Supporting Professional Learning: Impacts of the PLBSS in Portland Public Schools

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2006 the Portland (Maine) Public Schools (PPS) and the Portland Education Association (PEA) negotiated an alternative teacher salary system that took effect in the 2007-2008 school year. The Professional Learning-Based Salary System (PLBSS) awards teachers and other union staff credit (Salary Contact Hours or SCH) toward salary increases for various forms of professional learning, including college courses, continuing education units, district workshops, and individual self-directed professional learning or service activities. Teaching experience still is a factor in salary increases under the PLBSS but to a lesser extent than in a traditional salary schedule. This alternative salary schedule has received national attention and interest as an intriguing “middle ground,” offering the potential to support teacher development and professionalism without going so far as to tie teacher salaries directly to student test results.

This study focuses on what the PLBSS has done for teachers as professionals in key areas of potential impact: salary and staffing, professional learning, teacher practice, student learning, and staff satisfaction. Suggestions for improvement are also included.

**Portland Public Schools.** Maine’s largest school system serves 7,000 students in 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, and four high schools. While Portland is a relatively small city, it faces typical urban challenges. Over 50% of Portland students are low-income, and 25% are English language learners.

**Program Goals.** Goals for the program included the following:

- Improve instructional practice through professional learning,
- Add lanes to salary scale to compensate teachers for the acquisition of skills and knowledge sought by the school system,
- Provide greater opportunity for early career teachers for salary advancement, to attract and retain newer teachers and respond to their interests as identified in pre-negotiation surveys,
- Provide salary recognition for teacher leadership activities, and
- Increase career earnings.

**Theory of Action.** The theory of action for the PLBSS can be summarized as follows:

> *If teachers are compensated on the basis of their professional learning, their salaries will increase and they will become agents of their own learning. They will build skills and knowledge, both individually and collaboratively, to improve their instructional practices and a broader culture of learning in the schools. These improvements will result in increased student learning.*

**Key Elements of PLBSS.** The program includes the following:

- New salary schedule – 5 lanes, 10 steps each, as opposed to the previous 4 lanes, 30 steps each. Staff move up steps based on experience, but once at the top of a lane, they must complete a required amount of professional learning to move to the next lane.
• “Salary Contact Hours” (SCH) earned for approved professional learning of three types: college courses, district offerings, and individual projects. SCH are granted for additional work beyond normal expectations of professional duties.
• 225 SCH = lane change. Lane changes granted once per year, in September (down from twice per year in initial contract).
• 4 year minimum interval between lane changes for each teacher (increased from initial contract as cost-saving measure).
• Proposals for SCH must indicate how the learning will improve either student learning or teacher practice.
• Five-year “lookback” period to credit staff for courses taken under old system.
• Proposals reviewed by Salary Review Panel of 3 teachers and 2 administrators.
• “Living Contract” Committee authorized to make mid-course corrections to contract, with ratification by union and school board.

Research Methods and Data Sources. Mixed methods were used to inform the following research questions: (1) How has the PLBSS affected teachers’ salaries? (2) If the PLBSS has led to higher teacher salaries, has this enhanced PPS’s ability to attract and retain highly qualified teachers? (3) Has the PLBSS encouraged teacher participation in professional learning opportunities? (4) Has completing professional learning activities under the PLBSS had a positive impact on teachers’ practice and increased professionalism? (5) Have changes in teacher practice led to improved student learning? Data were drawn from the following: program materials; a literature review on effective, high-quality professional development; analysis of state, district, and program databases on staffing, salaries, and professional development participation; interviews with key groups and individuals; and an online survey of PEA members (55% response rate).

Findings

Salaries and Staffing. The PLBSS is widely recognized by staff as having raised average teacher salaries in Portland.
• 88.8% agree that the PLBSS has increased the salaries of Portland teachers.
• Between FY2006 and FY2011, the average PEA member salary rose from $50,317 to $61,386, an increase of 22%.
• 20.5% of current staff have received two lane changes under the PLBSS. Another 38.1% have received one lane change. 41.3% have not received a lane change.
• Early-career salaries have increased at a greater percentage rate than later career salaries, though salaries have increased at all experience levels.
• A career earnings model places Portland at the top of eight comparison districts in 2011, whereas it would have been in the middle of the pack in 2006.
• Over two-thirds of staff (68.5%) say that the PLBSS has improved teacher retention. A smaller majority (54.9%) say that the PLBSS has improved teacher recruitment; this is most likely affected by extremely limited hiring of new teachers over the past few years.
• Portland staffing has declined by 6.2% between 2006 and 2011, compared with staffing changes of -2.2% to +1.4% in seven of the eight comparison districts. Some portion of this was accompanied by reduced student enrollment, mitigating impact on staff workloads. Still, staff reductions outpaced the decline in student enrollment (6.2% vs. 2.3%).
Teacher Voices:

- From my conversations with current and prospective teachers, most seem to see the PLBSS as a counter-balance to the needy population...in the Portland Schools. Without the PLBSS and the attractive salary it offers, Portland would have a very hard time recruiting and retaining high quality teachers.

- Teachers move to Portland (myself included) for the competitive pay. Teachers stay here because the pay is comparable or more than surrounding areas. I know teachers [who] left positions to come Portland because of the pay, and if you are happy with your pay you are less likely to look into working in a different district.

- Teachers who are on the upper level desire to stay in Portland given that they would go to a lower scale if they left.

- Young teachers at my school are happy and busy working on lane changes.

- I commute about an hour to get here. Even if I could find a job closer to home, I would take a nearly $20,000 cut in pay compared to Portland.

- Salary scale attracts the best and keeps the best.
There is an excitement among the teachers. Why? Because there is a fairly clear plan in place where...a focused interest in bettering ourselves for our community and students has a well-deserved award attached.

Teachers know they will be rewarded for significant professional development rather than strictly longevity.

**Participation.** Teachers have actively participated in professional learning opportunities.

- 78.7% of eligible staff have obtained lane changes and/or accumulated SCH towards a lane change. Among the remaining eligible staff, only 13.2% have not participated in some way.
- Although submission of SCH proposals was high in the years around the change to PLBSS, levels of submission have moderated since 2008. This may be attributed to two factors: 1) many of the teachers who submitted SCH in the beginning have already achieved lane changes; and 2) policy changes and refinements in practice of accepting SCH have narrowed the scope of PD considered relevant to the teachers’ work. In addition, limitations on the number of lane changes allowable within a timeframe (now every four years) may account for some of the reduction in SCH submissions.
- College courses comprised the vast majority of SCH in the early years, but over time district-offered activities have grown. In recent years, district offerings and college courses have each comprised about 40% of SCH granted, while individual proposals have comprised about 20%.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCH Submitted</th>
<th>SCH Granted</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proposals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pre-9/06</td>
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<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>1620</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>983</td>
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**Annual % SCH by Type** (Source: PLBSS database)
Impact on Teacher Practice. Teachers report that completing professional learning activities under the PLBSS increased professionalism, created a culture of collaboration, and improved their instructional practice.

- **PLBSS has increased staff interest in professional learning.** Over 70% say that it has increased their interest in participating in professional learning activities. Half of respondents say that it has encouraged them to engage in professional learning that they probably would not have done otherwise – suggesting that it has positively affected behavior among harder-to-reach staff who were less likely to have pursued professional learning previously. Over 60% say they feel more valued as professionals due to the PLBSS.

- **PLBSS has increased collaborative practices, contributing to a new culture of collaborative learning** as teachers take courses together, participate in and lead Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), offer on-site courses for colleagues, and generally talk/interact more, using common goals and language. 62.9% of respondents say that the PLBSS has increased discussion of teaching practices among colleagues. 60.9% say that it has increased teacher collaboration around issues of student learning. And 70.9% say that it has increased teacher interest in participating in professional learning communities.

- **Teachers are using what they have learned to improve practice.** 76% of respondents say that the PLBSS contributed greatly (41.1%) or somewhat (34.9%) to improvement of their classroom teaching over the past three years. 67% of respondents say that the PLBSS has increased teacher-directed professional learning. 43.3% of respondents indicate that the PLBSS has increased their own interest in developing or leading professional learning activities.

- **PLBSS practices follow the national Standards for Professional Learning as implemented:** PLBSS activities support learning communities, teacher leadership, research-based learning designs, sustainability, and educator effectiveness; and data are used to identify priorities for PD offerings.

**Teacher Voices**

- *Rigorous professional development has become the norm for teachers in the Portland Public Schools.*
- *Teachers in my building are more apt to talk about what they are learning in these professional learning communities and will share what they have learned and continue to build on that learning. It is catching!*
- *I have continually been challenged to learn, reflect on, and grow as a professional. I can state clearly that I have changed significantly in terms of my professional practice each year since the beginning of the program. I strongly believe that the students are the main beneficiaries of my professional learning supported by this system.*
- *I'm not sure I would have gone for National Board Certification if we didn't have PLBSS. Going through that process has been the number one contributor to improving my practice.*
- *My colleagues and I share what we have learned in our courses and workshops during department meetings and at other, less formal meeting times. This includes discussions and presentations on specific ways to evaluate and increase student learning, new teaching strategies, and new content knowledge.*
- *I always take courses that other colleagues in my department are also taking. As a result, more meaningful reflection takes place during and after the course.*
I find that when taking a class or course together with other teachers from the same school or district, discussions often develop about what we learned. The learning and sharing continues.

Teachers are taking lots of classes and discussing them with one another. Teachers are also offering more workshops at the district level.

I especially love the courses offered by my colleagues. The information is specific to our community and the comments from other "students" in the class really add to the understanding of issues. I think it is the best collaborative environment possible.

All our math department are participating in the same course, and we have weekly rich discussions around algebra. We all feel like our classes are, in short, better. We share ideas and activities, it is great!

Teachers have more common language, more common strategies evolving. Learning more about the curriculum...understanding what other teachers at different levels need you to do in your position.

We are collaborating more with teachers in other schools that we meet at district offerings. We share what we learn with our colleagues at the various courses/workshops that we attend.

Instead of focusing on courses to obtain a Masters or Doctorate, I was able to take specific courses that immediately benefitted my teaching practice: behavior/management courses, collaboration/technology courses, and content-specific educational classes and workshops.

**Student Learning.** Three-quarters of respondents say the PLBSS contributed greatly (36.1%) or somewhat (37.8%) to improvement of student learning in their classrooms over the past three years.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>To What Extent has the PLBSS Contributed to Improvement of Student Learning in Your Classroom Over the Past 3 Years? (N=357)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contributed greatly</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributed somewhat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contributed slightly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Did not contribute</td>
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<tr>
<td>Too soon to tell</td>
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<td>0.0% 10.0% 20.0% 30.0% 40.0%</td>
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In interviews and on open-ended survey question asking for examples of how PLBSS has contributed to improved student learning, teachers offer evidence that include: measurable improvements in student performance; connections between their learning, their instruction, and the learning of their students; and illustrations of student work.

Teacher Voices
- Due to coursework in these areas I notice: Improved reading data – all students meeting/exceeding expectations. Increased parental involvement. Stronger math skills.
- Teaching is an art, but my students' NECAP scores are up...more are meeting the standard.
- Students now are scoring better on literary text on the NWEAs after taking my class.
- Because of a professional learning course I took last year, I now use more forms of formative assessment and remediation and differentiation in my classroom to ensure that students are meeting the content and skills standards of the course.
- I feel there are more conversations and ideas being floated around regarding how to meet the educational needs of our diverse population.
- Many staff have an increased awareness and understanding of poverty and homelessness and how it effects learning because of the classes many have participated in recently.
- I have become much more aware of how to meet the learning needs of our ELL population.
- I have gained many new ideas about how to integrate technology and literacy strategies into my classroom.
- I have seen the relevance and quality of professional development offerings improve. They are focused more on learner outcomes. I am pushed to improve and know there is an expectation that my students will benefit from the work I am doing.
- There are clear connections between my learning and the overall rigor and depth of knowledge I am asking my students to pursue. I can see changes through assessment in terms of more students engaging the content and reaching goals than I have in previous years. This helps me to feel successful and helps me to stay in this daunting profession.

Satisfaction with the PLBSS. Three-quarters of staff say they would recommend a PLBSS approach to peers in other districts; only 11% say they would not. And those who understand the PLBSS best like it most – among those who say they understand the PLBSS process, 82.1% would recommend PLBSS, while only 6.6% would not.

Teacher Voices:
- What I like best about the PLBSS is the flexibility in creating studies and learning around student, teacher and school need. District needs are not always school specific needs.
- I can choose the type of professional development I need to improve my teaching and be rewarded by making a lane change.
- I like that I can take courses, do projects and get credit by meeting objectives that best fit the population of students that I serve. I see the courses and projects as relating better to areas that are needed by the changing school population.
- It encourages teachers to pursue studies in areas that will have a direct impact on student performance.
- A teacher who already holds a masters, but doesn't necessarily want a PhD, can still gain credit for courses and self improvement.
Suggestions for Improvement. PLBSS appears to have had much success in meeting its goals. Salaries have risen, a culture of teacher professionalism and collaboration has been nurtured, and there are initial indications of improved practice translating into improved student learning. As Portland continues to refine its implementation, and as other districts seek to replicate its system, we offer the following suggestions:

1. Clarify program operations - those who understand it, use it and like it.
2. Streamline program logistics: automate processes so staff don't have to complete forms unnecessarily; have automatic approvals for PD that is designed to meet district goals; make the website more useful.
3. Continue to identify key district priorities and more intentionally align PD with these priorities.
4. Clearly define which learning opportunities are considered to be part of a teacher’s day (and thus not eligible for SCH) and which are outside (and thus eligible for SCH).
5. Use more systemic efforts to integrate PLBSS with teacher evaluation.
6. Consider building a more differentiated approach based on stages in the teacher career ladder: more prescriptive for younger teachers, more freedom once the foundation has been built, according to district and union preferences.
7. Identify key learning goals for non-core teachers and other unit staff (counselors, nurses, etc.) and work to build appropriate offerings to help them develop in ways that support district goals.
8. Use this report and other research to promote awareness of the PLBSS in other districts. The PLBSS appears to have replication potential beyond Portland, Maine.
9. Conduct more research. Consider a study that follows specific teachers through their professional learning and into the classroom to track use of learned strategies and effects on student work.

In conclusion, the findings provide hope that money spent on professional development can in fact be valuable, rather than being what US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has labeled “probably the least effective money we spend.” One survey response captures the general, positive attitude toward PLBSS:

- The PLBSS assumes that teachers are professionals and compensates them for improving their professional capabilities. Teachers become more skilled and more knowledgeable, and their professional development fosters a culture of learning that leads to greater student achievement. It does not tie salaries to high stakes test scores, and it does not seek to punish teachers for the effects of factors that are clearly out of their control. It does, however, provide a reasonable means to reward teachers for encouraging student growth.
INTRODUCTION

The Professional Learning-Based Salary System (PLBSS) is an alternative teacher salary schedule negotiated by the Portland (ME) Public Schools (PPS) and the Portland Education Association (PEA) which took effect in the 2007-2008 school year. As opposed to a traditional salary grid, which bases teacher salaries and increases on degrees earned and years of experience, the PLBSS gives teachers credit (Salary Contact Hours or SCH) toward salary increases for various forms of professional learning, including college courses, continuing education units, district workshops, and individual self-directed professional learning or service activities.

Theory of Action. The theory of action for the PLBSS can be summarized as follows:

If teachers are compensated on the basis of their professional learning, their salaries will increase and they will become agents of their own learning. They will build skills and knowledge, both individually and collaboratively, to improve their instructional practices and a broader culture of learning in the schools. These improvements will result in increased student learning.

Teaching experience still is a factor in salary increases under the PLBSS, but to a lesser extent than in a traditional salary schedule. This alternative schedule has received national attention and interest as an intriguing “middle ground,” offering the potential to support teacher development and professionalism without going so far as to tie teacher salaries directly to student test results.

About this Report

This report assesses the progress of PLBSS since its implementation in the 2007-2008 school year. It focuses primarily on what the PLBSS has done for teachers as professionals, in three key areas of potential impact: (1) salary and staffing, (2) professional learning, and (3) teacher practice. The PEA team is also deeply interested in the impact of the PLBSS on student learning, and we have devoted a chapter to exploring available information on that topic. In addition, we collected a significant amount of information from staff on their degree of satisfaction with the program – what they like best about it, what aspects they would change, and whether they would recommend a similar program to peers in other districts; we have included a chapter summarizing this information.

As discussed with the PEA team in our initial meeting last fall, this report is primarily an evaluation and does not focus in any great detail on the history of the program. However, we are aware that the NEA may have some interest in sharing this report with audiences unfamiliar with the program. To meet these needs we have included below a short summary of the program’s goals, initial design, and evolution in response to implementation challenges, and we have included a number of more detailed descriptive materials in the Appendix. The chapter of the report on participant satisfaction will also add to the unfamiliar reader’s understanding of how the program works.
Profile of the Portland School District

Portland, Maine, a coastal port city of approximately 66,000 people, is the largest municipality in Maine. Over one-third of the state’s total population lives in the greater Portland area. The Portland Public Schools (PPS) is Maine’s largest school system, serving 7,000 students plus 4,900 adult learners. The system has 10 elementary schools, three middle schools, and four high schools.

While Portland is a relatively small city, it faces typical urban challenges. Over 50% of Portland students are low-income, and 25% are English language learners, with more than 60 languages spoken by PPS students. A recent influx of immigration has augmented the challenges and highlighted the need for enhancing teacher knowledge and skills, specifically in five areas designated as priority by the district: English Language Learning; poverty; early childhood education; adolescent literacy; and technology.

Figure 1

Portland Public Schools Reporting Subgroups, Fall 2010 (Source: http://www2.portlandschools.org/school-budget)

![Bar chart showing economic disadvantaged, ELL, and special education subgroups.]

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2 portlandschools.org
PLBSS Program Goals and Theory of Action

Program Goals. In 2006, to prepare for bargaining toward a new contract, the Portland Education Association (PEA) conducted an association member survey to better understand membership priorities. The survey revealed three essential priorities: (1) members wanted their salaries to be more competitive with professions that require a similar level of education\(^3\); (2) members were dissatisfied with the district’s professional development offerings and a lack of control over their own professional learning; and (3) early-career educators wanted greater opportunities for salary advancement beyond traditional experience-based schedules. Working together to meet these three priorities, the PEA worked with the Portland school district to develop the Professional Learning-Based Salary System (PLBSS).\(^4\)

PEA and PPS negotiated the PLBSS, an alternative professional learning-based salary schedule, which took effect in 2007-2008. For many years prior to 2007-2008, the salary schedule, from which salaries for Portland teachers were determined, was a traditional grid that based salaries on degrees earned and years of teaching experience.

The new salary schedule, which is applicable to all teachers, no longer only considers degrees earned for salary advancement. Now various forms of professional learning earn credit toward salary increases, including college courses, continuing education units, district workshops, and individual self-directed professional learning or service activities.

Teachers continue to advance on the salary schedule as they gain experience, although the opportunities for experience-based increases are substantially reduced in comparison with the traditional salary schedule that the professional learning-based salary schedule replaced.\(^5\)

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\(^3\) A comparison with pay levels in other occupations is beyond the scope of this study.

\(^4\) Davin and Ferguson, *Voices from the Field: Stories from Seven Districts*, National Education Association Teacher Quality Department, 2010.

\(^5\) PEA Request for Proposals, April 2010.
PEA’s professional learning-based salary schedule has received national attention and interest as an alternative to traditional single salary schedules because it offers a middle ground between those who would shield teachers’ salaries from any accountability measure and those who would link teacher salaries directly to student test scores. The foundation for the salary schedule is found in the following statement from the 2006 collective bargaining agreement:

“We believe that the best predictor of student learning is teacher learning. Therefore, the salary schedule is designed to recognize and promote significant contributions to student learning or teacher practice or the school district community based upon an equitable standard equally accessible to all members of the unit.

“Rather than seeking to create a pay scheme built on measurement of student performance, this system’s goal is to encourage teachers to remain career-long learners, to increase and update their skills, and to be visible models as learners to their students.

“While not making movement on the salary schedule dependent on any measure of student performance, the system encourages teacher salary contact hours proposals that may use measures of student performance for documentation of successful proposals.”

PEA’s goals for the program included the following:

- Improve instructional practice through professional learning,
- Add lanes to salary scale to compensate teachers for the acquisition of skills and knowledge sought by the school system,
- Provide greater opportunity for early career teachers for salary advancement, to attract and retain newer teachers and respond to their interests as identified in pre-negotiation surveys,
- Provide salary recognition for teacher leadership activities, and
- Increase career earnings.

Theory of Action. The theory of action for the PLBSS can be summarized as follows:

If teachers are compensated on the basis of their professional learning, their salaries will increase and they will become agents of their own learning. They will build skills and knowledge, both individually and collaboratively, to improve their instructional practices and a broader culture of learning in the schools. These improvements will result in increased student learning.

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6 2010 NERLC presentation, Joe Stupak, Kathleen Casasa, Gary Vines.
How the PLBSS Works – The Initial Design

The PLBSS was negotiated in 2006, as part of the 2006-2009 Portland Education Association contract. The new system took effect in the 2007-2008 school year, and included the following key elements:

New Salary Schedule – 5 Lanes, 10 Steps Each. Previously, the salary schedule consisted of four lanes based on education level (Bachelor’s, Master’s, Master’s Intermediate, Doctorate), with 30 steps in each lane. Staff changed lanes based on acquiring additional education degrees. With the PLBSS, staff change lanes based on accrual of professional learning credits called Salary Contact Hours. There are fewer steps per lane – only 10 steps per lane. Staff move up steps based on experience, but once at the top step in a lane, they must complete the required amount of professional learning to move to the next lane. Conversely, there are no advanced degree requirements for lane changes.

On the old, experience-based salary schedule, most salary growth resulted from additional experience, and the maximum salary differential between a teacher with a B.A. and a teacher with a doctorate was $8,715 (15.6% difference). On the new, professional learning-based schedule, most salary growth requires continued professional learning. Teachers who continue professional learning have the potential for $33,654 in increased salary (more than 75% difference, compared to those who do not continue learning). In addition, a new teacher with a BA and no experience can reach the top of the salary schedule through professional learning, not requiring an advanced degree, in 22 years vs. 30 under the experience-based schedule.

Salary Contact Hours (SCH) Earned for Professional Learning. The unit for accruing hours to make a lane change is called “salary contact hours” (SCH). One university or college credit hour equals 15 SCH (45 SCH for a typical three-credit course). One continuing education unit (CEU) equals 10 SCH. District-offered professional development outside the normal school day accrues 1 SCH per hour of time. Other approved activities generated by individuals also receive 1 SCH per approved hour of time (e.g., curriculum development, classroom action research, professional book groups, juried publication, grant writing and receipt, non-compensated committee work).

225 SCH = Lane Change. Achieving 225 SCH entitles a participant to a lane change (if the participant is below Lane 5). National Board Certification yields 225 SCH. Five 3-credit university or college courses, at 45 SCH each, also accrue 225 SCH. However, SCH can be accrued by any combination of courses, CEUs, district-approved offerings, and approved individual proposals. Initially, staff could change lanes twice per year; this has since been amended to once every four years.

The “1-2-3 Rule”: SCH Accrued for Significant Contributions to (1) Student Learning, (2) Teacher Practice, or (3) the School District Community. Proposals for SCH must indicate which of these areas are addressed. As a PEA information document for teachers puts it, “What else counts? The real answer…is anything that can be supported as making a ‘significant

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7 PEA Salary Lane Change Brochure.
8 2010 NERLC presentation, Joe Stupak, Kathleen Casasa, Gary Vines.
contribution to student learning, teacher practice, or the school district community,’ the 1-2-3 Rule. Rather than overly define the limits, PEA and PPS are asking bargaining unit members to participate in courses, workshops granting CEUs, pre-authorized [district] offerings, or to make individual proposals that satisfy the 1-2-3 Rule conditions.” [The most recent contract, negotiated in 2011, eliminated approval of SCH in the “contributions to school district community” category, focusing on the other two categories.]

**Beyond Normal Professional Responsibilities.** SCH are not intended to be granted for regularly expected professional work of an educator carrying out his/her assignment, but rather for additional work beyond normal expectations of regular professional duties. Questions can arise when a proposal involves the creation of materials, the design of instruction, or the execution of an activity that is integrated in the offering of a course. In these cases, proposal review must determine whether the activity represents a normal freshening or a significant addition to the overall program.

**Five-Year “Lookback” Period to Apply Previously Earned Course Credits.** The initial contract recognized that transitioning away from an experience and degree-based system means that those teachers who have taken graduate courses toward a degree that would have been rewarded under the old salary system would feel negatively affected by the new system. Therefore, staff were allowed to apply coursework taken up to five years prior to September 1, 2006 (or date of hire if later).

**Proposal Review.** Proposals are submitted to Human Resources and either approved there or referred to a Salary Review Panel consisting of 3 teachers and 2 administrators. Courses and CEUs that meet district standards for course reimbursement and district-offered activities are typically approved by HR. Staff-generated individual proposals generally face scrutiny by the Salary Review Panel. The Salary Review Panel can recommend HR approval, recommend HR non-approval, request clarifying information from the applicant, or return it to the applicant with suggestions for revision. Staff whose proposals are not approved may appeal to the “Living Contract Committee” (see below), which meets monthly and has equal teacher and administrator representation. The decision of this committee is final and not subject to grievance procedures. Once approved, applicants must provide documentation of completion of proposed activities before Salary Contact Hours are granted.

**Living Contract Committee.** The PEA contract includes a provision that creates a Living Contract Committee, co-chaired by the Superintendent and Union President, “to provide for regular, on-going discussions and decision-making on matters germane to improved union-management relations and more effective overall district operation.” The committee is authorized to amend the union contract without waiting for its scheduled expiration and renegotiation timeframe, with ratification of amendments by the union and the school board. This provision proved useful in enabling mid-course corrections to the PLBSS to make salary costs more predictable and ensure the sustainability of the program.
Evolution of the Program

The Portland school district’s transition from an experience-based salary scale to the PLBSS faced some significant issues, some fiscal, some procedural, over the initial contract years.

First, Portland ended FY2007 with a very large deficit, unrelated to the PLBSS. Then, with the new contract allowing educators to use course credits taken as far back as 2001 and to apply those to up to two lane changes per year, 218 teachers changed salary lanes in FY2008; 42 changed lanes twice in that year. The budget for anticipated lane changes was exceeded by $500,000.9

The costs of raises and tuition reimbursement forced the School Board to request the PEA to renegotiate the contract in June of 2008. Negotiations resulted in modification and early extension of a contract for 2008-2011. As part of the amendments to the contract (see below and Appendix), lane changes were granted only once per year instead of twice, and individual teachers were limited to changing lanes only once every three years.

In the spring of 2011, PEA and PPS negotiated a new contract for 2011-2014. This contract reaffirmed the PLBSS, but extended the time between lane changes from three years to four. It also eliminated approval of SCH in the “contributions to school district community” category, focusing on the other two categories, student learning and educator practice. In addition, it included new language requiring Portland educators to include at least one course/offering in a district-identified priority area: English as a Second Language, poverty, adolescent literacy, early childhood education, or technology.

Current PLBSS Policies

The 2011-2014 contract characterizes the evolved PLBSS policies as follows:

- 225 SCH to make a lane change.
- Lane changes granted once per year, in September.
- 4 year minimum between lane changes.
- Maximum of 60 SCH per proposal with some exceptions (e.g., 225 SCH for National Board certification).
- SCH granted for activities that make a significant contribution to student learning or educator practice in the Portland Public Schools.
- Any educator requesting to make a lane change on September 1, 2013 or thereafter must provide documentation of the successful completion of one 3 credit university/college course or similar offering in one of the following areas of need: English as a Second Language, poverty, adolescent literacy, early childhood education, or technology.

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• SCH not granted for learning activities done during paid time, but SCH granted for the application of the knowledge/skill gained from the learning activity done during paid time when it is applied in the classroom.

• SCH not granted for activities repeated more than twice per lane change.

• Eliminated category for “School District Community” but educators can submit proposals for these types of activities in the student learning or educator practice categories if a strong connection is made in the submitted proposal.

• SCH not granted for writing college recommendations.

• Course/workshop/training presenters for PPS staff will be paid for district-approved repeat presentations instead of granted SCH.
Research Questions

Mixed methods were used to inform the following research questions:

1. How has the PLBSS affected teachers’ salaries compared to past trends or typical contractual increases, and how has the PLBSS affected the distribution of salary increases and the rate of salary advancement among unit members?

2. If the PLBSS has led to higher teacher salaries, has this enhanced PPS’s ability to attract and retain highly qualified teachers?

3. Has the PLBSS encouraged teacher participation in professional learning opportunities? In what ways?

4. Has completing professional learning activities under the PLBSS had a positive impact on teachers’ practice and increased professionalism? In what ways?

5. Have changes in teacher practice led to improved student learning?

The PLBSS policy goals, national Standards for Professional Learning, and research-based definition of professionalism served as analytic frameworks.

Data Collection Methods

Data were drawn from the following sources:

Program Materials. We reviewed relevant brochures, forms, contracts, histories, presentations provided by PEA and PPS. A number of these are collected in the Appendix.

Literature Review. We conducted a review of the research on effective, high-quality professional development. We also reviewed research on alternative compensation models.

Analysis of Salary and Human Resource Databases

- **MEDMS database for Portland and 8 comparison districts.** Included salary and HR information on all categories of staff in the PEA bargaining unit, 2006-2011. 35,000 lines of data.
- **PPS Staffing File.** Included salary and HR information on all members of the PEA bargaining unit, 2006-2011.
- **PLBSS Professional Development Database.** Included data on teacher participation in various types of professional development, 2001-2011 (minus those teachers who left employment between 2006 and 2009). Over 11,800 lines of data.

Interviews. We conducted interviews with various individual stakeholders, including Superintendent James Morse, Chief Academic Officer David Galin, PLBSS coordinator Sue Olafsen, former MEA research director Joe Stupak, and Human Resources Executive Secretary Lisa Wilson. We also conducted interviews with four participant groups (see Appendix for the protocol):

- National Board certified teachers
- Teacher-leaders
- District Offering participants
• Individual Proposal participants

**Online Survey.** A link to the survey was sent to 719 PEA members on April 11, 2011. (See Appendix for the questionnaire.)

• **Survey response rate.** A link to the online survey was sent by PEA staff to 719 PEA members on April 11, 2011. Periodic email reminders were sent by PEA staff, and 392 responses were received before the survey was closed on May 10, 2011. This represents a response rate of 55%. At this response rate, survey results can be considered to be accurate to within 3.3% at the 95% confidence level.

• **Respondents’ roles in district.** 78.5% of survey respondents are classroom teachers; another 7.2% are special education teachers or consultants. 2.8% are guidance counselors; another 2.8% are therapists (occupational, physical, or speech/hearing clinicians). Smaller numbers of literacy specialists, library/media specialists, social workers, psychologist/psychological examiners, and nurses also participated; altogether, these categories total 6.6%. 8 respondents (2.0%) chose the Other category.

**Figure 3**
• **Respondents’ years in district.** 4.6% of survey respondents have been working in the Portland Public Schools for 1-3 years, 24.2% for 4-9 years, 35.5% for 10-19 years, 25.8% for 20-29 years, and 8.9% for 30 years or more.

![Figure 4](image)

- **Respondents’ level in district (elementary, middle, secondary, etc.).** 36.5% of survey respondents report working at the elementary level, 24.2% at the middle school level, and 33.2% at the high school level. 3.3% of respondents work in adult education. The remaining 2.8% work either at a combination of levels or at the district level.

• **Respondents’ degree of understanding of PLBSS.** 86% of survey respondents indicate that they generally understand the PLBSS. 45.8% “strongly agree” and 40.2% “somewhat agree” with the statement, “I have a clear understanding of PLBSS, including the requirements to advance on the salary schedule.”

### About the Authors

The Center for Education Policy (CEP) is a research center of the University of Massachusetts Amherst School of Education and was created to put the University’s research capacity to work on key education policy issues in Massachusetts, New England, and nationally. CEP provides expertise to develop, recommend, and/or evaluate educational policies and programs relating to K-12 education reform and K-16 alignment, access, and outcomes. CEP also provides a forum for faculty, students, and various educational stakeholders to engage in discussions of important issues in education. Recent projects have drawn on CEP expertise regarding professional development, collaborative leadership, labor-management relationships, and school governance issues. The authors of this report, listed below, bring a combination of policy understanding, research expertise, and hands-on experience with public schooling.
Sharon F. Rallis, Director, Center for Education Policy. Dr. Rallis is the Dwight W. Allen Distinguished Professor of Educational Policy and Reform in the School of Education of the University of Massachusetts Amherst where she teaches courses in inquiry, program evaluation, qualitative methodology, and organizational theory. She has been Professor of Education at the University of Connecticut, Lecturer on Education at Harvard, and Associate Professor of Educational Leadership at Peabody College, Vanderbilt University. Her doctorate is from the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The 2005 president of the American Evaluation Association, Rallis has been involved with education and evaluation for over three decades. She has been a teacher, counselor, principal, researcher, program evaluator, director of a major federal school reform initiative, elected school board member, and university professor. Rallis has conducted evaluations of educational, medical, and social programs and has taught about evaluation. She has worked with state departments of education throughout New England and the mid-South on evaluations related to special education service provision and the inclusion of students with disabilities. Her work in evaluation is internationally known due to invited presentations and articles in China, Canada, and Japan, and program evaluation for the Ministry of Education in Afghanistan. Dr. Rallis has closely observed the roles principals play in schools that have improved, explicating these in her books, Principals of Dynamic Schools: Taking Charge of Change, Corwin, 2000) and Dynamic Teachers (Corwin, 1995). Her recent, Leading with Inquiry and Action: How Principals Collaborate and Improve Instruction (Corwin Press), draws on her evaluation experiences with school leaders. Dr. Rallis’ expertise lies in qualitative research and program evaluation. Her Learning in the Field: An Introduction to Qualitative Research (with Gretchen Rossman), is in its 3rd edition and widely used in methodology courses. She has published extensively in education and methodology journals and most recently has been writing about ethical practice in evaluation and qualitative methods.

Andrew Churchill, Assistant Director, Center for Education Policy. Mr. Churchill has served as Assistant Director of the Center for Education Policy (CEP) in the School of Education of the University of Massachusetts Amherst since 2000. He received his master’s degree in Public Policy from the University of California at Berkeley, and his bachelor’s degree in American Studies from Dartmouth College. As CEP assistant director, Mr. Churchill develops, conducts, and manages program evaluations, policy analyses, research studies, conferences, and stakeholder networks in partnership with University faculty, state agencies, national foundations, and education associations. He has conducted evaluations/policy analyses on a variety of topics, including: high-performing urban charter schools, leadership practices in successful urban schools, the use of data by local and state education agencies, teacher and administrator professional development, state agency capacity to implement education reform, and quality offerings in online higher education. Previous work includes positions with a market research firm, a national research firm focused on education and the economy, the AIDS Institute at Harvard University, and the federal Office of Management and Budget’s Education Division.

Rachael Lawrence and Jeffrey Darling are doctoral students in the Education Policy, Research, and Administration department of the UMass Amherst School of Education. Both Lawrence and Darling have been public school teachers, and Lawrence’s comprehensive paper explored professional development and interagency collaboration around delivery of education services.
Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the following people who helped us with the production of this report:

- The National Education Association’s (NEA) Collective Bargaining and Member Advocacy department and two NEA affiliates, the Maine Education Association (MEA) and the Portland (Maine) Education Association (PEA) – an MEA affiliate – contracted with us to produce this report. We appreciate their support.

- Sue Olafsen, Teacher Compensation and Professional Development Coordinator and chair of the PEA’s bargaining committee, was endlessly helpful as our primary Maine contact for this project, orienting us to the system, providing background materials, organizing and scheduling the group interviews, providing feedback on protocols, inviting and reminding staff to participate in the online survey, and answering numerous questions about how things work.

- Joe Stupak, retired MEA collective bargaining/research director, was instrumental in securing the MEDMS database from the Maine Department of Education, and he spent hours strategizing with us on how best to turn these data into useful information and providing detailed feedback on the results.

- Marcy Magid, NEA Senior Policy Analyst, provided useful feedback on protocols and calm and thoughtful support throughout.

- David Galin, PPS Chief Academic Officer, gave several thoughtful interviews to us about the PLBSS past and future.

- Lisa Wilson, Executive Secretary in the PPS Human Resources Department, provided us with a copy of and an orientation to the PPS staffing file.

- Dave Winans, NEA Senior Policy Analyst, provided valuable editorial input.

- Linda Davin, NEA Senior Policy Analyst, provided valuable editorial input and a copy of the latest Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

- And approximately 400 PPS staff/PEA bargaining unit members provided a wealth of experience and insight through the online survey and group interviews.
CHAPTER 1 – ANALYSIS OF SALARY, RECRUITMENT, AND RETENTION

This chapter includes three sub-sections exploring the impact of the PLBSS on: (1) salaries/staffing, (2) recruitment and retention, and (3) staff economic stress as indicated by “moonlighting”. Three sources of data were analyzed for this section: perceptual data from the online staff survey; the Portland Public Schools’ staffing file for PEA bargaining unit members; and a database of state MEDMS data on the categories of staff covered by the PEA bargaining unit.

IMPACT OF PLBSS ON SALARIES AND STAFFING

Staff Perceptions Regarding the Impact of the PLBSS on Salaries

Staff survey responses to the salary questions were some of the most strongly positive on the survey.

Staff perceive Portland salaries as being higher than average. Almost nine-tenths (87%) of survey respondents indicate agreement with the statement, “Portland salaries are higher than average for Maine school districts.” Fully half (50.8%) strongly agree with this statement, and another 36.2% somewhat agree; only one respondent (0.3%) strongly disagrees.10

Staff credit the PLBSS with having increased salaries. A similar but slightly larger proportion of respondents (88.8%) indicate agreement with the statement, “The PLBSS has increased the salaries of Portland teachers.” 58.1% strongly agree, and another 30.7% somewhat agree; only one respondent (0.3%) strongly disagrees.

Figure 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Perceived Impact on Salaries (N=384)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portland salaries are higher than average for Maine school districts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The PLBSS has increased the salaries of Portland teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50.8% Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>58.1% Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

10 See Appendix for all percentages on survey responses.
Staff clearly see the PLBSS as having been successful in improving salaries in the Portland Public Schools. Next, we look at fiscal data to analyze the particular impacts of the PLBSS both in Portland and in comparison to eight other Maine districts.

Salary Impacts in Portland

Between FY2006 and FY2011, the average PEA member salary\(^\text{11}\) rose from $50,317 to $61,386, an increase of 22%.

Figure 6

![Portland Average Salary, 2006-2011](Source: MEDMS)

In the first two years of the PLBSS, bargaining unit members could apply for Salary Contact Hours for professional development conducted during the previous five years, and they could apply for lane changes and the resultant salary increases up to twice per year, which took effect on September 1\(^{\text{st}}\) and/or January 1st.

226 lane changes took place in the first year, and another 215 took place in the second year. The contract was renegotiated in 2008 so that lane changes were only allowed on September 1\(^{\text{st}}\) of subsequent years, and staff were required to wait at least three years between lane changes (this has since been increased to four years in the 2011 contract negotiations). The backlog of creditable professional development from the period prior to FY2006 had also been largely worked through the system. As a result, the pace of lane changes has slowed to 50-75 per year over the past two years.

Table 1: Number of Lane Changes by PPS Staff, by Date (Source: PPS staffing file)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>9/1/07</th>
<th>1/1/08</th>
<th>9/1/08</th>
<th>1/1/09</th>
<th>9/1/09</th>
<th>9/1/10</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td># Lane Changes</td>
<td>116</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{11}\) Note: All salary averages calculated from the MEDMS database in this section are based on average FTE salaries for actual staff, not on salary scales.
As the figure below indicates, about three-fifths of current staff have received at least one lane change under the PLBSS.

**Figure 7**

Lane Changes Among Current Staff  
(Source: PPS Staffing File)

The impact of the implementation of the PLBSS is seen clearly in the figure below. The first lane changes took effect in FY2008, and salaries increased an average of 9.3%, after actually declining slightly (-0.2%) the year before. In FY2009, average salaries increased another 6.7%, after which they have increased at a more modest rate of slightly over 2%.

**Figure 8**

% Change in Average Salary from Previous Year  
(Source: MEDMS)
Comparison with Salary Trends in Other Districts.

Next, we compare the salary trend in Portland with those in eight other districts selected by the PEA team: Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth, Gorham, RSU/MSAD 15, Scarborough, South Portland, Westbrook, and Yarmouth. The table below lists average salaries in each district between FY2006 and FY2008, along with the total percentage increase in average salary.

Table 2: Average Salaries in Portland and 8 Comparison Districts, 2006-2011 (Source: MEDMS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>% Increase 2006-2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>$50,317</td>
<td>$50,211</td>
<td>$54,900</td>
<td>$58,596</td>
<td>$60,056</td>
<td>$61,386</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Elizabeth</td>
<td>$47,571</td>
<td>$49,317</td>
<td>$50,845</td>
<td>$54,284</td>
<td>$56,442</td>
<td>$58,817</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>$50,683</td>
<td>$52,214</td>
<td>$54,308</td>
<td>$55,913</td>
<td>$58,099</td>
<td>$59,013</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorham</td>
<td>$47,189</td>
<td>$48,567</td>
<td>$49,886</td>
<td>$52,425</td>
<td>$54,334</td>
<td>$55,353</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSU 15/MSAD 15</td>
<td>$42,114</td>
<td>$42,932</td>
<td>$44,132</td>
<td>$45,123</td>
<td>$47,302</td>
<td>$48,245</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>$42,735</td>
<td>$44,227</td>
<td>$46,129</td>
<td>$48,179</td>
<td>$48,677</td>
<td>$50,959</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Portland</td>
<td>$48,213</td>
<td>$50,654</td>
<td>$51,847</td>
<td>$52,845</td>
<td>$54,825</td>
<td>$55,214</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westbrook</td>
<td>$44,170</td>
<td>$45,030</td>
<td>$47,134</td>
<td>$49,304</td>
<td>$50,849</td>
<td>$51,620</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarmouth</td>
<td>$55,173</td>
<td>$54,388</td>
<td>$55,729</td>
<td>$58,375</td>
<td>$60,731</td>
<td>$61,821</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As the figure below indicates, all the comparison districts’ average salaries have increased over the past five years, but Portland is now nearly equal with the top comparison district. Yarmouth is now only 0.7% higher, whereas in FY2006 it was 9.6% higher.

Figure 9
Only Cape Elizabeth, at 23.6%, has a higher five-year percentage increase in average salary than Portland’s 22.0%. The non-Portland districts taken together averaged a 16.8% increase.

**Figure 10**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>% Change in Average Salary, 06 to 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yarmouth</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Portland</td>
<td>14.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSU 15/MSAD 15</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>16.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westbrook</td>
<td>16.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorham</td>
<td>17.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Elizabeth</td>
<td>23.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the recession in full swing, Portland and other school districts faced a difficult fiscal climate. While Portland was near the top of the comparison group in average salary increases, it was in the middle of the pack in terms of its relative five-year increase in overall salary expenditures. While Scarborough and Cape Elizabeth increased their total salaries by over 21% between FY2006 and FY2011, and Goreham and South Portland were in the 12% range, Portland increased total salary expenditures by 14.4%.

**Figure 11**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School District</th>
<th>% Change in Total Salary Expenditures, 06 to 11</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gorham</td>
<td>11.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Portland</td>
<td>12.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSU 15/MSAD 15</td>
<td>12.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarmouth</td>
<td>13.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westbrook</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>21.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Elizabeth</td>
<td>21.7%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
With average salaries rising more than average but total salaries held to a slower rate of increase, Portland cut its staffing level more than any of the comparison districts. As the figure below indicates, Portland’s cut of 6.2% compares with five-year staffing changes of -2.2% to +1.4% in seven of the eight comparison districts.

**Figure 12**

**Figure 13**

Some portion of this reduced staffing was accompanied by reduced student enrollment over the same time period, which thus mitigated some of the impact on teacher workloads. Between FY06 and FY09, total PPS enrollment dropped by 278 students, from 7,235 to 6,957 – a drop of 3.8%. Enrollment has rebounded slightly since FY09 to 7,066, leaving total enrollment 2.3% lower in FY11 than it was in FY06. Still, staff reductions outpaced the decline in student enrollment during this period by almost four percentage points (6.2% vs. 2.3%).
Another Lens: Salary Impacts with Impact of Layoffs Controlled

The dynamics of staff reductions can skew salary averages in different ways, depending upon whether older, more highly paid staff retire or younger, lower paid staff are laid off. To attempt to control for this, we also looked at salary trends among a subset of staff – those current staff who have been employed from the time the PLBSS was first implemented – using salary data on current staff from the district’s staffing file.

As the figure below indicates, average salaries among current staff who have been employed by the district since the PLBSS began have increased by 17.8%, from $54,771 at the end of FY06 to $64,541 in FY11.

Figure 14

Salaries among these employees increased at a slightly slower rate in the first year of PLBSS than the overall average cited above would indicate (5% vs. 9.3%), but the increase among this group was slightly higher in the second year than the increase in average salaries as a whole (6.7% vs. 6.2%). Subsequent increases among this group are also slightly higher than the overall average (2.8% vs. 2.5% in FY2010 and 2.9% vs. 2.2% in FY2011).

Figure 15
The figure below shows five-year trends in highest, average, and lowest salaries among this group. Note that the lowest salary hardly increases at all, but the average and highest salaries increase by over 17% over this period.

**Figure 16**

![High/Average/Low Salaries of Staff Employed Since 07-08](Source: PPS salary file)

Next, we sorted this group of employees into four categories, based on which of the initial four salary lanes they were placed in based on experience level at the beginning of PLBSS. These four salary categories allowed us to examine the progression of average employee salaries from four different starting points.

The figure below shows that the dollar increase at each of the salary levels is roughly similar.

**Figure 17**

![Average Salary of Staff Employed Since 07-08, by Initial Lane Placement](Source: PPS Staffing File)
However, because the lower lanes start at a lower salary amount, the percentage impact of the increase is higher for the less-experienced employees – 28.6% for those in Lane 1 vs. 14% for those who start higher in Lane 4.

Table 3: Average and % Increase in Salary of Staff Employed Since 07-08, by Initial Lane Placement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lane</th>
<th>06-07</th>
<th>07-08</th>
<th>08-09</th>
<th>09-10</th>
<th>10-11</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lane 4</td>
<td>$60,226</td>
<td>$62,427</td>
<td>$65,830</td>
<td>$67,150</td>
<td>$68,652</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lane 3</td>
<td>$53,698</td>
<td>$56,043</td>
<td>$59,515</td>
<td>$61,389</td>
<td>$63,162</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lane 2</td>
<td>$44,592</td>
<td>$47,869</td>
<td>$51,702</td>
<td>$53,558</td>
<td>$55,683</td>
<td>24.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lane 1</td>
<td>$37,388</td>
<td>$41,982</td>
<td>$44,424</td>
<td>$46,294</td>
<td>$48,064</td>
<td>28.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figure below indicates that the employees who were initially placed in the lower two salary lanes have accessed salary lane changes at a somewhat higher rate than those in Lanes 3 and 4.

Figure 18

![Average # of Lane Changes, by Initial 07-08 Lane Placement (Source: PPS Staffing File)](image-url)
Impact on Career Earnings

A key financial goal of the PLBSS was to increase career earnings by increasing the rate of salary increase for staff in the earlier phase of their careers. In this section, we examine MEDMS data on Portland and the eight comparison districts in order to assess the impact of the PLBSS on the average teacher’s career earnings trajectory.

In order to use the MEDMS database to examine the relationship between years of experience and average salary, we did the following:

- Cleaned the MEDMS data to eliminate duplicate records and ensure that each staff record accurately reflected salary and an FTE capped at 1.0.\(^{12}\)
- Sorted the data to get a spreadsheet for each district, in each year (FY2006 to FY2011), of total salary expenditures and total FTE for all teachers at each year of experience (from 1\(^{st}\) year to as high as 53\(^{rd}\) year in one district).
- Divided total salary by total FTE for each experience level to get an average salary per FTE for each year of experience in each district, 2006 to 2011.
- Created a table listing the average salary per FTE for each year of staff experience from Year 1 to Year 35 (beyond that, the data became “spotty”), at 2006 and 2011 levels.
- Summed the average earnings for staff with 1 to 35 years of experience, in 2006 and 2011, to get a hypothetical career earnings figure for each year’s salary level, based on the average salaries paid in 2006 vs. 2011 at each level of experience.

The table and two figures below summarize the results of this modeling by district. Portland shows the highest career earnings and the greatest increase in career earnings among the school districts examined.


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2006 Level</th>
<th>2011 Level</th>
<th>% Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>$1,588,809</td>
<td>$1,735,299</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSU 15/MSAD 15</td>
<td>$1,516,700</td>
<td>$1,761,610</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorham</td>
<td>$1,591,568</td>
<td>$1,823,512</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westbrook</td>
<td>$1,597,682</td>
<td>$1,876,731</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Elizabeth</td>
<td>$1,599,899</td>
<td>$1,877,602</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Portland</td>
<td>$1,678,259</td>
<td>$1,919,777</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>$1,792,542</td>
<td>$1,986,272</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarmouth</td>
<td>$1,932,718</td>
<td>$2,017,795</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>$1,748,909</td>
<td>$2,096,056</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^{12}\) Former MEA analyst Joe Stupak was instrumental in this process, from securing the data from the state Department of Education to patiently consulting with us on methodology.
Figure 19


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorham</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westbrook</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Elizabeth</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Portland</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarmouth</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>$1,000,000</td>
<td>$1,200,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 20

% Increase in Estimated 35-Year Career Earnings, 2006 Avgs. vs. 2011 Avgs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>Increase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yarmouth</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>10.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Portland</td>
<td>14.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorham</td>
<td>14.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSU 15/MSAD 15</td>
<td>16.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Elizabeth</td>
<td>17.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westbrook</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>19.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Comparing Salaries Across Districts, by Experience Level

The abovementioned methodology for sorting MEDMS data also made it possible to analyze average salary trends at different levels of a teacher’s career. We grouped the average salaries per FTE for staff in years 1-3, 4-9, 10-19, 20-29, and 30 and above.

We offer two different ways of viewing these data. In the first, average salaries for different districts are clustered by level of experience:

Figure 21

![Average Salary by Experience Level, by District, 2006](source: MEDMS)

Figure 22

![Average Salary by Experience Level, by District, 2011](source: MEDMS)
In the second, average salaries for each career phase are clustered for each district:

Regardless of which way the data are arranged, it is clear that Portland’s average salaries have increased and are at or near the top of the comparison group for all groups beyond the 1-3 year group.
Staff Characteristics in Portland and Comparison Districts

In this section, we examine some characteristics of Portland staff and compare them to those in the eight nearby districts.

Portland has a veteran, experienced staff, with over four-fifths (80.3%) having been working in public education for at least 10 years.

Figure 25

Only South Portland has a higher average level of experience (21.9 years vs. 20.6) among comparison districts.

Table 5: Average Years in Public Education, 2006 vs. 2011 (Source: MEDMS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2011</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scarborough</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>16.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westbrook</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Elizabeth</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>17.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falmouth</td>
<td>15.6</td>
<td>17.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gorham</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>18.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RSU 15/MSAD 15</td>
<td>17.2</td>
<td>18.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yarmouth</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>19.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Portland</td>
<td>17.8</td>
<td>21.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 26

Average Years in Public Education, 2006 & 2011
(Source: MEDMS)

Scarborough  Westbrook  Cape Elizabeth  Falmouth  Gorham  RSU 15/MSAD 15  Yarmouth  Portland  South Portland

0.0  5.0  10.0  15.0  20.0  25.0

2006  2011
The distribution of Portland teachers across experience levels has stayed largely constant between 2006 and 2011, except for in the 1-3 year range, which has dropped, while the distribution in the comparison districts has generally shifted toward a greater proportion of teachers in the 10-19 year range. Portland in 2011 generally has more teachers in the 20-29 and 30+ year ranges than the comparison districts, and fewer in the 10-19 year range.

**Figure 27**

**Distribution of Staff by Experience Level, by District**

2006 (Source: MEDMS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Level</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Cape Elizabeth</th>
<th>Falmouth</th>
<th>Gorham</th>
<th>RSU 15/MSAD 15</th>
<th>Scarborough</th>
<th>South Portland</th>
<th>Westbrook</th>
<th>Yarmouth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-9 Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19 Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29 Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+ Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Figure 28**

**Distribution of Staff by Experience Level, by District**

2011 (Source: MEDMS)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experience Level</th>
<th>Portland</th>
<th>Cape Elizabeth</th>
<th>Falmouth</th>
<th>Gorham</th>
<th>RSU 15/MSAD 15</th>
<th>Scarborough</th>
<th>South Portland</th>
<th>Westbrook</th>
<th>Yarmouth</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-3 Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-9 Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-19 Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20-29 Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30+ Yrs</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
<td>🌈</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Over half of Portland teachers have Master’s degrees or higher. This proportion has stayed roughly constant since 2006.

**Figure 29**

% of Staff with Master's Degree or Higher, 06-07 and 10-11 Averages (Source: MEDMS)

**Figure 30**

% Change in Staff with Master's Degree or Higher 06-07 and 10-11 Averages (Source: MEDMS)
IMPACT ON TEACHER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

One goal of PLBSS is to attract and retain highly skilled teachers, so in this section, we analyze the impact of the PLBSS on teacher recruitment and retention in the Portland Public Schools.

Perceptions of PPS as an Attractive Workplace

Almost three-quarters (72%) of survey respondents indicate agreement with the statement, “Among Maine teachers, Portland is seen as an attractive place to work.” 27.8% strongly agree with this statement, and 44.2% somewhat agree; only 1.6% strongly disagree.13

68.3% of survey respondents indicate agreement with the statement, “The PLBSS is a positive contributing factor in Maine teachers’ perceptions of Portland.” 35.7% strongly agree with this statement, and 32.6% somewhat agree; only 1.6% strongly disagree.

Figure 31

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of PLBSS on Maine Teachers’ Perceptions of Portland</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Portland seen as attractive place to work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=385)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree: 27.8% Somewhat Agree: 44.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PLBSS positive contributing factor in perceptions of Portland (N=384)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree: 35.7% Somewhat Agree: 32.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perceived Impact of PLBSS on Retention

Over two-thirds (68.5%) of survey respondents indicate agreement with the statement, “The PLBSS has improved the Portland school district’s ability to retain current teachers.” 40.1% strongly agree with this statement, and 28.4% somewhat agree; only 2.1% strongly disagree.

A smaller percentage (54.9%) indicate agreement with the statement, “The PLBSS has improved the Portland school district’s ability to recruit new teachers.” 30.2% strongly agree with this statement, and 24.7% somewhat agree; only 2.1% strongly disagree. However, almost two-fifths (39.3%) say they are undecided or don’t know. Focus group conversations indicated that this lower level of certainty about the impact of PLBSS on teacher recruitment is most likely affected by the limited number of openings for new hires in the district in recent years.

13 See Appendix for all percentages on survey responses.
We asked teachers, both on the survey (Q#7) and in the interviews, for specifics on how they feel PLBSS has affected Portland's ability to recruit or retain teachers. Most agree that this is a “place to stay” once hired because of the professionalism as much as for the high salaries. As one teacher stated:

*I think it’s keeping teachers in the system. I think now they have something to look forward to, to work towards. If they want to experiment in their classroom with their curriculum, it gives them more incentive to try and do that. I mean, I’ve been teaching for 18 years, and I’m not going anywhere.*

To summarize, “staff can move quickly and achieve better salaries in an atmosphere that inspires professionalism and creativity”. Selected staff comments from the survey are below.

**Treated as professionals**
- Teachers are able to grow as teachers and afford to stay in the field of teaching. Teachers interested and willing to put energy and time into improving their skills are valued in Portland and therefore will seek employment and stay with Portland Schools.
- Teachers know they will be rewarded for significant professional development rather than strictly longevity.
- Teachers are treated as professionals who can design and be in charge of their own professional development.
- Good teachers value continual professional learning and improvement and the PLBSS recognizes this value.
- I think any protocol or vehicle that allows for teachers to enhance the passion that they have for teaching as well as build their own self esteem, can’t help but be valuable to keep teachers.
- Provides incentive to continue advanced learning and be recognized monitarily for that work and acquired knowledge.
- Work/salary conditions that promote ongoing learning and reward one for doing so.
- Provides incentive to continue advanced learning and be recognized monitarily for that work and acquired knowledge.
- PLBSS keeps teachers challenged and motivated to improve their craft.
Clearly, it sends a strong message that in PPS we value, encourage, and are now willing to support/honor continuous learning/training. The premise is a solid one.

The PLBSS conveys a strong district-sponsored to PD, invigorating teachers and encouraging collaboration. Applicants know that in this district they have a vibrant professional future.

The system in place in Portland supports teachers in feeling they are highly regarded professionals and gives us incentives to maintain that status through continuing our education and professional learning.

**Salary higher than elsewhere – both for recruitment and retention**

- Teachers move to Portland (myself included) for the competitive pay. Teachers stay here because the pay is comparable or more than surrounding areas. For example I know teachers [who] have left positions to come Portland because of the pay, and if you are happy with your pay you are less likely to look into working in a different district.
- Salary scale attracts the best and keeps the best.
- I commute about an hour to get here. Even if I could find a job closer to home, I would take a nearly $20,000 cut in pay compared to Portland.
- Teachers who are on the upper level desire to stay in Portland given that they would go to a lower scale if they left.
- Teachers from other districts are attracted to higher salaries and better benefits.
- Young teachers at my school are happy and busy working on lane changes.
- People stay because they would go down in their salary if they went to another system. And not just a little bit. A substantial amount.
- Once hired, most teachers would take a pay cut to take jobs elsewhere.
- I would have moved on to a less stressful climate if I would not lose salary. In some ways, I feel stuck here.

**Higher pay balances workload and difficulty**

- By providing this type of pay scale, and health benefits, this helps counter-balance some of the tough stigmas of coming into the Portland Schools. The demographic at my school in particular is not typical of other Maine schools and is intimidating to a lot of great teachers.
- I know that teachers are interested in coming to Portland because salaries are higher - but the perception is that the work is harder, too.
- From my conversations with current and prospective teachers, most seem to see the PLBSS as a counter-balance to the needy population…in the Portland Schools. Without the PLBSS and the attractive salary it offers, Portland would have a very hard time recruiting and retaining high quality teachers.
- Teachers already in Portland have said they stay because of the salary scale, despite difficult transitions in administration and added workloads due to our challenging student population. We recruit few teachers due to budgetary restraints, but in general have not had difficulty finding new teachers.
- I know many special educators who realize that the caseload/workload is larger in Portland than almost any other district but stay here b/c of the salary scale.
It's not just salary – choice, relevance, and support for life-long learning

- Staff development and course offerings directly relate to the needs of students in our classrooms. By developing our skill set, we are improving our knowledge to work with the diverse group of students in our classrooms and we receive a salary to compensate for our willingness to be a life long learner. These qualities are very attractive to current and future teachers in Portland.
- PLBSS provides an avenue for teachers to continuously think about their own learning, encourages teachers to use apply their knowledge in action plans, and provides teachers with a way to earn a respectable professional salary for their commitment to life-long learner and refining their craft to improve student learning.
- Allowing teachers to take courses or trainings that have direct applicability to the level they teach rather than having to take a masters that might not meet the needs of the teacher in the classroom is a definite positive.
- Life long learning is always an enhancement to recruiting and retaining teachers.
- Having the choice to take workshops and courses of my choosing to meet the needs of my current students is more attractive to me than to receive a specific degree.
- Pay, benefits, and choice for advancement. Shows that the district values teacher learning and self-direction.
- Teachers know they can take accepted courses if they choose to advance their education and be compensated for their time and effort. Having a choice and having the opportunity to go up in the salary scale could have influence on recruiting and retaining teachers.

Higher pay has resulted in layoffs and few new hires – and more work

- The budget has prevented a lot of new hires over the past few years, so I can't really speak to whether our ability to recruit new teachers has improved. It has definitely been a huge factor in my decision to stay, however.
- The salaries are higher, so there are fewer teachers budgeted. As a result, the workload is more which is seen as undesirable. Portland is viewed as being arrogant by having to have a unique pay scale because supposedly Portland is so unique.
- In this climate of budget cuts, the PLBSS is being diluted to the point where it really is treated like a bad idea, a dead end idea, or somewhat of an embarrassment to an administration which is implementing the philosophy of "getting more for less" from its staff.
**IMPACT ON ECONOMIC STRESS AS INDICATED BY “MOONLIGHTING”**

In this section, we analyze survey results regarding the proportion of Portland staff who work additional hours at another job and the impact of PLBSS on this phenomenon.

**“Moonlighting” is not widespread.** Slightly less that one-quarter (23.4%) of survey respondents indicate that they work additional hours at another job during the school year, in addition to their job in the Portland Public Schools.\(^{14}\) About the same proportion (22.2%) work additional hours at another job during school vacations.

A greater proportion work at another job during the summer, but this group is still less than two-fifths of respondents (38.5%)

**Figure 33**

Respondents who indicated that they worked at another job were asked to specify the number of hours per week. The figure below summarizes this information, grouping respondents according to whether they worked 1-9, 10-19, 20-29, 30-39, or 40+ hours per week, in either the school year, school vacations, or summer.

Among the 82 respondents who say they work at another job during the school year, 34 of them work 1-9 hours per week and 36 work 10-19 hours per week. Of the 76 who say they work at another job during school vacations, 24 of them work 1-9 hours per week, 26 work 10-19 hours per week, and 16 work 20-29 hours per week. Among the 137 who say they work at another job during the summer, the greatest number (49) work 20-29 hours per week; roughly equal but lower numbers work 10-19 hours per week (27), 30-39 hours per week (22), and 40 hours or more per week (24).

\(^{14}\) See Appendix for all percentages on survey responses.
Positive but modest support for the idea that the PLBSS allows teachers to focus more on their work by reducing income-related stress and the need to “moonlight”. Half of survey respondents (51%) indicate that they agree strongly (16.6%) or somewhat (34.6%) with the statement, “The PLBSS has allowed Portland teachers to focus more on improving teacher practice and student learning because there is less income-related stress.” Only 18% indicate disagreement with this statement, but another three-tenths of respondents (30.7%) are unsure.

A smaller percentage (43.2%) indicate that they agree strongly (16.4%) or somewhat (26.8%) with the statement, “The PLBSS has allowed Portland teachers to focus more on improving teacher practice and student learning because there is less need to ‘moonlight’ (work a second job).” However, 37.5% say they are undecided or don’t know.
Few comments on moonlighting or economic stress appear in the open-ended responses to the survey or in interviews. One response may represent a common attitude: “Amidst all the other stress of a bad economy, it is something that is positive, except if you are already on lane 5” as several responses remarked that they are now paid fairly “for what can be an extremely stressful job that requires a specialized skill set to do well”. Some commented that increased salary has helped pay for graduate classes and pay back loans.

One survey response offered an interesting perspective on moonlighting:

I do not believe "moonlighting" is a bad thing. I am a musician and my "moonlighting" is directing choirs and teaching lessons. This "moonlighting" simply is another way for me to hone my skills and improve my musicianship which in turn improves my teaching. As you can see, I'm not pleased with the term "moonlighting". My choice to be a working musician is a benefit to the schools, not a deterrent.

On the other hand, nearly all positive comments, some with and some without specific reference to salary, indicated that PLBSS has in some way supported their interest in and focus on improving their own practice.
CHAPTER 2 – ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPATION IN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Exploring what effects PLBSS has had on teachers as professionals must begin with consideration of participation, including levels, categories (district, courses, independent proposal), and reasons. Analysis of the quality of PD offerings taken by participants can shed light on its potential to affect instructional practice that can, in turn, improve student learning.

Characteristics of Staff Participation in Professional Learning

In this section, we analyze the characteristics of staff participation in professional learning through the PLBSS: number of proposals; SCH earned; rates of participation; and SCH by experience and category.

SCH Submitted/Granted per Year

Although submission of SCH proposals was high in the years around the change to PLBSS, levels of submission have moderated since 2008. This may be attributed to two factors: 1) Many of the teachers who submitted a good deal of SCH in the beginning have already achieved lane changes; and 2) Policy changes and refinements in practice of accepting SCH have narrowed the scope of PD considered relevant to the teachers’ work. In addition, limitations on the number of lane changes allowable within a timeframe (now every four years) may account for some of the reduction in SCH submissions.

Table 6: SCH Submitted and Granted, by Time Period

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Submitted</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>Granted</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Proposals</td>
<td>SCH</td>
<td>Avg SCH</td>
<td>Proposals</td>
<td>SCH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pre-9/06</td>
<td>989</td>
<td>43513</td>
<td>44.0</td>
<td>960</td>
<td>42945</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>3091</td>
<td>64010</td>
<td>20.7</td>
<td>2993</td>
<td>62266</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>3173</td>
<td>49032</td>
<td>15.5</td>
<td>3067</td>
<td>46975</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>2013</td>
<td>26434</td>
<td>13.1</td>
<td>1776</td>
<td>22612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>1620</td>
<td>26797</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>973</td>
<td>17924</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>983</td>
<td>14279</td>
<td>14.5</td>
<td>351</td>
<td>4178</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

SCH Proposals peaked in 2007. As some focus group participants described, the early years of PLBSS were “a free-for-all” of people submitting as many possible contact hours as they could in order to obtain lane advancement. Many of the early credits were from college courses taken before 2006, which had not been used for salary advancement.
In more recent years, the credit has been a mixture of courses, district offerings, and individual submissions.

**Figure 36**

![Proposals Per Year](Source: PLBSS database)

Overall, the rate of SCH awarded to that proposed remains fairly high—around 88% overall. In the early years, nearly everything that was submitted was approved. This led to rapid and multiple lane changes for some. As PLBSS has continued, the process for determining credit-worthiness has become more rigorous, because the need to determine professional relevance was recognized. 2009-2010 saw a slight decrease in approval rates, and 2010-2011 has not ended, so many of the proposals at this time are incomplete. It is difficult to determine if the trend toward more selectivity implied by the 2009-2010 school year will continue.

**Figure 37**

![SCH Per Year](Source: PLBSS database)
Figure 38

Since 2006-07, SCH proposals have averaged between 10 and 20 contact hours per proposal. This reflects a shift towards more PLC activities and away from the traditional college courses or one-day professional development events. College courses average 45 contact hours, while the PLC and individual activities tend to be for shorter periods, such as a 1.5 hour study group that meets once a week for six weeks. As the pre-2006 credits were largely from college courses, the SCH proposals were for much higher numbers than those from 2007 on. Also, the recent policy change which allows for one lane change every four years may impact the number of credits teachers believe they need to apply for and obtain within an individual school year. In addition, SCH proposals are now limited to 60 hours, unless they are for National Board Certification.

Participation Rates

Participation by PPS staff in PLBSS is high, with 78.7% of eligible staff obtaining lane changes and/or accumulating SCH towards a lane change. Among the remaining eligible staff, only 13.2% have not participated in some way. 8.1% of the staff have started the SCH process, but have incomplete submissions. Among the 21.3% who have not earned SCH thus far are staff members who are new to the district. It is likely that staff members who have worked for the district for a very long time may also fall into this category.

Figure 39
SCH by Type

The vast majority of SCH earned before 2006 were from college courses. Over time, district-offered activities have grown; in recent years, district offerings and college courses have each comprised about 40% of SCH granted, while individual proposals have comprised about 20%.

Table 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCH Period</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Course</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Individual</th>
<th>% Course</th>
<th>% District</th>
<th>% Individual</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-9/06</td>
<td>42,945</td>
<td>41,486</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>1,422</td>
<td>96.6%</td>
<td>0.1%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006-07</td>
<td>62,266</td>
<td>29,534</td>
<td>11,101</td>
<td>21,631</td>
<td>47.4%</td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>46,975</td>
<td>24,824</td>
<td>11,837</td>
<td>10,315</td>
<td>52.8%</td>
<td>25.2%</td>
<td>22.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>22,612</td>
<td>8,172</td>
<td>8,904</td>
<td>5,536</td>
<td>36.1%</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
<td>24.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>17,924</td>
<td>8,828</td>
<td>6,220</td>
<td>2,877</td>
<td>49.2%</td>
<td>34.7%</td>
<td>16.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>4,178</td>
<td>1,764</td>
<td>1,682</td>
<td>732</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>40.3%</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>196,900</td>
<td>114,606</td>
<td>39,782</td>
<td>42,513</td>
<td>58.2%</td>
<td>20.2%</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 41

Annual % SCH by Type (Source: PLBSS database)
SCH by Building

The average SCH earned by each staff member in these schools is 272, or 47 over that needed for a lane change under the current contract language. With the 78.8% earned SCH participation rate, the average earned by participating teachers is higher.

Figure 40

Per-Capita SCH Per School (Sources: MEDMS and PLBSS database)

All the schools in this system fall within one standard deviation (80) of the mean SCH accumulation, except for Casco Bay High, which is higher, and Cliff Island (a very small school), which is lower.
Reasons for Preferring Each Type (College Courses, District Offered, Individual Projects)

PPS Staff indicated preferences (Q13) for each type of professional learning opportunity: College Courses; District Offered; and Individual Projects. Preferences reveal a variety of personal and professional reasons, indicating that the variety and flexibility offered are valuable aspects of the PLBSS.

Why Course Credit?

- I take courses that are relevant and meet my specific teaching needs.
- Taking graduate level coursework at the university is easier, quicker, and more convenient for me than other options.
- I enjoy taking courses; I like that a semester allows in-depth focus
- College credits are the only credentials that can transfer to other districts.
- I’m working on an advanced degree; I’m getting certified in a specific area.

Some staff members prefer college credit because they are seeking courses relevant to a less common specialization, to obtain licensure, and to gain a higher degree. Even though a lane change is possible without a master’s degree, some teachers desire the credential. In addition, courses are perceived as providing great depth of subject matter and convenient availability. For example, many courses for teachers are offered in the summer or online. Staff members can reliably schedule their out-of-school lives around a college course, because of their set schedules or online availability.

Some specialized areas perceive the district offerings as less relevant to their practice than college courses specific to their content areas—this may be especially true of teachers of the fine arts and vocational programs. Although some pedagogical skills are universally useful, refining content knowledge is important to the professional development of skilled teaching staff. For those who seek state certification in areas such as ELL, Special Education, or Administration, in addition to their current certificate, college courses are the only option.

Among those who preferred college courses, a perception that “courses are likely to be accepted for maximum credit” exists. In addition, some of those who pursue college credit believe that this form of SCH is likely to translate to another teaching position, should they lose their employment in PPS. Some participants indicated distrust of the system for deciding how to count the district offered credit as a reason for taking college classes, especially if they submitted individual proposals that were not granted. “Ease of paperwork” was cited as another reason for a college course preference. In addition, college courses are perceived by many as an enjoyable, reliable, and accredited way to gain professional knowledge.
Why District-Offered?

- I find many offerings to be pertinent to my teaching and my needs for re-certification.
- The offerings are convenient: getting credit, time, location.
- I find many high quality offerings for me to take.
- I can get credit for teaching or mentoring my colleagues.

PPS staff members who indicated a preference for district offerings frequently stated that it was a matter of finding the right job relevance, convenience, and price. For some, the idea of committing to a college course was the not the right “fit” with their lives. The district offerings do not require a long commitment and allow the staff members to participate as either a teaching or learning role.

Learning opportunities provided through this venue were perceived as being of high quality, with a good variety by those who chose this option. In addition to taking classes on a wide range of topics, including ELL, SpEd, and technology, staff members enjoy taking courses from colleagues that they know and trust. One person stated that s/he “can’t get the quality of courses available from Multilingual everywhere”. Many who prefer the district offerings cited a strong belief that these courses are high quality and very relevant to their work in Portland. Some, who had completed college coursework, felt that the PPS offerings were more specific and focused to the needs of the district.

In addition, several stated that they valued the opportunity to mentor under this portion of the PLBSS. “Opportunities to mentor student teachers have been extremely rewarding,” states one participant. This offers teachers an opportunity not only to help the next generation of teachers, but also to reflect on their own practice through the teaching of others.

Price and convenience were frequently cited reasons for choosing this option. Many stated that the paperwork involved with the district offerings is simple and likely to be approved. Pre-approval of credits was an incentive for many teachers, and many liked that they did not have to travel for these classes.

Why Individual Project?

- I am an independent learner
- More convenient to schedule around my available time
- I can choose a project that meets the needs I have in my particular role/experience/development stage
- A unique opportunity or project presented, so I used it for SCH
- I often mentor student teachers

One participant, in response to the question, stated, “I’m an independent go-getter. I see something that will give something back to my students and I go get it.” Many of the staff members who identified a preference for individual learning were responding to a unique opportunity such as an offer to lead an action research project. Others were developing classes and themes for school-wide use. Some of these were described as “large, integrated projects” which culminated in a new class for either PPS students or as professional development.
opportunities for other staff members. Some staff members, when they identified a student need, did not see a relevant course offering to address that need, and sought to study the problem on their own. A few who mentor student teachers mentioned that they see the independent project as a way to get credit.

People who sought out individual learning opportunities were largely looking for specific areas of study that weren’t necessarily those of the broader crowd. Specialists, teachers developing new classes, and those who had questions not addressed by the broad district offerings were drawn to this professional learning opportunity. Among those who identified their professional positions in this category were nurses, guidance counselors, adult educators, fine and applied arts teachers, speech and language pathology, and those with many years/degrees in traditional learning settings.

In addition to the self-direction and motivation, many respondents indicated that they liked the convenience of determining their own schedule and timelines. The cost and depth of their course of study was up to them. This was perceived to be a cost and time effective way for independent, motivated people to meet their own professional learning needs, while earning SCH.

**Benchmarking the PLBSS to National Professional Learning Standards**

Many resources describe common attributes of effective, high quality professional development, with good deal of consensus regarding teacher needs and impact on student learning. Perhaps the most concise and research-based summary of these attributes is the *Standards for Professional Learning*, first articulated by the National Staff Development Council (now Learning Forward) as staff development standards but most recently revised in 2011 (released on July 18) with the emphasis on learning. The introduction to the 2011 *Standards* states “By making learning the focus, those who are responsible for professional learning will concentrate their efforts on assuring that learning for educators leads to learning for students. For too long, practices associated with professional development have treated educators as individual, passive recipients of information, and school systems.” (Learning Forward, 2011, *Standards for Professional Learning*.)

Recent reports of studies that examined research on effective professional development and evaluated how teachers’ professional learning opportunities in the United States and abroad measure up to these standards found that opportunities for sustained, collegial professional development of the kind that produces changes in teaching practice and student outcomes are limited in the United States (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Richardson, Andree, & Orphanos, 2009; Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). Because PLBSS explicitly aims to link teacher learning with student learning, we chose to apply the standards to PLBSS. While urban districts like Portland seldom have capacity to track many of these standards without explicit policy and resource allocation to do so, the data we have collected and analyzed from surveys, interviews, and record reviews can indicate how PLBSS measures up. The following chart lists the 2011 *Standards for Professional Learning* and uses them to benchmark PLBSS practices, based on evidence collected in this study.
Table 8: Benchmarking the PLBSS to National Professional Learning Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standards for Professional Learning</th>
<th>Core Elements of Each</th>
<th>Evidence that PLBSS Practices supports</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING COMMUNITIES: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.</td>
<td>• Engage in continuous improvement. • Develop collective responsibility. • Create alignment and accountability.</td>
<td>• Membership in PLCs is a popular option • Teachers choose to take classes with colleagues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEADERSHIP: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.</td>
<td>• Develop capacity for learning and leading. • Advocate for professional learning. • Create supporting systems and structures.</td>
<td>• PLCs are teacher led • Many teachers offer courses for SCH • Various individual proposals and district offerings indicate advocacy or support of leadership (e.g., blacksmith program; curriculum modifications; team teaching).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RESOURCES: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.</td>
<td>• Prioritize human, fiscal, material, technology, and time resources. • Monitor resources. • Coordinate resources.</td>
<td>• Central office leadership collaborated with union leadership to implement PLBSS New contract continues support for PLBSS • Funds allocated for college coursework • Individual proposals can request funds for materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DATA: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.</td>
<td>• Analyze student, educator, and system data. • Assess progress. • Evaluate professional learning.</td>
<td>• PPS identified district priorities (i.e., ELL, poverty, technology) that guide district offerings; teachers took courses all areas (especially ELL) • New contract requires coursework in priority areas • Teachers took course on and report increased use of formative assessments • Teachers report tracking individual student progress using techniques learned through PLCs and PLBSS offerings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEARNING DESIGNS: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.</td>
<td>• Apply learning research, theories, and models. • Select learning designs. • Promote active engagement.</td>
<td>• Variety and flexibility in topics, learning formats/designs, times, and locations of offerings allow for learning that is active, relevant, and based on current research. • Teachers choose from traditional college courses, district offerings (on site and employing various formats), or propose individual learning opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IMPLEMENTATION: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.</td>
<td>• Apply change research. • Sustain implementation. • Provide constructive feedback.</td>
<td>• Proposal review team • Living contract committee • On-going development and review of district offerings • Formal evaluation by external team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OUTCOMES: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.</td>
<td>• Meet performance standards. • Address learning outcomes. • Build coherence.</td>
<td>• Coursework in action research resulted in teachers examining their own instructional practices. • Teachers report that their participation in PLBSS has contributed to improved student learning: o They can measure improvements; o They see connection between their learning, their instruction, their students’ learning; o They offer illustrations of student work and actions to illustrate improved learning.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
We returned to the literature on professional development to identify more indicators to evaluate the quality of the PD available through PLBSS (see Appendix for references on professional development). Some key indicators that provide insight into PPS’s professional development are as follows; we rate in italics the degree to which evidence suggests that many offerings meet the indicator:

### Table 9: Key Indicators of Quality Professional Learning from the Literature, and PLBSS Rating

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicator</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td>covers both content knowledge and pedagogical skill.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Relevance and alignment</strong></td>
<td>with need; PD is selected by the teacher and is based upon data from his/her classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD entails <strong>active learning</strong> on part of participants; staff members have opportunities to interact in a variety of ways and with people with similar needs; reflection (inquiry and action) is integrated.</td>
<td>High with strong evidence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Contextual factors</strong></td>
<td>(leadership, resources); on-site support &amp; follow-up built in.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Collaboration &amp; collective participation</strong></td>
<td>drawing on an existing community of practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coherence, relevance, and alignment</strong></td>
<td>to district needs as well as individual; needs of the school and students to the work of the school are reflected in the content and are apparent to participants.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Meaningful Duration</strong></td>
<td>offerings are longer in length than a typical workshop, preferably on-going or more than 14 hours with time to reflect between multiple meetings.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, the PLBSS appears to support professional development that has the potential to improve teachers’ instructional practice. The design of the PLBSS aligns with the national *Standards for Professional Learning* (Learning Forward, 2011) that emphasize the importance of teachers taking an active role in their continuous professional improvement and establish increased teacher learning as leverage for improved classroom practices. Locating the impetus for action within teachers themselves rejects traditional professional development practices that often treat teachers as individual, passive recipients of information. Further, the policy is grounded in three recognized prerequisites to professionalism: (1) knowledge of the body of knowledge – principles, theories, facts, procedures – that form the basis of the relevant field; (2) the ability and judgment to appropriately apply this body of knowledge; and (3) commitment to use the knowledge and skill in the best interests/to meet the needs of the client, that is, the student (Darling-Hammond, 1988).
CHAPTER 3 - IMPACT ON TEACHER PRACTICE

The PEA asserts “the best predictor of student learning is teacher learning”; that is, if teachers learn, students will learn. This section explores the teacher learning half of the equation. Specifically, the PLBSS theory of action for teacher learning is:

If teachers are compensated on the basis of their professional learning…they will become agents of their own learning. They will build skills and knowledge, both individually and collaboratively, to improve their instructional practices and a broader culture of learning in the schools.

This section draws on data from surveys and interviews to provide evidence of the impact PLBSS has had on professional learning and of its perceived value as a professional, collaborative, and instructional practice.

Professional Learning and Value

An important aspect of being a professional is teachers’ opportunity and will to self-direct one’s learning in order to improve practice, that is, to be agents of their own learning. PLBSS was designed in part to provide this opportunity, thus, a useful measure of effect of the system is teachers’ increased awareness of opportunities and interest in using these opportunities. Teachers’ perceived sense of their value as a professional is another important indicator.

**PLBSS has increased staff interest in professional learning.** Over 70% of survey respondents indicate agreement with the statement, “The PLBSS has increased my interest in participating in professional learning activities.” 33.1% strongly agree with this statement, and 38.1% somewhat agree; only 6.6% strongly disagree.¹⁵

In addition, half of respondents indicate agreement with the statement, “The PLBSS encouraged me to engage in professional learning that I probably would not have done otherwise.” 18.6% strongly agree, and 31.6% somewhat agree; 14.6% strongly disagree.

Please note that in the following figures we have formatted the graphs to display only the positive ratings of strongly agree and agree because these comprise the majority of responses.

¹⁵ See Appendix for all percentages on survey responses.
The response to the second question is more significant than it might at first appear, because it asks respondents about professional learning that they would not have engaged in otherwise. Certainly some of those who registered disagreement with this statement did so because they are intrinsically motivated and would have engaged in professional learning regardless.

These results suggest that the PLBSS has not only increased motivation for professional learning broadly across the staff, but that it has positively affected behavior among those harder-to-reach staff who were less likely to have pursued professional learning otherwise.

Over 60% of survey respondents indicate agreement with the statement, “I feel more valued as a professional because of PLBSS.” 30.9% strongly agree with this statement, and 29.8% somewhat agree. On the other hand, one-quarter (25.0%) disagree to some extent.
Teachers were open about the feelings toward professional learning and their perceived value as professionals. The interviews (1.27.11) and open-ended responses to survey questions (Q15 except where otherwise indicate) illustrate representative perspectives on changes since PLBSS. These perspectives include: recognition of a prevailing norm of professional learning; expressions of self-directed learning; and feeling that professional work is acknowledged and rewarded. Below we offer quotes that capture the voices within these themes.

**Because we are professionals, we are life-long learners.**
- I have continually been challenged to learn, reflect on, and grow as a professional. I can state clearly that I have changed significantly in terms of my professional practice each year since the beginning of the program. I strongly believe that the students are the main beneficiaries of my professional learning supported by this system.
- Rigorous professional development has become the norm for teachers in the Portland Public Schools.
- [PLBSS] has encouraged teachers to take classes, which not only increases their knowledge but reminds them what it is like to be a student. This will make their teaching better.
- Our staff attends Expeditionary Learning Institutes. When our staff members return from the institutes they present to the whole staff. This has been a great way to get valuable information out to a larger audience. The staff member takes a lot of time and energy to create engaging, relevant staff development experiences. Having done this myself, I find that when I am presenting information to my colleagues I have to push myself to understand the information on a much deeper level that I do as a participant.
- I think many teachers are talking about themselves being lifelong learners.
- It emphasizes the concept that teachers are also learners and should continue to grow as educators, becoming more effective and therefore increasing student learning.
- I feel that with the tight system now in place, that teachers’ professional development is more directed towards the crafting and improvement of their teaching. Whereas before, it seemed to be a race to change lanes before the deadline. I believe it is where it should be.
- Some teachers will always just complete activities to move up on a scale, but for the most part I believe our system maintaining its rigorous focus on student learning weeds many of these out.

**As professionals, we can choose what learning we need to improve our practice and to serve our students.**
- We feel a sense of autonomy and professionalism that we did not feel beforehand. Our professionalism is much more in our hands and a matter of self-interest and self-direction.
- The learning activities are really driven by professional needs. The District does not grant credit for frivolous classwork.
- I'm not sure I would have gone for National Board Certification if we didn't have PLBSS. Going through that process has been the number one contributor to improving my practice [Q17].
- Teachers take their own learning more seriously.
- Nearly all staff are participating in professional development of their choosing, with many team members working together on SCH proposals. This is enriching our discussions and practice.
I believe that teachers are documenting many practices that were in the past not formally recognized. It is great because it fosters a desire for teachers to do what serves to increase the quality of education in Portland.

Most teachers are interested in improving their practice and the PLBSS increases those opportunities.

Being rewarded makes us feel valued, makes us want to learn more, and makes us better teachers.

There is an excitement among the teachers. Why? Because there is a fairly clear plan in place where making a focused interest in bettering ourselves for our community and students has a well-deserved award attached.

I think that teachers feel more valued as professionals as a result of the PLBSS. This influences behaviors and attitudes, all positively.

Designing opportunities that are PLBSS approved allows me to feel seen and taken seriously as an educator, building and district wide.

Teachers are now able to work summer hours for SCH instead of being paid stipends . . . I bet if you went back and checked how many teachers attended summer workshops several years ago and compared that with now, you would find an enormous increase. This is true for courses offered in the afternoon, courses offered in the summer [1.27 #3].

In the past I have taken classes purely out of sense of obligation to improve myself professionally. It makes sense and is valid that I now continue to do it - but am recognized via the PBLSS.

Veteran teachers now have both a purpose and incentive for continuing to improve their practice.

Equity concerns

A few respondents noted that teachers with young families find it difficult to earn a lane change as they do not have time to take classes to accumulate sufficient SCH: “this system is great if teachers have the time to devote to course work or other initiatives. For teachers who coach, have families, or actually correct papers, there is not enough time in life to complete the 225 hours of work to advance one lane.”

At the other end of the spectrum are teachers who have “topped out,” that is, have reached the highest end of the scale. What incentives can support these teachers’ continued professional growth?

Some cite a “grey area” related to what time is considered to be an expected part of a teacher’s job (e.g., time during the day) and what is considered to be above and beyond the normal scope of the job. They argue that some work may be professional development even though it occurs during school hours. For example: “In our contract it says that principals can call any meeting a curriculum meeting, and people wouldn’t get SCH for that. However, there may be a meeting to take a look at national assessment scores and principals can call a meeting, and as long as people aren’t getting a stipend or a differential, they may open these meetings up to offer SCH as long as they use that.
meeting to help their kids but they would also have to go one step further and make sure that that was relevant that was something that was new that was going to make sure that the kids were improving.”

One teacher leader argued that PPS should be “growing its own principals” by granting SCH for coursework towards administrator licensure.

**Teacher Collaboration**

A powerful indicator that a culture of professional learning thrives is increased collaborative practice. For example, Part 1: Effective Teaching and Leadership of the *Annual MetLife Teacher Survey*, which focuses on what collaboration looks like in schools and to what degree it is currently practiced, reveals these points:

- Teachers (67%) and principals (78%) believe that increased collaboration among teachers and school leaders would have a major impact on improving student achievement.
- Nearly all teachers engage in some type of collaborative activity at their school each week, on average, spending 2.7 hours per week in structured collaboration, with 24% of teachers spending more than 3 hours per week.
- Schools with higher degrees of collaboration are associated with shared leadership and higher levels of trust and job satisfaction.

Collaboration has become an overused jargon term with fuzzy meaning. For PLBSS, we define collaboration as professional opportunities that bring teachers and other educators in the system together where individuals’ strengths and knowledge contribute to creating improved practice. Collaboration supports capacity building, common language, and shared goals. Survey and interview responses illustrate that a collaborative learning culture is building in PPS as teachers: take courses together; participate in and lead Professional Learning Communities (PLC); offer on-site courses for colleagues; create teaming situations. In short, teachers report that as a result of PLBSS they talk and interact more and share common goals and language.

**PLBSS has helped build a culture of teacher collaboration.** Focus group participants indicated that one of the major affects of PLBSS on the teaching force was to encourage a culture of collaboration among teachers, and the survey results bear this out. 62.9% of respondents agree (strongly or somewhat) that the PLBSS has increased discussion of teaching practices among colleagues. 60.9% agree that it has increased teacher collaboration around issues of student learning. And 70.9% agree that it has increased teacher interest in participating in professional learning communities.
Comments from interviews and surveys reveal details and examples of how PLBSS promotes collaboration efforts. Whether the format be formal coursework, PLCs, discussion groups, or conference attendance, professional development is supporting a give-and-take of knowledge: people bring to each other what they have learned; and people learn from each other. [All responses from survey Q15 unless otherwise indicated.]

**Taking courses together allows us to work together and build on what we learn.**

- Teachers in my building are more apt to talk about what they are learning in these professional learning communities and will share what they have learned and continue to build on that learning. It is catching!
- I always take courses that other colleagues in my department are also taking. As a result, more meaningful reflection takes place during and after the course. Additionally, there is greater collaboration and support when we put our professional learning into practice; thus, the learning is active and sustainable and often expands into common practices throughout the department as we share our knowledge, understanding and practices with others.
- I find that when taking a class or course together with other teachers from the same school or district, discussions often develop about what we learned. The learning and sharing continues.
- I especially love the courses offered by my colleagues. The information is specific to our community and the comments from other "students" in the class really add to the understanding of issues. I think it is the best collaborative environment possible.
- Many teachers take course offerings together and engage in conversations about what they learned and how they apply the knowledge to their classes. I collaborated with [University of Southern Maine] faculty and now regularly participate in learning and sharing opportunities at USM where I meet with a variety of other professionals. This, I think, helps to improve the culture of professionalism at PPS.
- All our math department are participating in the same course, and we have weekly rich discussions around algebra. We all feel like our classes are, in short, better. We share ideas and activities, it is great!
- Teachers are taking lots of classes and discussing them with one another. Teachers are also offering more workshops at the district level.
I have taken classes with other teachers so I can work in collaboration [Q17].

We talk together about teaching more now, so we share common language and goals. We can see it changing our practice.

- My colleagues and I share what we have learned in our courses and workshops during department meetings and at other, less formal meeting times. This includes discussions and presentations on specific ways to evaluate and increase student learning, new teaching strategies, and new content knowledge.
- Teachers have more common language, more common strategies evolving. Learning more about the curriculum...understanding what other teachers at different levels need you to do in your position [1.27 #2].
- I belong to a PLC offered by the district. This has enabled me to have great conversations with colleagues about teaching and student learning.
- I started a club on a book that had been recommended called “The Book Whisperer.” We teachers from second through fifth grade got together except for, I think, two. That was weekly for, I think it was ten full weeks. At the end we had a tea party. I personally, I facilitated this but I was amazed at how much it changed my practice. I’m sure it changed my practice a lot more than if I just read the book because reading it with nine other friends and talking about it and experimenting and doing a little research in our classrooms and coming back the next week and say, “well this really worked, Oh, I can’t believe how this changed how my classroom’s mood, environment.” And a lot of that stuff is what we found happening and at the end of that I can say that just about everybody was amazed at how much their classroom practice had changed {1.27 #4].
- In our district offered workshops, I am able to meet and develop relationships with other teachers who are interested in the same issues in education. In a district with so many challenges, it is essential that teachers have opportunities to interact ACROSS grade and content area. The workshops remind us that this is about KIDS. I'm always amazed at how professional and dedicated we are as a community of teachers.
- Excitement and ideas that come back from conferences. Brings new life to teaching, able to share strategies [1.27 #1].
- A discussion group on classroom accommodations for students with disabilities contributed to a clearer definition and understanding of the topic, as well as collaboration and practical practice amongst the K - 12 teachers involved in the discussion [Q17].

Working together presents new opportunities and opens us to new people and ideas and strategies.

- We are collaborating more with teachers in other schools that we meet at district offerings. We share what we learn with our colleagues at the various courses/workshops that we attend.
- Many staff have an increased awareness and understanding of poverty and homelessness [NB: district priority area] and how it effects learning because of the classes many have participated in recently
- Personally, I feel there are more conversations and ideas being floated around regarding how to meet the educational needs of our diverse population.
- We started, my partner and I, a gender-based classroom collaborative action research two-year cycle. On the first year I taught the boys reading and my partner taught the boys math
and the next year we switched around and I taught the girls math. You know, we both got to teach the core subjects, reading and math to a gender-specific classroom. Then we did a lot of collaborative action research around that and we also researched what was out there. We were the only school in Maine, I believe, at that time that had gender-based teaching and it was all through this (indicating SCH). It was amazing. We got the news; we got a lot of publicity. Got on a radio show . . . I think it affected many of the teachers in the system [1.27#4].

- More of a willingness to organize and offer a PLC at my school that might not have happened otherwise.
- I have also been able to interact more effectively with colleagues as a result of my studies [Q17].

### Instructional Practice

Professional learning and sense of value means little unless teachers us their learning to improve individual practice. Both on surveys and during interviews, teachers provide overwhelming evidence that their participation has had a positive effect on their classroom instruction.

**Three-quarters report that PLBSS contributed significantly to improvement of their classroom teaching.** 76% of respondents say that the PLBSS contributed greatly (41.1%) or somewhat (34.9%) to improvement of their classroom teaching over the past three years. Another 12.5% say that it contributed slightly, while 11.2% say it did not contribute. Survey participants were also offered the options of saying that the PLBSS contributed greatly, somewhat, or slightly to worsened practice; only one respondent (0.3%) chose any of these options.

![Figure 45](image-url)

**To What Extent has the PLBSS Contributed to Improvement of Your Classroom Teaching Over the Past 3 Years? (N=367)**

- Contributed greatly: 41.1%
- Contributed somewhat: 34.9%
- Contributed slightly: 12.5%
- Did not contribute: 11.2%

Verbal responses on the survey (Q17 unless otherwise indicated below) as well as interviews offer a more detailed picture the perceived improvement. Areas of improvement can be grouped into the following themes. Two areas align directly with district priorities (ELL and technology)
and another (data use) aligns with the NSDC standards for staff development mentioned in the previous chapter. The quotes following the themes are representative of the total responses.

**I know I teach ELL students better because of what I learned.**

- I have become much more aware of how to meet the learning needs of our ELL population. I have also realized that most of what I have learned in regards to teach ELL student translates as a BEST practice to use with all students.
- I have taken workshops on working with ELL students. I've wanted to improve my teaching practice due to all this new knowledge as our ELL population has increased significantly in the last 2 years.
- I have a better understanding of how to reach my ELL learners and children of poverty. My classroom management skills, through the use of Responsive Classroom and my knowledge of creating quality, authentic learning experiences, have improved.
- I have…taken graduate classes to better meet the needs of my English Language Learners. Since I teach at a very diverse school, I was able to apply these practices almost as fast as I learned them.
- I learned about new models for designing lessons for ELL's and new ways of looking at the issues of and helping ELL "lifers," students who may have been here for many years, but who can't exit the program.
- Again, all of this, I never could have done any of this if I hadn’t spent three lousy credit hours and the payback is really good, and for the kids. I have been teaching for quite a few years and I wanted to enhance my ability to teach ELLs and so last year. . . I think I went to five different classes. That was a wonderful experience for me because our school has grown in diversity immensely over the last few years and will continue to do so, and I feel it’s important for me to understand their culture and their language and their problems so this was very helpful. You really learn how to teach - much more so than the college courses that certify you as ELL[1.27 #4].
- Taking the ELL courses and teaching ELL students helped my teaching. I did start taking these courses for a lane change. However, the lane change and salary increase was a nice reward for my hard work and interest in my students.
- I am more aware of the challenges of our ELL population and how to better serve them as learners in the classroom.
- SIOP training helped learning practices with ELL students.
- I have taken some courses/workshops in areas outside of my direct area of work that relate to overall district needs in areas such as ELL that I might otherwise have not done.
- The amount of ELL coursework offered at the district level has been a great contribution to my work.
- I was part of a project with some professors at SMU to help ELLs get a better foundation and make reading more automatic and to give them some of the background that they would be missing because they are not native English speakers. My role in that was I was the first grade teacher that was the pilot teacher that was going to be doing the program and then I also ran, I was in charge of running the study for the school [1.27 #4].
- Wilson training that I did under the PLBSS helped me to know how to teach students who have trouble decoding. Courses on teaching ELLs have helped me to be a better teacher of ELLs.
How I approach working with ELL students - how I regard errors and how I work to correct them and support the student. Greater respect for the prior experiences of ELL students and what might be challenges for them.

I have appreciated the district courses on Somali culture and poverty. I have also appreciated that I can go out on my own and find professional learning that works for me and my practice, not being a classroom teacher.

I teach many ELLs, and extensive study of how to improve students' literacy has given me greater ability to do so.

**Now I use technology in new ways that I have learned.**

- I have gained many new ideas about how to integrate technology and literacy strategies into my classroom.
- I've learned to use programs on the laptops that help students visualize abstract concepts. For example, using Geogebra and Screencasts to have students’ visualize systems of equations math problems and record their understanding as a video.
- I’ll talk about one that made a big difference in my life as a teacher. I did go to *How to Create a Blog Website Parts 1 and 2* and from those experiences I started my own teacher website on Portland’s blog and it is a vital part of the way I communicate with parents. My homework is up there, my monthly letters are up there, and they can click on anytime. I have my own personal teacher’s mission statement and I have the mission statement that the class wrote for themselves for the year. Of course the children give me artwork and that’s part of the blog [1.27 #4].
- I can give you an example of a high school teacher who worked an enormous amount of time setting up a blog and a website for his math teachers. In that website there were all kinds of links so kids could go there to get what they needed. He also set up templates to support the work that he was doing in his classroom that would reinforce the learning that was going on in the classroom. He was also able to set up a blog within that so that if kids had any questions they could have an interactive blog going [1.27 #3].
- I participated in a *Bringing Technology into your Classroom* class that taught me to utilize technology to teach in different ways.
- I have mastered some mathematical software that helps in developing mathematical concepts as well as developing a full range website.
- I have taken many computer classes to help with the presentation I give to students. I have a blog for the class.
- The use of Google docs and other technology has improved my instruction.
- Helped me offer Moodle to my students to check work, review lectures and check in on missing days assignments. This has been extremely beneficial to students who need to see the information differently or catch up on missing days.
- Use of camera to document, to capture positive interactions to use as teaching points, to thank volunteers, to pre-trek a field trip, to save moments to review and savor. Smartboard training is still for the future in this particular school, but the exposure in tech class tells me they are not all the same, and what to advocate for my students when I write grants. Digital story telling was amazing and powerful experience and one that translate well to students with EL and Language issues [note connection to ELL priority]. The tech opportunity is really motivating.
Sharpened classroom inquiry and communication through technology, as well as inspired educational advocacy.

Increased use of technology due to courses I have taken.

I’m better equipped to teach computer skills and research online.

Now I use new software ideas and techniques.

I am better with technology.

Utilizing technology I have in my classroom in a way that not only uses it for internet searching, but for creative and adaptive projects.

**Learning about assessments and how to use data has changed my teaching.**

Because of a professional learning course I took last year, I now use more forms of formative assessment and remediation and differentiation in my classroom to ensure that students are meeting the content and skills standards of the course.

Everything you do has to be tied to student learning. We had to take a class of kids and track (formatively) and show the data to the PLC...and be able to show how students progressed or not. Brought those who weren’t making it to the forefront, and gave them opportunities to get ideas from each other to troubleshoot [1.27 #1].

I’ve been tightening up my formative assessment connections with kids applying Marzano's practices/strategies/techniques.

Focus is much more on how teacher practice has impacted student learning and, how do we know that? Now we use data to tell us. [Q15].

I learned about data notebooks to involve students in their own learning. I use this in my classroom and students are able to see their progress, set goals and meet those goals.

I took a course in literacy to improve phonics, vocabulary and spelling instruction. I used what I learned to provide direct instruction. I use assessment tools that pinpoint what students know and what they need to learn. I share the spelling assessment with parents and with students. I use the information to plan instruction and to celebrate learning.

In my Assessments Practice class, I learned a technique for separating out "responsibility/promptness" from actual writing grades. In addition, my work to create curriculum-integrated SAT prep materials has been used by both me and several colleagues.

Data around reading and writing has improved on the NECAP. Now looking at the smaller pieces of the picture…what is happening for the individual students? [1.27 #2]

**PLBSS supports my taking on personal projects and challenges that make me a better teacher:**

Perhaps the best examples come from an Adolescent Literature course I took. It changed the content and focus of independent reading. I built an extensive classroom library, created a blog for students to discuss their independent reading, revised the focus of the writing prompts related to reading, and as a result, increased my students' interest in and practices around independent reading. These practices, I believe, transfer to more in-depth and comprehensible reading in all content areas [note alignment with district priority].

I took a course called Getting Parents on Your Side. This course taught me how to partner with parents to have successful learning experiences for students. I started sending home newsletters and meeting with parents of students with academic and behavior problems to work together to come up with a home-school plan for improvement.
Now we have a full-blown blacksmithing curriculum . . . I spent over one hundred hours of developing equipment, building equipment in the shop, researching, gathering curriculum to teach and formatting it, getting it structured, taking classes, it’s helped pay for classes for me to take to learn more skills. I mean they were, it was so perfect in my situation, to fit in my situation to help these kids stay in the program and develop their skills. I would say that it really enhanced that fact that I could do this. It helped me out. It helped me do it. I don’t think I would have done it to the level that I did [1.27 #4].

There’s been a lot that’s been offered on health and wellness. “How to eat well” “Lifestyle and Health” “Wellness in the School”. I took all of these in the last two years. All very important to me because I was morbidly overweight, and I’m down about 60 pounds. So, yes I think . . . and I’m not saying the reason that I lost my 50 some odd pounds was because of this but it was a very important part of my wellness and my support on this venture. Does that make me a better teacher? Yes, it really does. I can’t tell you all the reasons, but I can skootch down and get up – I teach little kids. I couldn’t do that before [1.27 #4].

I now do some labs I would not have either been willing to do or would not have had the expertise to do. Now what I don't do is mostly a product of not being supported with a budget to provide needed materials.

I learned specific strategies I now apply to my classroom instruction.

Instead of focusing on courses to obtain a Masters or Doctorate, I was able to take specific courses that immediately benefitted my teaching practice: behavior/management courses, collaboration/technology courses, and content-specific educational classes and workshops.

I better incorporate students' individual strengths into the basis of my instructional strategies.

I have been able to answer students’ questions more thoroughly, more artfully, and I have been able to differentiate for students better because of my increased knowledge and understanding in my content area. I have been able to mediate student conflict and also to respond to inappropriate behavior more meaningfully because of what I have learned in some of my courses.

I took a class about supporting the struggling reader and then I would go to school and implement the suggestions and we all benefited.

Understanding the brain development and how it relates to understanding math.

A course in Psychology helped inform how to teach different needs. “Linear and logical” student needs things phrased in a particular way; “very organic and free flowing” girl needed different strategies—learned how to reach these students because of a heightened perception of the students [1.27 #1].

Yes, with the Asperger and autism population – I can use best practice with these students. [NB: many responses referred to learning strategies to deal with special needs].

I had the opportunity to go to two different courses on Autism Spectrum Disorders…and they were fabulous….I found application right away, to understand better how they were thinking,…and to work with my students so that lack of communication would not precipitate bully-type behaviors [1.27 #4].

Gender-based practices such as proper book choices for boys, kinetic teaching practices in the classroom such as dance and improvisation, and on and on. [NB: many responses referred to learning strategies to deal with gender differences in learning styles].

I took a psych class that was so good for my practice and understanding of the students and their family situations.
Teacher Leadership

Teachers assuming greater leadership in offering and developing professional learning opportunities serves as another persuasive indicator that a culture of professional learning thrives in PPS. Interview and survey responses (Q15 and Q17) reveal increased opportunities for teachers’ leadership of their own development.

**PLBSS has increased teacher leadership of professional learning.** Two-thirds (67.3%) of respondents agree (strongly or somewhat) that the PLBSS has increased teacher-directed professional learning; only 4.8% strongly disagree. In addition, over two-fifths (43.3%) of respondents indicate that the PLBSS has increased their own interest in developing or leading professional learning activities.

These results suggest that the PLBSS is in fact building a better “market” for professional learning, increasing both the demand and the potential supply of teacher-directed offerings. An example of this was raised in the focus groups. As one participant explained, the district used to have a representative teacher professional development committee. This group planned workshops and brought trainers in, “but they weren’t accessed in the same way as now. We had to beg, borrow, and steal to get people to come in.” Now with the PLBSS, more internal people are offering professional learning opportunities. “The scale really nudged people to do it” – both create workshops and access them. “‘Oh, I can do that, too’ – it became more of a norm to do that.”[1.27 #2] According to this group, the salary scale was the big difference in building both supply and demand for professional learning that a committee of people working had previously tried and failed to make happen. Open-ended responses to survey questions corroborate that the impact of PLBSS “has been evident in the number of teacher led workshops”.

Another comments that: “The model of teachers teaching other teachers is a great one. Both the teacher and the teachers in the class learn so much from each other”. A specific example is of a building reading specialist who has led several ongoing literacy curriculum classes; these “have directly impacted the work in our building, been effective in terms of generating real change in practice, and enhanced team work”.

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**Figure 46**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact on Teacher Leadership of Professional Learning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Increased teacher-directed professional learning (N=377)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased my interest in developing/leading professional learning activities (N=374)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly Agree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

0.0% 10.0% 20.0% 30.0% 40.0% 50.0% 60.0% 70.0% 80.0%
Several respondents mentioned the value of formal mentoring opportunities; as PLBSS credits, these require rigor that enhances the mentor’s capacity for leadership:

If you want to be a mentor, and you want to have an intern in your classroom for a whole semester every single day, you propose, and this is under district offerings, so we ask you to not just take the student intern but we ask you to meet with them, to complete formal observations. The universities may ask you to do something different, but we ask you to do four formal observations with reflections. We ask you also to write a reflection so they have a packet, a documentation packet they receive. Most people will pass in the reflections and the time spent on their observations, but then some people actually show you what it is that they have done with the student intern throughout the semester. This one actually included all the observations as well as the reflection of her growth over time as she worked with the intern [1.27#3].

Another cited her experience in a Portland cohort of teachers pursuing Teacher of English Language Learners endorsement as a source of training in how to mentor other teachers or students. Similarly, other responses reveal that various PLBSS opportunities have built teachers capacity for leadership in general: for example, “Taking graduate level courses on ELL, assessment, curriculum design, and school leadership has given me tools I can use on a daily basis as well as a broader and deeper understanding of how to function as a leader in a school”.
CHAPTER 4 – IMPACT ON STUDENT LEARNING

This section explores the students will learn, or result, half of the causal statement on which the PLBSS is grounded: if teachers learn, students will learn. As researchers, we recognize the challenges in directly attributing changes in student learning to the activities supported through PLBSS since conducting any rigorous and valid randomized controlled trial is not possible in the reality of the school setting. As Linda Darling-Hammond reports, measures connecting state test score gains to teacher performance are highly unstable for individual teachers because gains are caused by so many variables in addition to teacher instruction that no direct causal links may be drawn between any two variables (see for example her September 6, 2010 New York Times article: “Too Unreliable”).

However, we can analyze perceived impact of the PLBSS on student learning in the Portland Public Schools. We can also seek evidence that teachers offer as proxies for improved learning on their students that they attribute to their improved instruction. The interviews and survey responses offer strong evidence of connections between teacher learning from PLBSS, improved instruction, and student learning.

Three-quarters report that PLBSS contributed significantly to improvement of student learning in their classrooms. 73.9% of respondents say that the PLBSS contributed greatly (36.1%) or somewhat (37.8%) to improvement of student learning in their classrooms over the past three years. Another 11.2% say that it contributed slightly, while 11.5% say it did not contribute. An additional 2.8% said it was too soon to tell. Survey participants were also offered the options of saying that the PLBSS contributed greatly, somewhat, or slightly to worsened practice; only two respondents (0.6%) chose any of these options.16

Figure 47

To What Extent has the PLBSS Contributed to Improvement of Student Learning in Your Classroom Over the Past 3 Years? (N=357)

- Contributed greatly: 36.1%
- Contributed somewhat: 37.8%
- Contributed slightly: 11.2%
- Did not contribute: 11.5%
- Too soon to tell: 2.8%

16 See Appendix for all percentages on survey responses.
Throughout interviews and open-ended responses to the survey question asking for examples of how PLBSS has contributed to improved student learning (Q19), teachers and teacher leaders express a clear message: They have learned: to articulate clear learning goals; to identify instructional strategies to bring all students to the goal; and to assess if students reach the goal. They report that their participation in professional development “promotes reflective teaching and the opportunity to put learning into action”. Many teachers refer to collecting and analyzing data on their students’ learning and then using their knowledge to address those students who do not master learning targets.

Specifically, responses provide evidence that falls into three thematic categories: teachers’ measures of improved learning; perceptions of improved learning; and illustrations of student work.

**Measurable improvements in student learning**
- Teaching is an art, but my students' NECAP scores are up...more are meeting the standard.
- Payoff for students is more subjective and reflective than test scores. We just finished a standard reading test with kids. One student jumped from a 3.8 to an 8.6…this student was able to do this because of strategies I learned from a PLC. He went from being a reluctant reader to growing to enjoy reading. Being reflective and willing to look at student data is important [1.27 #1]
- Students now are scoring better on literary text on the NWEAs after taking my class
- Due to coursework in these areas I notice: Improved reading data - all students meeting / exceeding expectations. Increased parental involvement. Stronger math skills.
- Triangulating the assessment data re: my ELL learners offers evidence of success that I can credit to some degree to the specific emphasis I have placed upon my professional development re: differentiation/tiered instruction. Building background knowledge and the 12 core Design Principles of Exp. Learning have enhanced my work around curriculum mapping which in turn has generated clearer learning targets for students who for their part have demonstrated stronger work products/writing pieces over time.
- I collected data during this class and can document the improvement in learning of this year's students compared to last year's before I took this class. I used teaching skills to deliver guidance curriculum and my students are so much better prepared and less anxious about their plans for after high school.
- I developed a course to help students to pass the arithmetic portion of the Accuplacer. I used various techniques I learned from 2 elementary math courses that I took. The pre and post test assessments and the ending Accuplacer results have shown great gains with more than 80% passing the arithmetic portion of the Accuplacer at the end of the course.
- My students are exceeding the standards.

**Connections between teacher learning, instruction, and student learning**
- I have seen the relevance and quality of professional development offerings improve. They are focused more on learner outcomes. I am pushed to improve and know there is an expectation that my students will benefit from the work I am doing.
- There are clear connections between my learning and the overall rigor and depth of knowledge I am asking my students to pursue. I can see changes through assessment in terms
of more students engaging the content and reaching goals than I have in previous years. This helps me to feel successful and helps me to stay in this daunting profession.

- Teachers are engaged in current learning. This enhances colleague discussions to better assist our students….Engagement in our profession keeps our practice dynamic, and helps us to keep our students engaged.
- My students’ learning in writing has greatly improved as a result of the course work I did to improve my teaching of writing.
- As I have learned more about English Language Learners and strategies that help them learn, all of my students have benefited. A specific example is working with language frames.
- Teachers have implemented some writing activities that were part of an after school workshop that I taught. Students enjoy the writing and activity, and teachers observed that students were invested in the activity and produced quality work.
- I put learning targets to use, which has improved student learning.
- My course work has encouraged me to conduct action research to improve instruction. For example, I completed a project focused on student-led discussions, and this directly improved my students' abilities to analyze texts critically.
- I feel that my students have made significant gains in reading and math as a result of the training I have received.
- One example - I have changed how I do my Word Study - greatly improving my students' spelling.
- I've seen an increase in the quality of my students' writing as I've read about writing professionally.
- I let my students to be self-directed learners more than before.
- The blacksmithing curriculum would cover the fine arts credit that they would pull the kids away from my class and bring them back to the sending school in order for them to get their graduation requirements. So, I embedded it in my curriculum and then we dedicate a certain amount of time every few months, and we spend it just on the blacksmithing over the two years, three years, sometimes four years that the kids are there, and I document everything that’s done, that they do, and build portfolios for them and then I send it back to their schools. This would provide a way, not only to help them learn another skill such as blacksmithing, but also so that they could stay in a program where they would continue to learn more of what they needed to learn.

Student work or actions
- I took 120 hours in Mathematics. I currently work with a student for about 20 minutes at lunch. Her mother reports that she is gaining confidence and skills. I can see her skills improve. I also learned how to give individual assessments to monitor progress and have been able to pinpoint exactly what she needed to learn.
- Students are now able to exhibit their work on the class blog, and take pride in their learning.
- I think the use of Google docs has made the content more accessible to students and as a result many students have been more successful.
- The response of the Moore Middle School students and their families to the Tsunami in Japan. The influence I had in getting a federal grant for Multilingual Project Thrive.
- Service-learning projects with students
I feel my students feel great about the community we have built, which provides them with a safe learning environment. My students are willing to take risk with their learning and are kind to one another.

One respondent calls for more instruction in and better systems for gathering and managing data without which “there is absolutely no way to determine this [contribution of PLBSS to improved student learning]!!!” As the respondent notes: "correlation is not causation . . . How do we know which intervention did or did not make a difference?"
CHAPTER 5 – SATISFACTION

The survey generated a great deal of information about participants’ general levels of satisfaction, both with the Portland Public Schools as a place to work and with the PLBSS itself. This section includes an analysis of respondents’ favorite aspects of the program and their suggestions for further improvement.

Satisfaction with the PLBSS

Satisfaction with Portland as a place to work is generally quite high. 71.8% of survey respondents reported being very satisfied (31.0%) or somewhat satisfied (40.8%) with Portland as a place to work. Only 3.0% indicated being very unsatisfied.

Figure 48

Satisfaction with the PLBSS is even higher. Four-fifths (79.4%) of survey respondents are very or somewhat satisfied with the PLBSS; over half (53%) are very satisfied. Only 4.3% report being very dissatisfied.

Figure 49
Three-quarters would recommend a PLBSS to other school districts. 74.8% of survey respondents indicate that they would recommend a PLBSS-like program to teachers in other districts. 11.1% would not recommend such a program, while 14.1% are undecided.

Figure 50

Those Who Know the PLBSS Best Like It Most

Those who know PLBSS best are more positive. Interestingly, the percentage that would recommend PLBSS is higher among those with greater levels of understanding of PLBSS. We asked survey respondents to state their level of agreement or disagreement with the following statement: “I have a clear understanding of PLBSS, including the requirements to advance on the salary schedule.” 86% of respondents either strongly or somewhat agreed with this statement. Only 3.3% strongly disagreed.

Figure 51
Among those responding “strongly agree” or “somewhat agree,” 82.1% would recommend PLBSS, while only 6.6% would not. In the chart below, respondents who strongly or somewhat agree that they have a clear understanding of PLBSS are coded as the “understand” group, while those who strongly or somewhat disagree or don’t know are coded as the “don’t understand” group.

**Figure 52**

**Percent recommending PLBSS, based on level of understanding of the program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Understanding</th>
<th>Understand (N=318)</th>
<th>Don’t Understand (N=51)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
<td>82.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No</td>
<td>6.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t know</td>
<td>11.3%</td>
<td>31.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Similarly, satisfaction ratings are higher among those with greater levels of understanding of PLBSS. Among this group, 87% are very or somewhat satisfied; three-fifths (59.9%) are very satisfied. Only 6.7% are somewhat or very dissatisfied. Another 6.3% report being neutral about the program.

**Figure 53**

**Satisfaction with PLBSS, based on level of understanding of the program**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Satisfaction Level</th>
<th>Understand (N=317)</th>
<th>Don’t Understand (N=51)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very satisfied</td>
<td>9.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat satisfied</td>
<td>21.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somewhat dissatisfied</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very dissatisfied</td>
<td>23.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Favorite Aspects

Survey respondents were forthcoming with what they like best about PLBSS (Q27) and why they would recommend the process (Q23). Two responses capture well the themes underlying many reasons:

“I can choose the type of professional development I need to improve my teaching and be rewarded by making a lane change.”

“What I like best about the PLBSS is the flexibility in creating studies and learning around student, teacher and school need. District needs are not always school specific needs. This system trusts teachers and gives the freedom to pursue higher education.”

First, a dominant theme is: PLBSS offers choice, flexibility, and relevance to individual and school needs and encourages life-long learning. Overwhelmingly, teachers appreciate that they may personalize their learning to their own specific interests and needs. They see the system as teacher-driven, honoring teachers’ “ability to create your own professional development path that is focused on the needs of your students.” Specifically, “It encourages teachers to pursue studies in areas that will have a direct impact on student performance.”

As well, teachers report feeling that the system has improved PD offerings as a result; more and varied options are available that more directly match teacher needs, both professional and personal. For example, teachers applaud the community-specific learning opportunities and note these are well attended by staff. “I like that I can take courses, do projects and get credit by meeting objectives that best fit the population of students that I serve. I see the courses and projects as relating better to areas that are needed by the changing school population.” Responses include reference to offerings that are site-based, content or strategy specific, on-going, teacher-led, and informal working groups. The system also encourages further PD among the more veteran teachers who have “topped-out” on the old system; for example, a “teacher who already holds a masters, but doesn't necessarily want a PhD, can still gain credit for courses and self improvement.”

A second theme is that teachers feel valued, both through the tangible rewards of SCH and as professionals. Clearly, money is important, but so is the sense of being validated as a professional. Respondents emphasize the importance of being “financially compensated for taking classes that build my content knowledge and improve my teaching practice.” One states: “I can choose courses I enjoy and know they are helping my students and my income.” Another reports that: “I was able to quit my two part time jobs. I am treated as a professional. I feel I can make enough to not have to worry about my future.”

Respondents report that the system “treats teachers with respect and offers a competitive salary based on improvement that is rewarded on the basis of the professional doing work to improve their teaching skills.” Many express their desire for the work they do to benefit their students to be acknowledged:
“[I like] feeling valued for professional knowledge, being recognized (I don't like to say rewarded) for improving knowledge. It has really motivated me and some of my colleagues to fine-tune and expand our knowledge base, and I truly believe it benefits our students.”

One comment compares PLBSS favorably to alternative salary systems:

“[PLBSS] is about developing professionals rather than about rewarding tenure or test scores. Given our demographics, test scores are not an accurate indicator of the progress students (especially ELL) make. This system provides teachers with tools and rewards”

Another positive aspect that respondents cite is the increased opportunity to collaborate and converse with colleagues about teaching and learning. Because offerings are flexible, varied, and open to everyone, respondents feel that collaboration among teachers has increased. A respondent states that PLBSS has opened up “opportunities and conversations”.

A few compliment what they experience as an effective working operation that is easy to use: “PLBSS is well a clear and well organized program that provides a way to maintain and grow substantially in all within the schools.” Some specify the “ease of submitting paperwork online” and the “ability to keep records at the site”. Another is pleased with “how the trainings are put on the computer so that I can see what I have done”.

Only a handful wrote that they did not like anything. [NB: one respondent cited “Sue” as what s/he likes best about PLBSS!]

Areas for Improvement

However, even among those who are satisfied and would recommend PLBSS to other districts we heard an overwhelming call to streamline and clarify the process. Specific suggestions include (the italics are representative quotes from responses to Q28):

Simplify and more clearly define the process to be followed
- Submitting a proposal is sometimes confusing, it's hard to know at times which category to pick and what evidence they are going to want to see.
- Too many hoops to jump through. I have a couple of unresolved proposals only because I'm too daunted by the paperwork and procedures required to pass them. I know they're a necessary evil, but maybe relax the rules on timing. I feel a little intimidated by keeping track of what needs to be submitted by which date.
- I struggle the most with navigating the "paperwork" system of how to apply for the credits etc.
- The documentation process could be a little more streamlined. Sometimes it is difficult to keep up with a number of small proposals you have submitted. These are often the ones directly related to the classroom and have the most impact on student learning, but it sometimes becomes difficult to find the time to keep up with the documentation process for these.
The process is a bit confusing if you are new to it. It seems like it could be simplified in some areas.

**Make the process more timely with speedier turn-around**
- The system for logging and earning credit for hours is often very far behind or cumbersome. Long wait times to get proposals improved.
- Proposals are reviewed very slowly. Often takes too long to have proposals approved or to be awarded hours when finished.
- It takes forever to hear back about proposals. I still haven't heard anything about a class I took 9 months ago.

**Reduce paperwork and eliminate repetition**
- Way too much paperwork!!!
- I would like to see the paperwork reduced. The paper trail is very much like the certification process and it is hard to distinguish them. Certificates from district offered workshops should automatically be entered in PLBSS, instead of sent to employee, scanned, uploaded, etc.
- Make easier to provide documentation for district offered training – the certificate comes from Central Office, yet we need to scan it and send it back to Central Office.
- The electronic scanning back and forth of class certificates or documentation of course work is time consuming and wastes trees. Credits for district offered courses should be given electronically and automatically sent to our account. I don't need a paper certificate saying that I completed a course. Send me an email and put the credits in my account electronically.

**Improve the website**
- The PLBSS web site - how to get to it, exemplars of proposals, clarity on the web site about how to do it, and timelines.
- The web site needs a more streamlined process, clearer explanations of types of development that make it more easily accessible

**Improve communication channels for questions, feedback, and decisions**
- Paperwork is often difficult to submit and hard to find someone to answer questions....
- Management of the system has improved since the inception of the program, but CO personnel not always responsive to concerns, problems, etc
- The communication after you submit your hrs. If there is a problem in the past it has be difficult to know how to resolve it.
CHAPTER 6 – FINAL THOUGHTS

We began this report referring to the belief in teacher learning on which the PLBSS is grounded. To conclude, we return to this belief and the primary goals of PLBSS. While no research-based causal links between teacher learning and student learning can be established (see also technical report, Teacher Professional Learning In The United States: State Policies And Strategies, by Learning Forward, 2010 that asserts the same), attainment of the various goals can be reviewed and conclusions made. The primary goals are to:

- encourage teachers to remain career-long learners,
- increase and update teacher skills,
- promote teachers as visible models of learners to students, and
- attract and retain highly skilled teachers.

The PLBSS also was designed to achieve the following salary goals:

- Eliminate multi-year steps – dead zones – in schedule
- Reduce number of years to reach maximum salary
- Improve career earnings
- Add lanes to salary scale to compensate for professional development resulting in acquisition of skills and knowledge sought by the school system
- Salary recognition to compensate for teacher leadership activities
- Greater opportunity for early career teachers for salary advancement, to attract and retain newer teachers and respond to their interests as identified in pre-negotiation surveys.

Based on data analyzed and discussed in this report we can conclude that PLBSS is, to a great extent, achieving these goals. As one survey respondent put it:

The PLBSS assumes that teachers are professionals and compensates them for improving their professional capabilities. Teachers become more skilled and more knowledgeable, and their professional development fosters a culture of learning that leads to greater student achievement. It does not tie salaries to high stakes test scores, and it does not seek to punish teachers for the effects of factors that are clearly out of their control. It does, however, provide a reasonable means to reward teachers for encouraging student growth.

Career earnings have increased. Areas of internal expertise have surfaced as many have chosen to become leaders and mentors, offering courses and proposing to facilitate PLCs. Three-quarters of the staff would recommend a PLBSS to others. Overall, teachers have embraced the opportunities to increase salary while developing professionally. We note that the NEA’s study of Alternative Compensation Models and Our Members: Voices from the Field (Davin & Ferguson, 2010) corroborate this finding.

A minority of teachers remains who have not participated. One interpretation seems to be that those who do not understand it express dissatisfaction and do not participate. As one teacher stated: “If there are teachers who don't like it, it's because they don't understand it. Once they take the time to understand the PLBSS system, I'm confident that they will feel empowered, rather than burdened, by it.”
Many respondents called for clarification or simplification of the process and/or training in how to complete the process. One even wished for “more transparency about how proposal should be written, and what "code words" should be used”. As another stated:

In theory, PLBSS seems supportive and equitable. In practice, it has not been. Too many teachers have been left out of the process because they were unable to figure out how to access the system, or were unable to get help with it. I know two teachers who have never documented any work because the technology-based submission process is too daunting and they were unable to get assistance from colleagues.

A very few still express preference for the traditional salary system that rewards longevity; however, researchers, policy makers, and professional associations are aware that in the current era of accountability, such traditional compensation systems are under fire (see for example, the May 2010 issue of the *Phi Delta Kappan*). Only one respondent expressed a desire for a performance-based system: “More emphasis needed on classroom teaching performance, not the accumulation of course credits and outside activities.” However, the respondent does not suggest how the teaching performance is to be measured.

Research cautions alternative systems to involve partnerships between union and district, to clarify purpose, to identify credible measures for awarding dollars, and be adequately funded (Koppich, 2010). Portland’s PLBSS appears to meet most of these criteria, although funding has been a challenge. The recent contract changes stretching out the time period between lane changes may address some of this funding problem. But the strong participation in and positive perceptions toward the PLBSS suggest that other districts should take a good look at what Portland is doing.

A key criterion of effective high quality professional development is alignment with district priorities. PPS has identified five such priority areas of need: English as a Second Language (ESL), poverty, adolescent literacy, early childhood education, or technology. In interviews and through survey responses, we heard numerous examples of teachers taking college or district coursework or doing independent projects in ESL and technology; several referred to opportunities supporting their understanding of poverty and adolescents. The recent teachers contract has made these priorities integral to accumulating SCH for lane changes:

Because of the unique needs of the PPS student population, the district administration has an interest in directing some of the professional learning of educators. Therefore, any educator requesting to make a Lane Change on September 1, 2013 or thereafter must provide documentation of the successful completion of one 3 credit university/college course OR one PPS and PEA course designed by the District Professional Learning Committee OR other PPS approved trainings in ONE of the following areas of need: English as a Second Language, poverty, adolescent literacy, early childhood education, or technology. The course must have been taken within FIVE years of the lane change date. This
course will not be eligible for SCH unless it was proposed and submitted to the PLBSS according to the guidelines.

Additionally, several teachers suggest that the PLBSS be integrated into the teacher evaluation system; principals could use the teacher’s goals to guide PLBSS choices and then use completion as a measure of goal attainment.

In conclusion, the findings of this study provide hope that money spent on professional development can in fact be valuable, rather than being what US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has labeled “probably the least effective money we spend” (Transcribed from www.ustream.tv/recorded/14157960, mark 36:04 through 37:17). High quality professional development, such as that available through PLBSS, is:

- embedded in and relevant to teachers’ work,
- tied to district priorities,
- offered in flexible formats,
- creates opportunities for collaborative action, and
- supported by district leadership.

Such learning builds professional capacity and can be effective in improving instruction as well as student learning. Moreover, using professional learning as the measure for compensating teachers offers an alternative to measures such as longevity or student achievement. The PLBSS alternative respects teachers and their professionalism by offering them multiple and meaningful ways to increase their knowledge in order to better serve their students. Through PLBSS teachers can be active agents of their own continuous professional learning.

Suggestions Going Forward:

1. Clarify program operations - those who understand it, use it and like it.
2. Streamline program logistics: automate processes so staff don't have to complete forms unnecessarily; have automatic approvals for PD that is designed to meet district goals; make the website more useful.
3. Continue to identify key district priorities and more intentionally align PD with these priorities.
4. Clearly define which learning opportunities are considered to be part of a teacher’s day (and thus not eligible for SCH) and which are outside (and thus eligible for SCH).
5. Use more systemic efforts to integrate PLBSS with teacher evaluation.
6. Consider building a more differentiated approach based on stages in the teacher career ladder: more prescriptive for younger teachers, more freedom once the foundation has been built, according to district and union preferences.
7. Identify key learning goals for non-core teachers and other unit staff (counselors, nurses, etc.) and work to build appropriate offerings to help them develop in ways that support district goals.

Impacts of the PLBSS
In Portland Public Schools

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8. Use this report and other research to promote awareness of the PLBSS in other districts. The PLBSS appears to have replication potential beyond Portland, Maine.

9. Conduct more research. Consider a study that follows specific teachers through their professional learning and into the classroom to track use of learned strategies and effects on student work.