

## The Implementation of the *National Professional Standard for K-12 Teachers, 2012 (NPST)* at Regional and Local Level in China: A Case Study of Regional Teacher Professional Development Standards Implementation in Qingyang District, Chengdu, China

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### Abstract

The Ministry of Education of P. R. China published *National Professional Standards for K-12 Teachers (NPST)* in 2012. Guiding by the standards and the recommendations for its implementation, provincial and municipal governments across China have carried out education reforms, focusing on institution and mechanism innovation, in order to realize the regulation and guidance role of the national standards. This paper starts with recent educational reforms for implementing *Qingyang District Teacher Professional Development Standards, 2012 (QDTPDS-2012)* issued by Qingyang District, Chengdu, Sichuan Province, a model of successful education reform in southwest China, and continue to make a comparison of teachers' awareness, influences on teachers and schools, and implementation process of *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012* in Qingyang District by means of delivering questionnaires in teachers and interviewing with local school authorities, teacher educators, and education researchers; especially focuses on implementation process and approaches of *QDTPDS-2012*. The survey shows that the core value and principles of *NPST* are embodied in *QDTPDS-2012*; and *QDTPDS-2012*, as regional teacher professional development standards, is much more practical and feasible than *NPST*. In light of these findings, some implementation principles of national teacher professional standards in China, such as unifying objectives, implementing regionally, clarifying standards, innovating curriculums, emphasizing practice, making operational planning, establishing supporting system and adopting multi-evaluation approaches, are proposed in this paper.

**Key words:** China National Professional Standard for K-12 Teachers, 2012 (NPST); Implementation; Qingyang District; Chengdu; 2012 Qingyang District Teacher Professional Development Standards (QDTPDS-2012)

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### INTRODUCTION

Standards and quality form the cornerstone of many national education policy developments around the world today. (Tuinamuana, 2011) So does the Chinese government to promote professional development of teachers, great effort has been put into establishing national and regional standards which capture the ethics, knowledge, and skills of qualifying teachers to represent the profession since the beginning of this century. In September 2012, after 7 years of investigation, research and amendment, a draft of professional standards for teachers in kindergartens, primary schools and middle schools across China, *National Professional Standards for K-12 Teacher, 2012 (NPST)* (The Ministry of Education of P. R. China, 2012, February 10), was released officially. In the same year, an influential regional teacher professional development standards, *Qingyang District Teacher Professional Development Standards, 2012 (QDTPDS-2012)* (Youth Education Department, Qingyang, para. 3, 2012), was issued in Qingyang District, Chengdu City, Sichuan Province, southeast China. It is assumed that *QDTPDS-2012* not only embodies the core value and principles of *NPST*, but also expanded the contents of *NPST* to promote constant professional development of

local teachers; and its implementation provides references for dissemination and application of *NPST* at provincial and municipal level in China.

*NPST* was mainly developed by 9 normal universities affiliated to Ministry of Education and National Institute of Education Sciences in consultation with the profession, systems and sectors to promote excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership. (Liu, 2011, December 12). It is the first national professional standards for teachers in China, and set a common framework with core attributes (knowledge, skills and practices, ethics, professional values and attributes, community and relationships and professional learning) that teachers must demonstrate in order to perform effectively their professional duties. And it was also regarded as basic requirements for teacher education graduates in elementary and secondary education. When fully implemented at the province, city, district, and school levels, *NPST* can serve several essential functions, such as, providing a framework for planning, designing, implementing, and evaluating teachers' professional

development, including both teacher education programs and an entire professional development agenda for individual teachers; stipulating responsibility and accountability for ensuring that all professional development is of the highest quality and aligned with school improvement planning and implementation, and so on. *NPST* consists of three parts: the Rationale, Main Contents, and Implementation Suggestions. In Rationale, teachers are suggested to have the following four ideas: "Students should be put in the first place; teachers should have professional ethics; teachers' practical competence is the basis of their jobs; and teachers need to be life-long learners". The Main Contents is divided into 3 dimensions, consists of 13-14 domains, and 60-64 standard indicators. All the listed standards in *NPST* are grouped into three dimensions of teaching: Professional Ethics and values, Professional Knowledge, and Professional Practice, which were provided further illustration in standard focus areas, and then separated into Standard Descriptors. Take the standards for primary school teachers as an example, the contents of the standard are shown in the table (Table 1) below:

**Table 1**  
**National Professional Standards for Primary School Teachers, 2012<sup>1</sup>**

Dimensions	Domains	Descriptors
Professional ethics and morality	Professional understanding	1) Teachers' professional activities reflect the Party's and the state's education policies and guidelines; Teachers are required to observe the education laws and regulations; 2) Teachers understand and appreciate primary education, and are full of career aspiration and professional dedication; 3) Teachers recognize the specialty and professionalization of primary school teachers, and are committed to improving practice through autonomous professional development ; 4) Teachers observe professional ethics and serve as role models who act ethically and honestly; 5) Teachers cooperate well with team members, conduct active exchanges and collaboration with colleagues.
	Attitudes and behaviors toward students	6) Teachers protect and care for students in primary school, ensure their physical and psychological health, give priority to the security of their life; 7) Teachers respect students as individuals, safeguard their lawful rights and interests, treat equally to every student, and do not mock, satirize or discriminate against students; do not subject students to corporal punishment or disguised forms of corporal punishment; 8) Teachers appreciate individual variation within each area of development, shows respect for the diverse talents of all learners, and is committed to help them develop self-confidence and competence; 9) Teachers take the responsibility for establishing a harmonious environment in school and bring happiness to every student.
	Attitudes and behaviors of teaching	10) Teachers promote people-oriented and morality-first education, combine knowledge learning and capability development with moral cultivation, and value students' all-round development; 11) Teachers understand laws of education and knowledge of student growth and development; provide learning opportunities for every student; 12) Teachers value the development of students' critical thinking, independent problem solving abilities, and performance capabilities; 13) Teachers guide students to learn how to learn, help them to develop good learning habits; 14) Teachers give full play to the leading role of Yong Pioneers.
	Self-cultivation and behaviors	15) Teachers are full of love, responsible, patient and careful; 16) Teachers are optimistic, warm, cheerful, and approachable; 17) Teachers are self-adjustable under working pressure, peaceful in mind; 18) Teachers are keen to learn and self-motivated in learning; 19) Teachers dress neatly and appropriately, use standard, correct and civilized language, and behave civilly and friendly.

To be continued

<sup>1</sup> The contents in the table was translated from Chinese version of "National Professional Standards for Primary school Teachers, 2012"

Continued

Dimensions	Domains	Descriptors
Professional knowledge	Knowledge about students' development	20) Teachers are aware of laws and regulations related with primary school students;
		21) Teachers understand and apply the laws of physical and mental development of students at different ages and students with special needs, and acquire the strategies and methods of protecting and promoting students physical and psychological smooth development;
	Content knowledge	22) Teachers understand learning styles of students at different age, and know how to develop students good habits;
		23) Teachers know psychological characteristics of students in transition period from kindergarten to primary school, help them navigate primary school;
		24) Teachers know how to teach adolescent health and sexual knowledge
		25) Teachers are familiar with the knowledge of students' security, know how to identify potential student abuse or neglect and follow safeguarding procedures.
	Teaching and educational knowledge	26) Teachers acquire multi-subject knowledge, meet the needs of comprehensive curriculum in primary school;
		27) Teachers know and understand systematic knowledge and main theory of the subject they teach and related pedagogy;
		28) Teachers recognize the interconnectedness of their subject, social practice, and Young Pioneer's activities; and know how their subjects are related with other subjects.
	General knowledge	29) Teachers know theories on education and teaching students;
30) Teachers know how to cultivate good behavior of students;		
Professional competence	Teaching design and lesson plan	31) Teachers know cognitive development of students at different age, and basic principles of educational psychology;
		32) Teachers have a secure knowledge and understanding of curriculum standards and teaching methods of their subject.
	Organizational skills and performing ability	33) Teachers have certain knowledge of humanities and natural sciences;
		34) Teachers understand the basic situation of Chinese education;
	Facilitate and evaluate learning ability	35) Teachers have certain knowledge of art appreciation and expression;
		36) Teachers have information technology competence to support their teaching and wider professional activities;
		37) Teachers can plan instruction appropriate for their students, and make individual and collective instruction plan;
		38) Teachers make good use of teaching resources, and create scientifically-sound lesson plans
		39) Teachers can design brilliant class and Young Pioneer activities with distinct theme.
		40) Teachers establish good teacher-and-student relationship, help students build a strong relationship with their peers;
Communication and cooperation	41) Teachers design and create a teaching environment which is adjusted in time according to the student's response;	
	42) Teachers stimulate students motivation and learning interest, considering students existing knowledge and experience;	
Self-reflection and development	43) Teachers are flexible in using heuristics, researching, discussing and participatory methods to give full play to students' subjectivity;	
	44) Teachers make full use the educational function of the Young Pioneers in conducting group activities regularly and spreading information widely;	
Communication and cooperation	Facilitate and evaluate learning ability	45) Teachers apply modern educational technology into teaching;
		46) Teachers have appropriate body language, verbal expressions, and written language; teach in standard Chinese; and write well with pen, chalk, and Chinese brush;
	Communication and cooperation	47) Teachers can ensure an appropriate response to any emergency;
		48) Teachers can identify students' behaviors and thoughts, in order to prevent and correct unhealthy behaviors.
		49) Teachers make observation and judgment on students' daily performance, recognize and praise students slight progress;
	Self-reflection and development	50) Teachers flexibly use multiple evaluation methods to assess students and give them appropriate guide ;
		51) Teachers guide students to make a active self-evaluation about themselves;
Communication and cooperation	Communication and cooperation	52) Teachers constantly improve their teaching based on the evaluation result.
		53) Teachers use language consistent with characteristics of children in teaching;
	Self-reflection and development	54) Teachers are good listeners and communicate with students effectively;
		55) Teachers cooperate with colleagues well, share experiences and resources, and realize common development;
		56) Teachers keep effective communication and cooperation with parents to promote students' development;
Self-reflection and development	Communication and cooperation	57) Teachers assist in building cooperation between schools and communities.
		58) Teachers actively collect and analyze related information, make reflections on their teaching, and make improvements continuously;
	59) Teachers make research and study on questions and demands in their teaching;	
60) Teachers make personal professional development plan, attend professional training, and improve their professional quality constantly.		

Currently, governments at all levels in China are in full gear to carry out education reforms targeted at integrating the standards into work and life of every teacher, and achieving the orientation and guidance role of the national

standards. However, provinces and cities, due to imbalance and differences in regional development in China, are at varying levels of progress regarding the adoption and implementation of *NPST*. Some municipal governments

had developed their teacher professional development standards before *NPST* formally issued based on national policies; some areas followed *NPST* and created their regional teacher qualification standards; and some are in the process of renewing their old standards for teachers based on *NPST*. (Li & Qu et al., 2012) Qingyang District, as a reform trailblazer in Chengdu city, southwest China, is one of the pioneers in education reform. (Hong & Liu, 2011, April 15) It developed and enacted the first regional professional standards, *QDTPDS-2012*, for local teachers in China, and attracted increasing attention. Although *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012* issued almost at the same time, the standards and indicators in *QDTPDS-2012* were directly aligned with *NPST*. From this perspective, *QDTPDS-2012* is the embodiment of regional recognition of *NPST*, representing local governments' understanding of national policies and the reality they confront currently. Comparing with *NPST*, *QDTPDS-2012* defined teachers' professional

understanding, professional knowledge, and professional competence into four degrees at teachers' different career stages, and guides the preparation, support and development of teachers. According to *QDTPDS-2012*, all the primary and secondary teachers in Qingyang District were categorized into four types: "Qualified Teachers (Graduate)", "Backbone Teachers (Proficient)", "Elite Teachers (Highly Achieved)" and "Expert Teachers (Lead)". (Policy Research Office of Chengdu Municipal, 2012) Different types need to meet different requirements during their professional development. The stages reflect the continuum of a teacher's developing professional expertise from undergraduate preparation through to be an exemplary classroom practitioner and a leader in the profession. Take one domain of *QDTPDS-2012* (Table 2), Professional Understanding as an example, it shows different professional ethics and codes of teachers should abide by at different career stages.

**Table 2**  
**Professional Understanding of 2012 Qingyang District Teacher Professional Development Standards (*QDTPDS-2012*)<sup>2</sup>**

	Qualified teachers (graduate)	Backbone teachers (proficient)	Elite teachers (highly accomplished)	Expert teachers (lead)
Professional understanding	A abide by the national education laws and regulations, especially the code of Professional Ethic, and are accepted by students	A abide by the national education laws and regulations, especially the code of Professional Ethic, and are accepted by schools	In an exemplary way, abide by the national education laws and regulations, especially the code of Professional Ethic, and are widely accepted by the society	Have noble morality, set examples for other teachers, widely recognized and admired by peers inside and outside the province, and enjoy a high reputation in society
	Be aware of teachers' obligations, have basic social responsibilities as educators	Be familiar with teachers' obligations, Understand the meaning of being a teacher, have correct education thoughts and teaching philosophies	Love teaching and working with children, have professional ideal and dedication, have advanced education thoughts and teaching philosophies	Have lofty educational ideal, be persistent in educational pursuit, have systematic and advanced education thoughts and teaching philosophies
	Follow the school rules; fulfill position requirements; be willing to take assignments	Follow the school rules; effectively fulfill position requirements ; accomplish assignments successfully	In an exemplary way, follow the school rules; fulfill position requirements with all their hearts; make an outstanding achievement in teaching	Give full play to the spirit of service and dedication, make continual improvement and innovation in job, make a remarkable achievement in teaching
	Be willing to be involved into schools reform on teaching and education, constantly improve their teaching practice;	Actively involve into schools reform on teaching and education, teach with modern educational philosophy	Play a leading role in schools reform on teaching and education, actively explore strategies in teaching with modern educational philosophy	Be pioneering and innovative, play a leading role in district's reform on teaching and education, have a significant impact
	Have teamwork spirit, are willing to collaborate with team members, and grow up in team.	Have teamwork spirit, actively collaborate with team members, make teamwork finished efficiently and smoothly	Have teamwork spirit, actively carry out cooperation and exchange, play a leading role in schools' same grade teacher groups, schools' education research groups	As a core leader in a team, be good at organizing group activities and cooperating with others, play an active role in training and nurturing young teachers in the city and province

As one of the most important district government policy documents in 2012, *QDTPDS-2012* was distributed to all the primary and middle schools in Qingyang

District along with *NPST*. Many scholars are invited to give lectures on both governmental documents. Teachers and working staff were required to be familiar with the

<sup>2</sup> The 2012 Qingyang District Teacher Professional Development Standards (*QDTPDS-2012*) has three dimensions: Professional Ethics and Morality, Professional Knowledge, Professional Competence; and each dimension has several domains, Professional Understanding is part of Professional ethics and morality. And the content of this table is also an English translation of the Chinese version.

contents of *NPST* and make a self-evaluation to check whether their behaviors had already complied with the detailed descriptions, and speculated which type they belonged to, which phrases they have been arrived at in their career stage based on *QDTPDS-2012*. Teachers were encouraged to make professional development plan according to *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012*, and the local education department, teacher education institutions, primary and secondary schools would assist teachers in realizing their professional development plan. (Qingyang District Education Reform Committee, 2012, October 15)

What teachers' attitudes and responses to *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012*? What concrete measures were taken by teachers, schools, and local government in response of *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012*? Whether these measures are effective or not? Has *QDTPDS-2012* and related supporting policies promoted the implementation of *NPST*? To answer these questions, a field study was carried out. The study, exploiting questionnaire and interview, focuses on investigating the practical implementation process and related policies of *QDTPDS-2012* in Qingyang District, intends to find out how *NPST* was implemented or embodied into Qingyang teachers' professional development, and finally provides some suggestions for current teacher professional development reform in China.

## 1. RESEARCH DESIGN

The main instruments involved in this study were a survey questionnaire and an interview on creation and implementation of teacher professional standards in China, focusing on investigating and discussing *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012*. The questionnaire included 3 parts: the first part was designed to get information about teachers' awareness and understanding of the shared and unique features of *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012*. The second part included some detailed questions to detect whether teachers' thoughts and actions were actually affected by *NPST* or *QDTPDS-2012* and what changes brought by these government documents, including newly-issued school rules, government policies, and teachers' life and career planning; the third part intended to invite some suggestions on the improvement of *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012*. And the questions were mainly simple or multiple choices, combined with open-ended questions.

The second part of this questionnaire is the key part. Questions in this part are two types; one is multiple choices for checking teachers' knowledge of *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012*; the second part is multiple choices and open-ended questions about the influences and impacts of *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012*. Twenty multiple choice questions based on main parts of these two documents are designed to learn teachers basic knowledge about *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012*, such as "what is the rationale of *NPST*?", "how many descriptors are included in *NPST*?",

"The Elite Teachers in *QDTPDS-2012* should meet the following standards..." and so on.

The second type questions of this part are multiple choices with open-ended questions which intend to find out some "changes" in teachers and schools brought by *NPST* or *QDTPDS-2012*. A prophase investigation on Qingyang District school reforms from 2012 to 2014 was conducted for question design. Researchers selected 5 teacher individual practices in promoting their professional development and 5 school reform activities as options for respondents to choose whether they themselves and their schools adopted these measures, and further identify whether the practice is much more influenced by *NPST* or *QDTPDS-2012*. If teachers did not know these practices and could not decide they are influenced by which documents, they could choose "Not Sure". And there are also an open-ended questions prepared for respondents to provide their practices which was not included in the options, they also need to identify these practices is brought by *NPST* or *QDTPDS-2012*.

A semi-structural interview was also formulated for an in-depth interview simultaneously, which focused on *QDTPDS-2012* and its implementation. The following questions are mainly addressed:

- a) *How was the QDTPDS-2012 developed?*
- b) *Who was involved in the process of QDTPDS-2012 making?*
- c) *To how much extension does QDTPDS-2012 reflect NPST?*
- d) *How are QDTPDS-2012 implemented, to what extent and in what ways?*
- e) *What key features/factors support the implementation of QDTPDS-2012?*
- f) *What barriers have authority, schools and teachers encountered, and how have they overcome these?*
- g) *What are the perceived positives or benefits of QDTPDS-2012 for teachers' working practices, attitudes and roles?*
- h) *What exact roles were played by QDTPDS-2012 for teachers at different professional development stage?*
- i) *What are the perceived impacts of QDTPDS-2012 on teaching and learning in schools?*

The survey was mainly carried out in primary and secondary schools in Qingyang District. And the questionnaire was distributed at random. In addition, an interview and a focus group discussion were conducted in this study. The interviewees include local authority staff, education ministry officials, experts from educational science institute, principals of the primary and middle schools, new teachers, experienced teachers, and senior teachers in Qingyang district. A total of 500 questionnaires are distributed, among which 452 are valid. While the survey data were analyzed statistically by SPSS statistical software, the data obtained from the depth interviews and observations were analyzed qualitatively.

## 2. FINDINGS OF THE RESEARCH

The survey data shows that teachers in Qingyang district are quite familiar with *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012* with the assistance of school and local education authorities. Some lectures and seminars are held for teachers, helping them get a full picture of these two documents. Teachers noticed that some newly-released district regulations were more or less related with these two documents. However, from their responses, it could be found that teachers were more familiar with *QDTPDS-2012*, and showed more concerns about *QDTPDS-2012*; they spent more time on studying and analyzing it, although local governments made the same sort of efforts on promoting *NPST*. In the following interview, we find that, in some teachers' views, *NPST* is regarded as a national guide for making education law and

regulation for teacher profession; teachers think education officials should pay more attention to it; while they also believed that they had met all the demands for the teaching job since they had already been teachers. Some teachers even thought that *NPST* had no significant differences with former government regulations on teachers' norms and codes of their working, but *QDTPDS-2012* is a new policy good for their professional development. According to their responses, *QDTPDS-2012* is local regulations and normative acts for Qingyang teachers, it presented concrete requirements for teachers; it demonstrated more other than basic requirements for teachers; and it had more practical and influential impacts on teachers. The data collected from this part are listed in the following table (Table 3).

**Table 3**  
**Teachers' Awareness of *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012***

Statements about <i>NPST</i> and <i>QDTPDS-2012</i>	Respondents' choice		
	Yes	No	Not sure
I know <i>NPST</i> .	75.22%	9.29%	15.49%
I know <i>QDTPDS-2012</i> .	91.15%	0%	8.85%
I have read the document of <i>NPST</i> .	59.73%	39.82%	0.5%
I have read the document of <i>QDTPDS-2012</i> .	84.07%	9.96%	5.97%
I have attended lectures or seminars about <i>NPST</i> .	68.19%	15.27%	16.54%
I have attended lectures or seminars about <i>QDTPDS-2012</i> .	82.96%	8.19%	8.85%
There are some new policies and regulations issued in Qingyang District, which are based on <i>NPST</i> .	69.02%	4.42%	26.56%
There are some new policies and regulations issued in my school, which are based on <i>NPST</i> .	53.89%	18.9%	27.21%
There are some new policies and regulations issued in Qingyang District, which are based on <i>QDTPDS-2012</i> .	80.75%	4.42%	14.83%
There are some new policies and regulations issued in my school, which are based on <i>QDTPDS-2012</i> .	78.76%	6.63%	14.61%
<i>NPST</i> has great influences on my teaching and working.	34.51%	40.71%	24.78%
<i>QDTPDS-2012</i> has great influences on my teaching and working.	78.98%	5.97%	15.05%

According to the data collected from the second part of this survey, we further found that *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012* had great influences and impacts on teachers and school management. Most respondents can give right choices to questions presented in Part Two of the questionnaire; the average accuracy percentage is quite high (see Table 4). Teachers were quite aware of the rationale of the two documents, but not all teachers can give right answers for questions on the contents and implementations of them. It was very interesting that teachers were more familiar with the contents of *NPST* and the implementation of *QDTPDS-2012*.

It was explained later that *NPST* contained essential requirements for teaching, and it was easy for teachers to make right choices, even though they did not pay close attentions to *NPST*; while teachers were confused a little bit about the exact description of different degrees of teachers in *QDTPDS-2012*, because they were concerned more about the career stages they belonged to. The implementation process of *QDTPDS-2012* is accounted in details for teachers who want to make achievements in their professional development. Therefore, it is easier for teachers to remember the implementation of *QDTPDS-2012*.

**Table 4**  
**Accuracy Percentage of Questions on *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012***

Questions in part two	Average accuracy percentage of questions in part two
Questions on <i>NPST</i> and <i>QDTPDS-2012</i>	80.2%
Questions on <i>NPST</i>	79.17%
Questions on <i>QDTPDS-2012</i>	81.25%
Questions on Rationale of <i>NPST</i>	93.75%
Questions on Rationale of <i>QDTPDS-2012</i>	87.5%
Questions on Contents of <i>NPST</i>	81.25%
Questions on Contents of <i>QDTPDS-2012</i>	68.75%
Questions on implementation of <i>NPST</i>	56.25%
Questions on implementation of <i>QDTPDS-2012</i>	87.5%

Since the issue of these two documents in 2012, teachers in Qingyang District have attached more emphasis on their professional development. Compared with the past, current teacher professional development activities are always directly connected to national and local standards, and are aligned with school improvement efforts that are tied to real student needs. Therefore, some new forms of professional activities are appearing in Qingyang teachers' professional development, such as, making personal professional development plan, consistent individual and collective professional reflection, participating professional organizations, attending more professional development workshops or conferences, establishing more cooperative relationship with parents, communities, and teachers in other schools. For example, one respondents added "cooperation between middle schools and elementary schools" when answering open-ended questions in this part. In the later interview, he made a further explanation. According to him, elementary school teachers teaching language and mathematics meet several times a year with their middle school colleagues to discuss curriculum alignment. Participants share curriculum, sample lessons, and examples of student work and discuss how to align their instruction and assessments with national and provincial standards.

Schools in Qingyang District even took more measures. Although Chinese education reforms are always "up-down" model, guided by government at all levels, schools has got plenty of freedom in teacher choice and training nowadays. The implementing of NPST and QDTPDS-2012 has been expected to promote teachers and schools development, therefore, series of measures have been taken to make a difference to teachers' and principals' working practices. Most schools in Qingyang District updated their teacher evaluation system; divided teachers into different types according to their professional

development stages; provided mentors for new teachers and trained more ; invested more in experienced teachers' development, developed more professional development chances for teachers with universities and societies. One provincial key secondary school in Qingyang District invited educational specialist and professors in university around China to help teachers design professional development plan; teachers in that school were divided into three types—"new teachers", "proficient teachers", and "accomplished teachers", based on well-designed standards by experts and teacher delegates. Different types of teachers established learning communities and collaborated in professional development; school leaders and authorities also make detailed and realistic working plans to promote teachers' progress, including sending teachers to work in sister schools inside and outside Qingyang District for a period of time and learn latest teaching skills in universities to enhance their professional knowledge and competence.

While most schools in Qingyang District have adopted the above measures and actions according to respondents' answers to Part Two of the questionnaire, the survey continually probed the effects of NPST and QDTPDS-2012, and further detected, in teachers' view, which documents had more influences on those changes in teachers' professional development. The following table (Table 5) shows that the proportion of teachers' ideas on influences caused by NPST or QDTPDS-2012 on teachers and schools. We can find from the table that, almost half of the respondents related the current changes in schools with QDTPDS-2012 other than NPST, a small portion of respondents chose "Not Sure", and some respondents chose "NPST". Those who chose "not sure" were interviewed, and some of them thought NPST and QDTPDS-2012 shared the same main idea; it's difficult to tell which one had more influences on current teacher professional development.

**Table 5**  
**Teachers Awareness of Reform and Innovation Brought by NPST and QDTPDS-2012**

	By NPST	By QDTPDS-2012	Not sure
Teachers individual development (e.g. to make professional development plan; join in professional association, etc.)	12.22%	69.2%	18.58%
Schools' reform and innovation (e.g. update teacher evaluation system; divide teachers into different types based on their professional development stages, etc.)	26.55%	56.42%	17.03%

From the third part of this questionnaire, we collected some suggestions for these two documents and their related policies. Almost 90 percent of respondents provided the suggestions for QDTPDS-2012 or did not respond to this open-ended question, and less than 10 percent respondents provided advice on NPST. We can conclude that, on the one hand, teachers made more considerations on QDTPDS-2012 and on the other hand, QDTPDS-2012 still needed to be improved in many ways. The most mentioned suggestions for QDTPDS-2012 were making more clear division among professional development levels and clarifying indicators

of requirements for each level's teachers to make detailed revision for better adaptation and implementation, but for NPST, respondents directly pointed out that indicators in NPST is "too vague" for teachers' daily working practice, and it is not "practicable".

The result of the interviews in the study represents the standard-making process. As early as 2009, 3 years before the issue of NPST, a project team of Qingyang District government officials, university professors, educational experts, primary and secondary teachers was formed to conduct research on regional teacher

professional standards, almost at the same time with the beginning of *NPST* research, and also guided under *National Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development (2010-2020)*. In the process of the standards making, the project team not only took advanced experiences of other provinces and foreign countries for reference, but also made an in-depth and extensive investigation on actuality of professional development of the entire faculty in Qingyang District. Since *NPST* and *QDTPDS-2012* were developed under the national outline for education reform, both of them reflect the basic requirements of society towards teachers; and *QDTPDS-2012* went through plenty of appropriate consultation, appraisal and assessment at the last stages of developing, aiming to comply with *NPST*.

When *QDTPDS-2012* was released publicly, to help local teachers meet the standards in *QDTPDS-2012*, Qingyang government made the following efforts:

a) Establish a management department responsible for teacher professional standards, which play a leading role in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership; and decide what further support is required for implementation of the Standards;

b) Provide material and policy support to ensure the success of actions and measures taken by government and schools to promote teacher professional development;

c) Reform teacher education and training program for future teachers, Teacher education colleges and universities carried out a series curriculum innovation, guided by the *QDTPDS-2012*, and managed to provide well-trained and qualified future teachers;

d) Develop a provincial model for teacher evaluation and professional growth, an “expert teacher” association was established in Qingyang District, the members in the association are first-class teachers in this district, and they have special privileges, set examples to the rest teachers, and they are obligated to help other teachers in their professional development.

Apart from that, Qingyang District has set an clear and explicit objective: build up a contingent of teachers in five years, consisting of 80 “Expert Teachers”, 400 “Elite Teachers”, and 2000 “Backbone Teachers”, which will make up 33% of the whole teaching staff in the district. (Qingyang District Education Reform, para. 1, 2012, October 15)

An incentive and guarantee mechanism has been set up, including establishing research teams, providing funds for research and inviting educational experts and scholars to design “personal professional development plans” respectively for teachers at different professional stages. Most teachers and principals investigated in the interview have made their personal professional development plans under the direction of experts; many training courses are provided to teachers and principals, helping them to fulfill their plans. According to the data provided by the authority, all the teaching staff in Qingyang District has been sent to participate in various levels or types of professional

training. By the end of 2013, almost 2638 teachers and principals had been to domestic famous universities, such as Tsinghua University, to further their studies. The number of teachers with Bachelor degree or above has reached 3513, 91.2% of the professional and technical personnel in schools of Qingyang Districts. (Qingyang District Youth Education, para. 2, 2012, November, 15)

A teacher professional association called *Qingyang Model Teacher Association (QMTA)* was also built in 2013, which enrolled teachers and principals with the title of “National Excellent educators”, “Provincial Top Educators”, “Municipal Top Educators”, “District Top Educators”, “Municipal Subject Teaching Experts”, or “Ethics Role Model in Education”. (Youth Education Department, Qingyang, para. 3, 2012) All the members in the Association were rated from one-star to three-star and offered different privileges, such as, special allowances, paid sabbatical leave, qualified training, publishing funds, research studios and so on. Using the Membership One-Card, *QMTA* members are eligible for regular free check-ups, subscribing to academic journals or magazines, and other exclusive services. At the first year of the establishment of *QMTA*, about 110 teachers and principals joined the Association and they played their exemplary role to all the teachers in the district, and offered numerous proposals and suggestions for the development of teachers and schools. They shared their educational wisdom and teaching experiences with young teachers, and continuously made efforts to explore, with other experts, ways to solve the problems faced by most teachers currently. In fact, the association members themselves also benefited from these, one interviewee, who worked as volunteer teachers for a month at remote rural schools in Sichuan Province in 2013, reported that his original intention of “helping other teachers’ development” had turned into “self-improvement”, especially on “teaching moral”, that experience deepened his understanding of “teachers’ professional image”. Supported by the association, these leading teachers and principals’ influence is getting stronger; most of them have been invited to other provinces, even other countries to share experience. A lot of respondents (79.5%) mentioned that they had read articles or books written by the association members, and thought those experts’ ideas impacted their practices.

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### 3. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATION

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The main purpose of *NPST* is to guide provinces, municipalities and cities in defining the basic requirements related to knowledge, pedagogical skills and personal attributes that teachers must demonstrate in order to achieve the objectives of education. It directs regional authority in monitoring and evaluating teachers’ professional growth and learning, and assists teachers’ pre-service, in-service and continuing professional development. However, the strength of the standards

is in its implementation through further refinement, clarification, and enforcement. What Qingyang District has done demonstrates *NPST* implementation approaches at a regional level, which modifies *NPST* into a more applicable model, meets the reality of local teachers' professional development status, and advocates related education reforms to integrate *NPST* in teacher education. From the practice of Qingyang District, we can find the following principles for reference in implementing national teacher professional standards:

The *NPST* needs to be developed into several types according to different functions of standards, such as selection, accreditation, registration, accountability, and so on. The current national professional standards for teachers are basic criteria "to articulate core educational values those teachers seek to manifest in their practice". (Teacher Education Department of Chinese, para. 2, 2013) In other words, *NPST* provide a general description of what is valued in this profession, and it is not practical enough to make an impact on the real lives of teachers who are at different professional development stages. On one hand, regional government needs to make or modify standards for pre-service teacher education, new teacher induction, and in-service training, embodying the guidelines of *NPST* into these specific and detailed standards. On the other hand, only was refined into more specific standards, can *NPST* realize its guiding roles in promoting teachers' professional development. *QDTPDS-2012* is appraisal and promotion standards for professional development. It is based on research and professional knowledge, version of highly accomplished practice, clear dimensions of what teacher should get better at. It provides a detailed and clear description for what each level of teachers should know. Teacher can make self-analysis and reflect their practice; schools, parents, and teacher associations can make assessments on teachers' practice and performance. According to an official of Qingyang District Education Bureau, it was very difficult for all the teachers in Qingyang District to find approaches in their career ladder by *NPST*, since the standards were broad and excessive and teachers were different in age, educational background and professional title, however, *QDTPDS-2012* listed measurable and evaluable indicators for teachers at different level and age group. For example, "qualified teachers" need to teach at least 3 years, get 3-year professional quality certification, and gain the acceptance of students and parents; while "expert teachers" should win honors granted by provincial level or above, and make more than 90% students satisfied with their teaching, playing a leading role in teaching his subject across the city or the district.

Local authority should become leaders and designers in implementing *NPST*. Effective professional development for teachers requires strong leaders who can recognize the value of high-quality professional development, set priorities for professional development

in district improvement plans, encourage and facilitate teacher participation, and actively communicate about the benefits of professional development to key stakeholders (e.g., parents, school boards, county commissioners). Qingyang District set a good example to other provinces and regions in China. In 2011, Qingyang District released *The Outline for Medium and Long-term Education Reform and Development in Qingyang District (2010-2020)*, highlighting the urgency of setting professional standards for teachers. Then, they established a panel of researchers responsible for developing and revising regional teachers' professional standards. The researchers were not only from local universities and institutes, but also from other distinguished universities around China. With support of the district government, Seminars have been held regularly to solve any problem arising from teachers' professional development reform since then. Several incentive plans were put forward to stimulate teachers' motivation in professional development. Take a financial incentive in 2012 as an example, according to it, primary teachers who obtain 3-year-college degrees will be given 1800 RMB as rewards; junior secondary school teachers who obtain university degrees will also be given 1800 RMB; and senior secondary school teachers who obtain master degrees will be given 6000 RMB (Wang, 2012, February, 6). While, apart from the rewards, there are still punishments, a Teaching Profession Exit Mechanism was established in Qingyang District, those who could not meet the standards will be removed temporarily or permanently (Liu, 2013, August, 15). The reasons why local government took these measure are because schools usually did not dismiss a teacher who has been certified by the government in the past, most teacher were not worried about their positions, and they were also lack of motivation in professional development. The government of Qingyang District invested heavily in building a college-elementary and secondary school teaching-learning community, in which teachers are sharing resources and experiences. In a word, to carry out *NPST*, regional government needs to understand how national standards are organized and the degree to which they facilitate professional development beyond the facts.

Teachers and principals should be the main body in defining and refining *NPST*. The effective profession standards could not be created without involvement of the professionals and their associations; neither could it be implemented without reference to the thoughts and ideas of the participants and practitioners, that is, teachers and principals. China's National Ministry of Education is the central government authority in charge of the overall planning, coordination, and management of various kinds and different levels of teacher education and training; it sets, oversees and implements qualifications and preparation standards for the teaching occupation. Because the decision-making and governance of teachers are highly centralized, it is liable to cause passively participation

in professional development activities. Therefore, *NPST* provides regional government reference in educating, selecting, and evaluating teachers, but does not empower them to “control and intervene in teachers’ professional development”. (Hu, 2011) What the local government should do is devoting in assisting teachers and principals in charge of their own professional development. The establishment of *Qingyang Model Teacher Association (QMTA)* distributed the leadership for teacher professional development among teachers, principals, administrators, district staff, institution of higher education, and various social organizations. It is not only a platform for teachers and principals to communicate and learn from each other, but also a professional autonomy organization which ensures all the initiatives and actions on teacher professional development effectively. The indispensable part of successfully implementing *NPST* is establishing an effective evaluation system, involving evaluators from government, schools and educational institutions. Expert teachers and educational researchers should be part of the assistance and review process for teacher professional level evaluation. The Institution of Education Research in Qingyang District assists Education Bureau to carry out “Third-Party Evaluation” on teacher’s performance, adopting an *Ability-Competence Test System (ACTS)*; the real intention of this evaluation is not just to provide a balanced appraisal, but to grant more rights for teachers and principals to decide their own professional development direction (Liu, 2013, August 15).

The implementation of *NPST* needs a detailed survey on regional teacher groups. Provinces and cities which differ in population, urbanization, and educational attainment, tend to have different way, approach and process in implementing *NPST*. Although *NPST* is evidence-and-research based, informed by the most

effective models from provinces and cities across China, it is still necessary for regional and local government to carry out an in-depth investigation on the recent developments and current challenges of schools and teachers. Just as professors and academics involved in *NPST* development pointed out, “...the ranges of reference samples are not wide enough..., considering the regional difference...; it is recommended that government at all levels apply the standards into schools’ management and teachers’ daily work based on local situation...” Educational administrators in Qingyang District are aware that they are expected to make data-based decisions in this era of heightened accountability and transparency; therefore they planned to use data to identify teachers’ professional development need at the very beginning. In April 2011, *The Status of Teacher Professional Development Survey* was administered to all Qingyang teachers employed in the 52 primary and secondary schools (Zheng, 2012). The purpose of the survey is to document and analyze the achievements and prospects in teachers’ professional development, so that teachers, stakeholders and policymakers can make evidence-based decision on policies and practices that will improve teacher quality and student success. This survey, aligned with *NPST*, can provide policy-makers and stakeholders with a clearer picture about teachers’ current professional status, and made it possible to divide the whole teaching staff into groups based on different development level. In September, 2012, the first five-year professional development plan for district teachers was developed, which aims to realize the goal of optimizing teacher staff structure, that is, the distribution of teachers at difference professional development stage will be at a fair and rational percentage, as the following table (Table 6) shows.

**Table 6**  
**The Planned Distribution of Qingyang Teachers at Difference Professional Development Stage in 2017<sup>3</sup>**

	Qualified teachers (graduate)	Backbone teachers (proficient)	Elite teachers (highly accomplished)	Expert teachers (lead)
Percentage	40%	46%	12%	2%

The implementation of *NPST* requires adequate resources—money, time, and people—to ensure the effectiveness of the Standards. The largest part of Qingyang District spending is education, the financial appropriations for compulsory education accounts for roughly a quarter of total expenditure each year (Hong & Liu, 2011, April 15). To improve teacher quality and effectiveness, Qingyang District invested heavily in making survey, doing research, and promoting individual and staff professional development. Almost every teacher has been asked to create a personal professional development plan based on comprehensive understanding of features of students in his or her classroom, the subject

taught or any specialized knowledge he or she desires to learn. Educational experts at home and abroad were invited to share experiences, give lectures, contribute ideas and exert efforts. In the process of *QDTPDS-2012* development, the Education Bureau of Qingyang District held workshops, seminars and symposiums attended by academics and experts from other provinces and cities, drawing on collective wisdom and absorbing all useful ideas. Relying on external sources of expertise and assistance demands more money, but is worthwhile. The scientificity and efficiency of *QDTPDS-2012* have been accepted by most experts in China.

Since 2004, Qingyang District has invested more than 1 billion RMB in promoting standardization in the construction of primary and secondary schools, and gave

<sup>3</sup> Based on “The Implementation Program of Establishing Model Teachers Association in Qingyang District, 2012”

priority to rural schools and weak urban schools (Yang, 2006). Currently, there is no distinct difference between rural and urban schools, which provides pre-conditions for administrators and schools in promoting teachers' professional development. Improvements in school conditions not only attract more students, but also provide more chances for teachers to improve their professional skills. Expert teachers who are required to temporarily transfer from urban schools to rural schools are willing to accept the position and have played leading roles in teachers' professional development in rural schools. Since October, 2012, a Professional Elite Competition was held in Qingyang District every year, all the Backbone Teachers got the chance to be promoted to the position of Elite Teacher (Zhou, 2012, November 1). Teachers have been interested in getting involved in the competition which will bring them both social prestige and economic benefit.

## CONCLUSION

Teacher professional development is not an event but a process (Harvell, 2003, October 13) so is the development, implementation and innovation of teachers' professional standards. Like most of the countries in the world, China has made great efforts in providing a nationally consistent basis for recognizing quality teaching and promoting excellence in teaching. The establishment of *NPST* became a milestone in the history of teacher professionalization in China, it plays great roles in standardize teachers teaching practice and daily behaviors, and provides administrators and teachers effective tools to evaluate and improve professional skills. Although China's top-down and relatively centralized education management system contributes to the implementation of *NPST* to some degree, it still confronts with some challenges. By some teachers' eyes, they are just "workers" at school; they have to follow the directions of the principals, while principals have to follow the ideas of government officials. Therefore, it is difficult to balance teachers' professional autonomy and professional standards implementing. However, what Qingyang District government did set us a good example. They reinterpreted *NPST*, made it more practical, more adaptable; and most importantly, they showed their respects to teachers, treating them as the main body of teachers' professional development, that is the key to succeed in implementing professional standards for teachers.

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