

Box 1.3 Caveat Emptor: Talking to Vendors

These research-based criteria make good questions to ask vendors when considering whether to purchase online professional development. After determining your need, use the following questions to interview or research online professional development providers.

Linked to student learning outcomes

- What student learning outcomes are addressed?
- Are they aligned to your local or state standards?

Job-embedded

- How does the professional development support the daily needs of the participants?
- What content or skills are addressed that are immediately applicable?

Ongoing and sustained with follow-up

- What is the duration of the professional development? Is it flexible?
- What kind of follow-up is provided?

Incorporates authentic, active learning experiences

- What kind of activities do the participants complete? Ask for examples or guest access.

Includes subject-matter content

- What subject-matter content is included? How is it used to leverage new skills and knowledge?
- Does the subject-matter content match the needs of all of your participants?
- Does the subject-matter content align with required content standards, or preferred pedagogies or philosophies?

Encourages reflection on pedagogy, content, and beliefs

- What kind of reflective activities are included? Who participates in them?
- Is a process for deep reflection nurtured in the professional development?

Incorporates collaboration with colleagues and/or experts

- How is collaboration supported? What technologies are used?
- Are your participants ready, both in terms of technical skills and process, to collaborate in the ways supported by the course?

Provides support for teachers

- What kind and degree of content, program, and technical support is provided? Does it match the needs of your participants?

Measures impact on student achievement

- What data indicates impact on student achievement as a result of participation in the program? How do those students compare to yours?