



By Eric Celeste

In 2011, Learning Forward revealed its third iteration of Standards for Professional Learning — seven characteristics of professional learning that lead to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. The 2011 standards (see p. 11), built on those issued in 1994 and revised in 2001, combine decades of research, lessons learned, and input from 40 professional education organizations.

Undergirding all seven standards is this fundamental premise: The purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions they need to help students perform at higher levels. The standards are not a prescription for how education leaders and public officials should address all the challenges related to improving the performance of educators and their students. The standards focus on one critical issue — professional learning.

The seven standards focus attention on educator learning

that relates to successful student learning, and it is vital that we support all educators in doing the same. Every educator requires professional learning that is interactive, relevant, sustained, and embedded in everyday practice. Only by achieving such a vision for professional learning is equity of access to high-quality education for every student possible.

It is not a simple matter to connect the dots between high-quality professional learning and student outcomes. However, the theory of action that drives the standards, and indeed much of Learning Forward's work, is a continuous model of improvement: Standards-based professional learning leads to greater overall educator expertise, which causes changes in educator practice that results in better student outcomes (see "Relationship between professional learning and student results" on p. 12). There is much embedded in each of those four circles, and the aim of this issue of *JSD* is to encourage readers to explore the ideas behind the standards in depth through a range of lenses and consider next actions.

The quality of professional learning that occurs when the Standards for Professional Learning are fully implemented en-

STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students ...

LEARNING COMMUNITIES: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

LEADERSHIP: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

RESOURCES: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

DATA: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

LEARNING DESIGNS: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

IMPLEMENTATION: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

OUTCOMES: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

rolls educators as active partners in determining the focus of their learning, how their learning occurs, and how they evaluate its effectiveness. These educators are part of a team, a school, and a school system that conceive, implement, and evaluate carefully aligned professional learning that responds to individual, team, schoolwide, and systemwide goals for student achievement. The standards give educators the information they need to take leadership roles as advocates for and facilitators of effective professional learning and the conditions required for its success.

Why is this critical? Placing the emphasis on professional learning reminds all education stakeholders that educators' continuous improvement affects student learning. Increasing the effectiveness of professional learning is the leverage point with the greatest potential for strengthening and refining the day-to-day performance of educators.

For most educators working in schools, professional learning is the singular most accessible means they have to develop the new knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to better meet students' learning needs. If educators are not engaged throughout their careers in new learning experiences that enable them to better serve their students, both educators and students suffer.

And if those educators are not learning collaboratively in the context of a systemwide plan for coherent learning tied to a set of goals aligned from classroom to school to school system, their professional learning is less likely to produce its intended results.

This is not theory: We've seen it in practice. In the five years since Learning Forward issued the Standards for Professional Learning, there has been widespread adoption of its core tenets throughout 39 states and several municipalities. (See "Why adoption of standards matters" on p. 60.) Policymakers have used them to help form law and inform conversations about the value of professional learning to teachers, students, districts, and communities. They have proven to be a vital tool, necessary when incorporating high-quality professional learning practices into a school system.

Why then revisit them now, and in such depth? Three reasons:

Teacher turnover: Although a 2015 comprehensive National Center for Education Statistics study (NCES, 2015) proved that many reports of teacher turnover were overstated, it showed a 30% turnover rate every five years, on average. That means there are nearly one million new full-time teachers, public and private, since 2011, when we first examined the standards at great depth. We know also that

Learning Forward’s membership shifts and grows, with many educators taking on new learning leadership roles in their schools and school districts.

A new landscape: With the adoption of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), we see the continuation of a sea change in public education. As ESSA is interpreted state by state, efforts that revolved around measuring and improving teacher accountability and effectiveness — and tying those measures to student outcomes — will be adjusted and implemented. A discussion about the necessity of effective professional learning to those efforts is crucial. As well, ESSA offers many opportunities to rethink in depth how funds for professional learning are best invested. Absent attention to the standards, those investments are unlikely to bear the returns students, communities, and educators demand.

Increasing relevance: Five years is a long time in education. It’s vital the standards not be stagnant, but that they are viewed and re-viewed through a critical lens. We felt it important for the continuing examination of these standards to come from experts outside Learning Forward, from researchers and thought leaders also on the front lines of shaping the professional learning conversation. They can help educators more fully understand what the standards are and the myriad ways thought leaders with a range of perspectives consider their meaning and use. They can take their knowledge and relevant research to explain and give examples of how each of these elements function individually and in synergy to enable educators to increase their effectiveness and student learning.

This is why we created a book series with Corwin — to invite the authors featured in this issue of *JSD* to explore these standards in depth. The seven-book series — one for each standard — was conceived to deepen learning leaders’ understanding of the standards. Each volume opens with a thought leader essay exploring the themes in the standards. These essays are not identical to what Learning Forward would write — we invited these particular authors because of their expertise. We knew they would approach the standards from a unique angle that would encourage learning and reflection.

Each volume in the *Reach the Highest Standard* series continues with a section geared toward practitioner implementation

Relationship between professional learning and student results

1. When professional learning is standards-based, it has greater potential to change what educators know, are able to do, and believe.
2. When educators’ knowledge, skills, and dispositions change, they have a broader repertoire of effective strategies to use to adapt their practices to meet performance expectations and student learning needs.
3. When educator practice improves, students have a greater likelihood of achieving results.
4. When student results improve, the cycle repeats for continuous improvement.



This cycle works two ways: If educators are not achieving the results they want, they determine what changes in practice are needed and then what knowledge, skills, and dispositions are needed to make the desired changes. They then consider how to apply the standards so that they can engage in the learning needed to strengthen their practice.

of the standards, complete with protocols and educator considerations. Finally, each volume concludes with a case example of a school system that has used the concepts in the standard to improve results. The cases highlight the real-world successes and challenges of improving professional learning through sustained effort, offering context information and inspiration.

We appreciate the partnership with Corwin on the series and their support of this issue of *JSD*. We hope that this issue helps educators begin to imagine and plan how to reshape the professional learning for which they are responsible — now and in the future.

REFERENCE

National Center for Education Statistics. (2015). *Public school teacher attrition and mobility in the first five years: Results from the first through fifth waves of the 2007-08 beginning teacher longitudinal study.* Washington, DC: Author.

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