



GENERAL DISTRICT SPENDING CATEGORIES

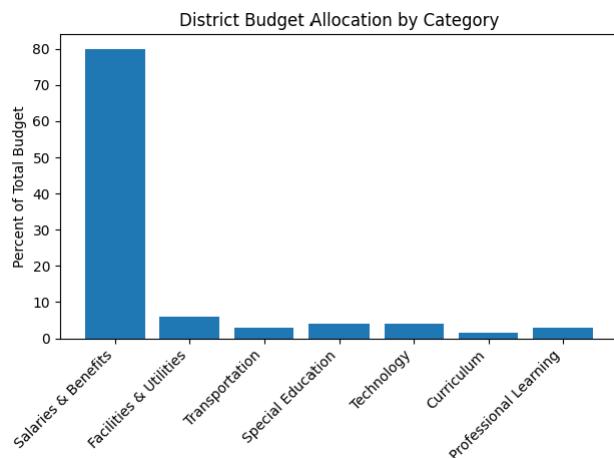
Section 1: The Big Picture — What District Budgets Allow (and Constrain)

Most school district budgets are largely predetermined before instructional decisions are made. In a typical U.S. district, approximately **80% to 85% of total expenditures are committed to salaries and benefits**, with additional fixed costs for facilities, transportation, special education, and technology. After these essential obligations are met, only a small portion of the budget remains discretionary.

In a **\$100 million annual district budget**, the remaining funds available for instructional improvement—specifically **curriculum and teacher professional learning combined**—total roughly **4.5% of overall spending**.

Key Insight:

Curriculum and teacher learning together account for less than five cents of every district dollar. As a result, meaningful improvement depends less on increasing spending and more on strategically using this limited discretionary slice.



Section 2: Curriculum vs. Professional Learning — Proportions Matter

Within that discretionary portion, districts typically allocate funding as follows:

Category	Percent of Total Budget	Annual Dollars (on \$100M)
Curriculum & Instructional Materials (All Subjects)	1.5%	\$1.5 million
Teacher Professional Learning (All Subjects)	3.0%	\$3.0 million

At first glance, professional learning appears to receive significantly more funding than curriculum. However, this comparison can be misleading. **Professional learning is not a single, coherent investment**; it is distributed across personnel, time, logistics, and contracted services, many of which do not directly support deep instructional improvement.

Key Insight:

Although professional learning receives roughly twice the funding of curriculum, **most of those dollars are absorbed by staffing and operations rather than sustained, content-focused teacher learning**.

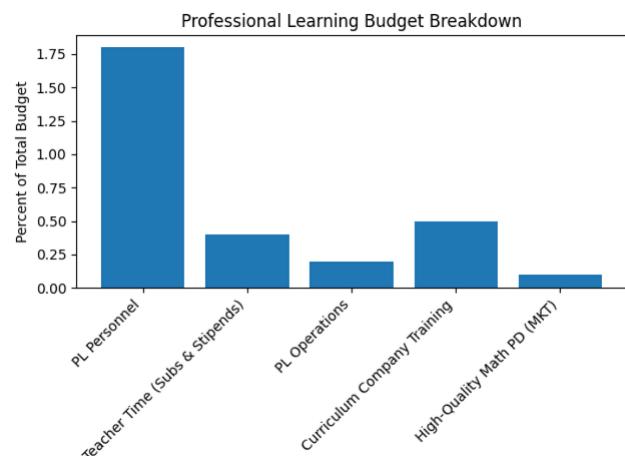
Section 3: What “Professional Learning” Actually Includes

Professional learning budgets are often assumed to support teacher growth in subject-matter knowledge. In practice, those funds are spread across several categories:

- Instructional coaches and district specialists
- Substitute coverage and teacher stipends
- Operational costs (facilities, scheduling, platforms)
- Contracted external training and services

A closer look at how the **3% professional learning allocation** is typically spent reveals a critical imbalance.

Within a \$100 million district budget:



Within a \$100 million district budget:

Professional Learning Category	Percent of Total Budget	Approx. Dollars
Professional Learning Personnel	1.8%	\$1.8 million
Teacher Time (Subs & Stipends)	0.4%	\$400,000
Operations & Infrastructure	0.2%	\$200,000
Curriculum Company Training	0.5%	\$500,000
High-Quality Math PD (MKT-Focused)	0.1%	\$100,000

Key Insight (Central to This Analysis):

Districts spend roughly **five times more on training teachers to use curriculum products** than on developing mathematical knowledge for teaching (MKT).

Curriculum-company training typically focuses on navigation, pacing, and implementation fidelity. In contrast, high-quality mathematics professional learning—grounded in content, student thinking, and instructional decision-making—receives only a small fraction of total professional learning funds.

Section 4: A Math-Specific Illustration

When professional learning dollars are disaggregated by subject, the imbalance becomes even more apparent.

In a typical district:

- **Math curriculum** (annualized across adoption cycles): approximately **\$250,000**
- **Math-specific professional learning** (coaches, training, PD time): approximately **\$800,000**

While this suggests a stronger investment in math professional learning, most of those dollars support general coaching structures or curriculum rollout activities rather than **deep mathematical knowledge for teaching (MKT)**.

As a result, for a subject foundational to STEM access, postsecondary success, and economic opportunity, districts typically invest **just around 1% of their total budget** in math curriculum and math-specific professional learning combined—and only a fraction of that directly supports content-rich teacher learning.

Summary Takeaways

- Districts operate under tight fiscal constraints; **only a small portion of the budget is discretionary**.
- Curriculum and professional learning together represent **less than 5%** of total spending.
- Within professional learning, **training is often mistaken for learning**.
- **High-quality, content-focused mathematics professional development represents approximately 0.1% of total district spending.**
- Meaningful improvement in mathematics does not require new funding, but **strategic reallocation within existing professional learning budgets**.



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