



Southwest Open School

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Professional Development Policy

Adopted: 10/14/24

Revised:

Purpose

It is the policy of Southwest Open School to both ask for and require the pursuit of ongoing professional development of staff. The programming at SWOS is relatively unique and has developed over the years to focus on project based learning, outdoor education, a holistic approach to student development, and a heightened level of awareness for/of diversity, equity, and inclusivity. The purpose of this policy is to support professional development endeavors at Southwest Open School.

Eligibility

Southwest Open School will support both career-related and job-related professional development activities. It is expected that employees and supervisors mutually agree to discuss professional development issues and opportunities. The Executive Director may support an employee's request to participate in a professional development activity by approving flexible or alternate work schedules, leave without pay, leave at full or part pay, full or part payment of fees and expenses, and temporary or part-time reassignment in another department provided that:

- The employee is in a regular good standing.
- The employee is Full-Time Status.
- The necessary funding has been secured.

Types of Professional Development

- *Required Professional Development:* When an employee is required to attend a development program, the time spent in attendance shall be counted as time worked (contract day(s)), and the full fees and related costs (i.e. materials, travel and per diem, etc.) shall be paid by the department.
- *Continuing education courses* for the maintenance of state licenses that are a requirement of the employee's position are not automatically considered professional development and do not necessarily qualify for fee reimbursement.
- *Elective Professional Development:* When an employee requests time off to attend an elected training or professional development program, the time spent in attendance may/may not be counted as time off or non-compensable, and can/ can not be subject to reimbursement (i.e. materials, travel and per diem, etc.). Decision(s) regarding organization cost coverage of elective professional development will be determined by the Executive Director.

Procedures

An employee who wishes to request professional development leave shall develop a written plan for approval by the Executive Director. Upon approval of the plan, the employee may proceed with scheduling and making the necessary travel and registration purchases. The Executive Director shall approve the leave subject to scheduling, staffing and budget considerations.

Professional Development Leave Plan: For professional development leave requests, the employee and Executive Director develops a mutually agreed-upon, written plan that addresses the following:

- A description of the activity or activities to be undertaken by the employee during the leave period.
- The requested period of time for the activity.
- The relation of the activity to the employee's current job responsibilities.
- How the activity may assist the employee's improvement of career-related responsibilities.
- The quality of the particular training activity as compared to similar activities, and/or an assessment of the reliability of the institution, organization, or other sponsor providing the training.
- The relation of the activity to the school's mission and goals.
- The impact, if any, on employee workload and the workload of colleagues within the school.

The copy of the approved professional development leave plan is placed in the employee's file.

Purchasing and Reimbursement

Professional development is an allowable expense that can be paid from school funds as long as it meets the provisions of this policy. Seminars, workshops, and conferences are the most common activities that incur costs. (Under certain circumstances, college level or similar course fees may qualify for reimbursement.)

To qualify for purchasing or reimbursement by/from school funds, professional development courses must meet the following criteria:

- Have been approved by the Executive Director.
- Have a primary purpose that clearly benefits and supports the fulfillment of Southwest Open School's mission and objectives.
- Include supporting documentation that describes how and why the training will benefit the employee and the school.
- Be comprised of coursework that is consistent with the duties of the employee's position description.

College level courses may qualify for purchase or reimbursement if they meet additional criteria as follows:

- Be approved by the Executive Director.
- Be independent of a degree or certificate program the employee is pursuing for personal development. (Qualification is determined course by course and not on a full field of study.)