We are in the midst of an economic and budget disaster that has left us with a shortage of money to pay even for basic supplies or the salaries of the teachers who still have their jobs. We should be in crisis mode, and there should be a total suspension of staff development programs for the duration of this downturn.

As a by-product of the current situation, our political and educational leaders have shown their clear priorities in relation to education. They are not protecting education as a high-priority concern. Their rhetoric might pay lip service to the importance of education—especially when candidates are campaigning for votes—but when it comes to putting their money and priorities in line with that rhetoric once they’re in office, their resolve pales.

I have been a staff development specialist in California for 20 years, and I have witnessed the way most staff development programs are currently run: from the top down. Administrators treat professional development needs to reflect the needs of both the teachers and the students. Why are we still discussing technology professional development? Isn’t the real conversation about learning, teaching, and the appropriate tools to enhance this process? Learning to point and click is simple, and professional...
Professional development should be about supporting the learning process, and technology is a proven way of doing this. Therefore, all time spent doing this should be considered valuable.

Time gives teachers a chance to collaborate, reflect, and experiment. This is necessary in any profession. Would you ask a doctor if time away from his or her practice to participate in a class or discussion or to learn a new technique is a valuable use of time? Of course not; if anything, we would consider it negligent if other professionals did not keep up in their fields. And yet, for teachers there is a double standard.

If we continue to preach about the need for technology in the classroom but then hold teachers to a standard that supports only continuous testing and rote learning, then we are setting everyone up for failure. Learning should be about making meaning, creating understanding, and solving problems. We know this. We also know that the appropriate use of technology supports this process. Professional development should be about supporting the learning process, and technology is a proven way of doing this. Therefore, all time spent doing this should be considered valuable.

Michelle Podulka has been an educator for 12 years in the public and private sectors. She is the technology integration teacher at Abington Friends School in Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

It is time to give the teachers and students working hard in our classrooms a chance to feel the sea change beneath them, as well as the respect, support, and protection they deserve as they go about the critical business of charting the future direction of the next generation.

Ron Witort has been a public school teacher for 40 years and is currently a staff development specialist in K–12 curricular innovation and integration of technology, as well as a lecturer and supervisor of student teachers at California State University, Stanislaus.