



professional organizations

Professional organizations provide avenues for professional development through collaboration and networking that ultimately affect the teaching and learning process. Participation in professional organization events provides opportunities for classroom teachers to hear and meet experts in their field (e.g., speakers, other members, sponsors, vendors). These interactions facilitate the sharing of current research that impacts educational trends and issues and provides the "how to" for implementing researched-based practices that affect student learning and school improvement.

Professional organizations exist at the local, state, national, and international levels and have awards and recognition opportunities for their teacher members. Awards are

usually in the form of a citation with public recognition and sometimes include a stipend or scholarship, free membership, or conference registration. Award recognition is valued by many individual teachers and the community such that public relations announcements are made by local school administration and by state agencies who are also involved.

Along with recognition, professional development to improve student learning is a primary focus of professional organizations and is offered through many avenues such as conferences, journals, books and electronic media (e.g., websites,

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webinars, listservs). Membership in the sponsoring professional organization usually provides discounts towards conference registration, books, journals, and training. Some of the professional development opportunities, particularly the electronic media, can be realized for free or at low cost.

Why Join?

An important aspect of professional organizations related to student learning stems from the opportunity to network with other professionals in the same or similar areas. Most individuals learn best in the presence of others who possess the desired skills or are developing these skills and experiencing similar challenges. Through conscious and deliberate participation in conference sessions and networking opportunities, teachers learn from one another by way of formal and informal discourse and conversation. Some teachers identify others with desired skills and establish mentoring relationships. Learning derived from session attendance and networking (e.g., teaching methods, learning strategies, ideas for classroom activities) is often transferred to the classroom where it influences teaching methodology and student learning. Because of this transfer of knowledge from conference to classroom, students gain insight and opportunities that allow for higher-order thinking skills necessary for school-to-work transitions (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, n.d.). Although membership in professional organizations merely serves as a means to enhance the résumé for some teachers, others realize the opportunities offered through active membership and participation. These more engaged professionals attend conferences to glean information to be used in their classrooms. They also realize the expansion of opportunities related to advanced education and are privy to job opportunity postings. Some become involved in the operations of the professional organization where they develop leadership skills and participate in networking efforts that facilitate marked professional growth that can only be gained from the broader perspectives that are found beyond state and national borders. Individuals who become involved in professional organizations often return to their school where they accept greater responsibility and act as team members, change agents, and leaders. They become central players in redesigning the school experience for all students.

Many excellent professional organizations exist for teachers. Some of the organizations are broad in their representation and advocate for government support of education. Other organizations are very specific to service areas and are specialized in their professional development offerings.

How to Choose the Right Organization for You

So, which organizations should a teacher join? A teacher could spend excess amounts of earned income to join too many profes-

Level of Involvement in Professional Organization

MEMBER	ACTIVE MEMBER	CONTRIBUTING MEMBER
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Has obtained membership in a chosen professional organization ✓ Periodically reads journal articles from organization publications ✓ Looks at organization's website from time to time ✓ Has joined an online professional community (via Twitter, Facebook, blogs, etc.), but does not actively participate ✓ Minimal to no positive impact on student learning from applying information and opportunities gained through membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Displays all defining characteristics of normal member ✓ Attends state conferences of professional organization ✓ Actively posts messages or comments in office professional community ✓ Networks with professionals from other communities, states, nations ✓ Seeks professional development opportunities with the purpose of applying new information in the classroom ✓ Fair amount of positive impact on student learning from applying information and opportunities gained through membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ Displays all defining characteristics of normal member and active member ✓ Presents and disseminates new information at state conferences of professional organization ✓ Runs or administers the organization's online professional community ✓ Serves as one of the organization's officers or on one of the committees ✓ Plans conferences or professional development opportunities ✓ High amount of positive impact on student learning from applying information and opportunities gained through membership

sional organizations. Many support teaching and learning, so how does a person become a wise consumer? When answering these questions, one should first consider his/her service area. For instance, someone who teaches Technology, Engineering, and Design Education (TEDE) will want to realize the benefits of professional organizations particular to their elementary/secondary/post-secondary position and curriculum. They should identify local, state, national, and international organizations that can best assist with professional development for a current position as well as for a future position. A TEDE teacher could perform web searches to find information and make decisions and/or could also ask other TEDE teachers, district supervisors, and/or their Career and Technical Director. The TEDE teacher could consult with the Supervisor or Consultant from the State Department of Education and/or TEDE professors from their nearest TEDE program to inquire about the professional organizations that are key for the state. Both the State Supervisor and the TEDE professors should be aware of the most relevant organizations and would be helpful in providing accurate and adequate information in a timely manner. Because its central purpose is to support technology and engineering education, ITEEA (International Technology and Engineering Educators Association) is used in the examples in this Learning Object. TEDE teachers are encouraged to consider joining ITEEA and its state affiliate associations to support their efforts.

The following is a list of the benefits of belonging to professional organizations. Professional organizations can:

- Assist with collaboration efforts both within the field and with other fields.
- Enhance the teacher's résumé.
- Help improve instruction by increasing collaboration.



- Help teachers develop new ideas that can be incorporated into lesson plans, activities, and curriculum.
- Help teachers stay up to date on current trends.
- Identify opportunities and challenges from other regions of the state, nation, or world.
- Offer discounts on books, journals, and materials to members.
- Offer free or inexpensive training.
- Provide access to experts in the field (e.g., speakers, other members, sponsors, vendors).
- Provide direct and indirect mentoring.
- Provide expansion of opportunities through job postings.
- Provide extracurricular opportunities for teachers and students.
- Provide opportunity for discourse and conversation.
- Provide opportunity to develop leadership skills through service.
- Provide public relations.
- Serve in advocacy roles (lobby government agencies).

Obtaining membership in a professional organization is as easy as completing a membership application and paying the membership fees. Capitalizing on the membership opportunities will determine the value of the organization to the individual as well as the effects of the offered professional development. Ultimately, there will be positive influences on student learning that can be documented. If a person participates in the events and opportunities that are offered by the professional organization, he/she is more apt to receive valuable professional development and be enabled to work collaboratively with colleagues to improve teaching and learning. If a person refrains from participation in the professional organization, then he/she cannot possibly glean the influence and recognize growth.

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STEM Teacher Learning (STEMteacherlearning.com) provides state-of-the-art STEM professional development and continuing education (CEUs) for Technology and Engineering Education teachers. Visit this site to review the eighteen units researched and developed under a National Science Foundation-funded project to improve classroom instruction. STEM Teacher Learning provides these NSF-researched units to local school districts and teachers using cloud-based, self-paced learning and certifies completion. Contact training@stemteacherlearning.com for more information.

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