



The Individualized Teacher Improvement Plan

A Primer on University Prep's Comprehensive Professional
Development System

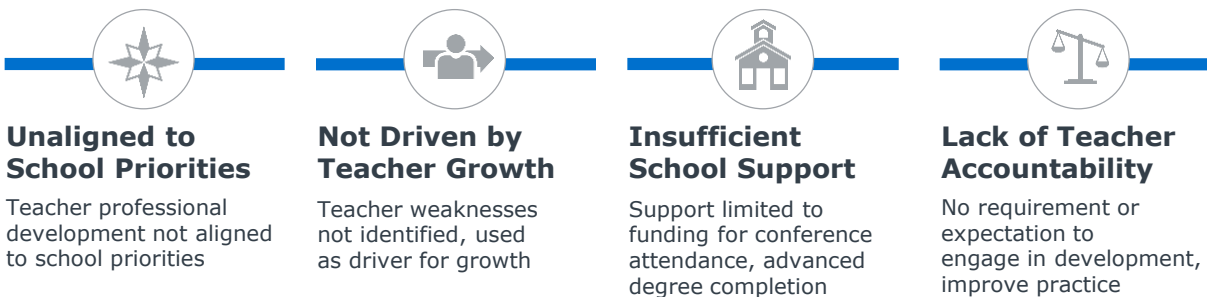
The Importance of a Structured Development System

A Supportive, Structured Professional Development System Drives Continuous Growth

For professional development to foster a culture of continuous, collective growth, it must be more than just a patchwork of activities and offerings. Indeed, to create such a culture of growth, schools need a system of professional development that is well-structured, coherent, aligned with school priorities, and that holds teachers and the school accountable.

But few schools organize professional development in this way. Instead, independent schools engage teachers in haphazard professional development with no connection to the school's teaching philosophy, no clear path for improvement, and limited support from the school.

Shortcomings of Typical Professional Development Approach



Schools often provide little guidance to faculty in identifying areas for improvement and choosing appropriate corresponding professional development. Schools also often fall short in creating structures to hold teachers, as well as the school itself, accountable for continual improvement.

As a result of this lack of guidance and accountability, teachers often design and drive their own professional learning. Teachers focus their professional development predominantly on their strengths or interests, leaving opportunities for development unaddressed. In order to fully develop their teachers, schools should instead work with faculty to identify specific areas for development and more directly support their improvement.

“The inclination of most professionals is, if given the choice of what you want to spend your professional development time on, you dive into an area that you’re really interested in. It’s often an area that you’re good at, but...**what really improves teaching across the whole school is improving areas where they’re weaker, not areas where they’re strong**—this is what actually makes a difference.”

Assistant Head of School, Independent K-12 School



University Prep’s Cohesive System for Professional Development

University Prep, a coed day school for grades 6-12 in Seattle, WA, overcame this challenge by developing a comprehensive, cohesive professional development and evaluation system for faculty. The Individualized Teacher Improvement Plan (ITIP) is grounded in the school’s principles of teaching excellence. This primer describes ITIP and explains how it aligns to best practices in professional development.

Individualized Teacher Improvement Plan Overview

Overview of University Prep’s Three-Phase Professional Development System

Principle-Aligned Professional Development for All Faculty

To continuously support all faculty to improve their practice in alignment with school priorities, University Prep developed the Individualized Teacher Improvement Plan (ITIP). University Prep, a co-educational 6th-12th grade day school in Seattle, Washington, requires all faculty to participate in this growth and evaluation system.

The goal of the three-phase system is for each teacher to identify a weakness within a particular domain of the school’s teaching excellence document and focus on improving in that area. At University Prep, this document is called the Characteristics of Good Teaching (CGT) and was developed in 2009. Originally consisting of four domains of teaching, the CGT was revised substantially to include four more domains, as outlined in the figure below. The CGT describes the essential qualities of effective teaching practice at University Prep and is revisited regularly to ensure that it continues to reflect what it means to be a great teacher at the school.

For more information on adopting principles of teaching excellence at your school, see our Principles of Teaching Excellence Resource Guide, available online at www.eab.com

The Eight Domains of University Prep’s Characteristics of Good Teaching

1 Qualifications for Teaching

Example: An understanding of and commitment to the school’s mission

2 Academic Responsibilities

Example: Work with peers to ensure quality, content, and scope of curriculum

3 Lesson Design

Example: Design and implement lessons that have clear learning objectives

4 Delivery

Example: Every class must evidence appropriate pacing for every student

5 Assessment

Example: All assignments and assessment tools must be graded in a clear manner

6 Classroom Environment

Example: The classroom must provide a space in which students are physically safe

7 Outside the Classroom

Example: Engage in the life of the community by volunteering time and talents

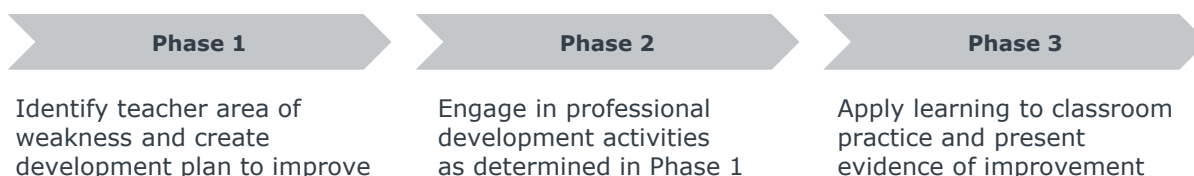
8 Culturally Competent Teaching

Example: Ability and commitment to recognize and interrupt biased behavior

Access the full Characteristics of Good Teaching document: https://www.universityprep.org/uploaded/faculty/cgts_rev_2-7-12.pdf

Once an area for development has been identified, the teacher develops a plan to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to improve in that area. The three phases, each one year in duration, are described on the following pages of this primer.

Three Phases of University Prep’s Individualized Teacher Improvement Plan



ITIP Phase One: Creating a Development Plan

Identify Area of Weakness, Develop Plan for Improvement

Phase One

The first phase of ITIP focuses on identifying an area of weakness and developing an appropriate goal for improvement. Each teacher's professional development focus area is aligned to a Characteristics of Good Teaching (CGT) domain and is developed with guidance from the teacher's ITIP support team. Observations of teaching and feedback related to the identified focus area are major components of this first phase.

Identify an Area for Improving Teaching

In the first quarter of the year, the department head meets with the teacher to identify an area for improvement. The teacher selects his or her focus area in alignment with the CGT document. The teacher then writes professional development goals related to the focus area and drafts the ITIP. The ITIP document may be revised throughout the first year as the teacher receives feedback from observations by the support team.

Observations, Feedback

The teacher assembles a support team that conducts a minimum of three observations for an entire class period during the remainder of Phase One. The department chair or division director will be present at all observations during this first phase, and each support team member must participate in at least two observations. The entire team should be present at one observation. In addition to the Division Director, Department Chair, and a peer teacher, the fourth member of the team can be an educational support staff member, such as a counselor, technology specialist, or dean.

ITIP Support Team Composition



Division Director



Department Head



1-2 peers from other departments

▶ Before Observations

Prior to each observation, the teacher and team discuss the teacher's goals for the class, and how they relate to his or her professional development plan.

▶ After Observations

Following each observation, the observers meet with the teacher to debrief about the class, focusing on the outlined goals and teacher's professional development plan.

Phase Completion, Preparation for Phase Two

- ▶ At the end of the phase, the teacher meets with his or her team to discuss and summarize the teacher's performance across the phase. Following this meeting, the teacher designs a learning plan of professional development activities in which to engage during Phase Two in order to achieve his or her stated goal.
- ▶ The teacher subsequently provides a written summary of that meeting and the Phase Two plan to the department head. The teacher also completes an end-of-year reflection, including progress, setbacks, activities, and insights.
- ▶ The department head reports on the teacher's progress to the head of school and division directors during meetings at the end of the phase. In the final meeting of the phase, these administrators assess the teacher's Phase One progress and decide on satisfactory completion of the phase.

Example ITIP Goal at University Prep

Teachers at University Prep set a wide range of goals but all within the framework of excellent teaching as outlined in the CGT. Within the fine arts department, for example, one teacher's goal was to increase student comfort with and ability to express issues of identity, which is a goal aligned with the Cultural Competency domain of the CGT. With this goal in mind, the teacher focused on improving lesson design and promoting student voice.

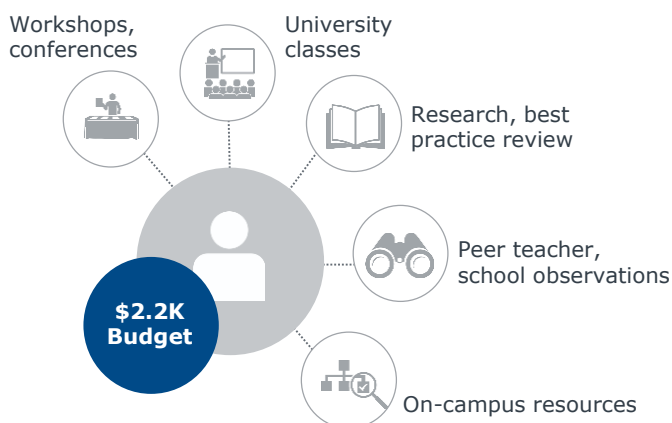
ITIP Phase Two: Implementing the Development Plan

Engage in Professional Learning Related to Development Plan

Phase Two

In the second phase, teachers focus on learning new ideas and strategies to help them accomplish the goals set in Phase One. Teachers engage in a variety of activities across the phase, which they specifically select to support their particular focus area. While learning new strategies, teachers must also apply them to their classrooms and assess the strategies' impact on students.

Phase Two Learning, Implementation Activities



Professional Learning and Funding

Each teacher is given a \$2.2K budget to use throughout the ITIP process. This budget is primarily used during this second phase for professional development activities tied to the teacher's goal.

At University Prep, teachers are encouraged to engage in professional development that is *external* to the school. This is to broaden teachers' exposure to new ideas and ways of thinking about teaching beyond the walls of the school.



Documentation and Progress Tracking

Measuring the Impact of Teacher Development to Determine ITIP Success

Observing Classes

While the teacher engages in professional development, the academic dean conducts class observations and provides written feedback across the phase. The department head and division director conduct routine observations to keep track of the teacher's progress.

Writing Reflections

At the end of Phase Two, the teacher must write an end-of-phase reflection to assess his or her ITIP progress up until that point. The reflection is limited to one page.

Documenting Progress

Throughout Phase Two, the teacher must file all professional development proposals, observation notes, and reflections as part of a portfolio to be created in Phase Three.

The teacher must submit all required documentation, including the phase-end reflection, through University Prep's ITIP website on the "Inside U Prep" portal. This site notifies the teacher's support team when a document is uploaded and maintains a dashboard of the year's work that can be accessed by the teacher and his or her support team.

Example Phase Two Activities

To progress toward the goal of increasing student comfort and the ability to express issues of identity, the fine arts teacher engages in multiple learning activities. These include reading *Raising Race Questions*, attending the Seattle Art Museum's *Intersections and Identity* workshop, attending the Northwest Conference on Teaching for Social Justice, and consulting the on-campus Office of Diversity and Community.

ITIP Phase Three: Assessing Teacher Progress

Implement, Measure, Evaluate

Phase Three

The objective of the ITIP process is to produce observable, measurable changes in practice that demonstrate progress towards teachers' ITIP goals. Phase Three provides an opportunity to implement, document, reflect on, and present these changes in practice. In this final phase, teachers must demonstrate sustained change to their practice by documenting evidence of improvement and the impact on student learning.

Phase Three Process



Implement, Measure, Curate

The teacher is responsible for implementing teaching practices and strategies learned during Phase Two. These observable changes to classroom practice are documented and compiled in a portfolio; the teacher is also responsible for keeping the ITIP support team apprised of their progress.

In addition, the teacher is supported by key administrators throughout the phase:



Department Head

Conducts general class observations and provides feedback, advice when requested



Academic Dean

Provides feedback, advice when requested; reviews portfolio, presentation drafts



Present, Reflect

The teacher must create a portfolio that includes all required documents as well as additional artifacts. These elements should provide evidence that the teacher has made observable change in his or her teaching practice in alignment with the original goal.

Required Portfolio Documents

- ✓ Goal proposal
- ✓ Classroom observation notes
- ✓ Professional development documentation
- ✓ End-of-phase reflections

At the end of this phase, the teacher must deliver a 20-minute presentation describing the substantial changes made to his or her practice. It must explain the learning process that led to the changes and provide specific evidence in support of the progress achieved. All members of the teacher's department must attend, along with the teacher's support team, and the entire faculty and staff are invited.



Leadership Evaluation

At the close of Phase Three, the teacher provides a summative reflection of the success of his or her ITIP. This reflection focuses on the impact of the process on the teacher, students, and school.

Subsequently, the department head, division director, and head of school review and evaluate the teacher's full ITIP performance. This review determines if the teacher successfully completed the ITIP and moves up the pay scale or receives a bonus.¹

Assessment Elements



Documentation of teacher's learning



Year-end presentation



Teacher reflections



Student outcomes

Example Outcomes at University Prep

To demonstrate progress, the fine arts teacher creates a blog to document his learning and student outcomes throughout ITIP process. The blog includes the teacher's reflections at the end of each year and sample student projects that illustrate issues of race relations and diverse American identities.

¹) At University Prep, when a teacher has reached the highest point on the pay scale, s/he may receive a bonus instead of a raise when ITIP is completed successfully.

Frequently Asked Questions About ITIP

Answers to Your Questions about Implementing a Similar System

Question

Answer

How long should we give faculty to complete a similar three-phase plan?

University Prep provides teachers with three years to complete the ITIP (one year per phase). However, the phase length can be adjusted to fit your school's context. At a minimum, we recommend allowing teachers one semester per phase.

Who is in charge of overseeing this program?

The Assistant Head of School for Academics and Strategic Initiatives, previously the Academic Dean, is in charge of ITIP. Because the ITIP process is mostly self-directed by teachers, it does not require a burdensome time commitment from administrators or the program director. The program director described the process of ITIP as similar to a student's independent study, with some guidance along the way but primarily self-directed.

What occurs if a teacher does not "pass" his/her ITIP?

If a teacher does not pass the ITIP process, he or she can repeat the process again with further support. In this case, the teacher is prompted to refocus the ITIP goal on the specific problem that needs to be addressed. If further action must be taken, the teacher is removed from the ITIP completely and put on a conventional improvement plan. Because there are numerous checkpoints and milestones throughout the three-year process, it is uncommon for teachers to reach the final phase and not pass the ITIP.

Can teachers collaborate on an area of improvement?

If two teachers are in the same ITIP year and are interested in working together on an identified area of improvement, they can submit a proposal to engage in a three-year collaborative ITIP (called a CoTIP). Each individual teacher is still responsible for completing and submitting all required documentation and reflections.

Is the ITIP stipend automatically given to each teacher? Is there funding available for teacher PD not related to ITIP?

Teachers can spend up to the \$2,200 that is allotted to them for each three-year ITIP cycle. To spend these funds, teachers must complete a PD request form. The school also makes funds available to teachers to participate in PD that is unrelated to ITIP.

Key Takeaways

Lessons Learned from the Individualized Teacher Improvement Plan



Tie Professional Development System to Principles of Teaching Excellence

- Principles of teaching excellence provide teachers with clear direction and ensures professional development is linked to the school's mission, strategic priorities, and teaching philosophy.
- At University Prep, teachers identify an area for improvement aligned with the school's Characteristics of Good Teaching document. This ensures that the school community is collectively working toward excellence in defined areas of teaching.



Provide Teachers with Support to Make Tangible Change

- University Prep provides teachers with funding, time, and individual support throughout the ITIP process. This signals to teachers and administrators that teacher growth is critically important for the school.
- Comprehensive support ensures teachers have the tools and resources needed to achieve their goals and make meaningful improvement in student outcomes.



Hold Teachers Accountable by Linking Improvement to Compensation

- Administrators at University Prep use teachers' ITIP progress to determine if they will receive a raise/bonus.
- Accountability measures ensure faculty consistently engage in professional development as an obligation of employment.



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