

Inside

- Collective responsibility tools, pp. 4-5
- Our new name, p. 6
- Coaches shift paradigms, p. 8

September 2010

Vol. 6, No. 1

EVERY EDUCATOR ENGAGES IN EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING EVERY DAY SO EVERY STUDENT ACHIEVES

Collective responsibility makes all teachers the best

By Stephanie Hirsh

"I really wanted my daughter to be in Mrs. Meyer's class this year — everyone knows she is the best fifth-grade teacher in this school."

Over the years, I have heard such statements repeatedly. It's the beginning of the school year and too many principals and teachers face parents expressing concerns about the teachers their children are assigned. For a variety of reasons, these parents believe their children would have been better off in another teacher's classroom. They fear their children may learn less, experience less joy in learning, or feel less motivation to succeed. Empathetic principals and teachers listen and try to offer reassurance that the children will have a great year. They tell the parents that all teachers in their school will welcome their children; students will have a great year no matter which classroom they

have been assigned. And yet, savvy parents are getting smarter — they know there is no proof to back up this statement. Some parents know that there is research that suggests the single most important determinant of a student's success is the classroom teacher. When parents

The most important phrase in Learning Forward's definition of professional learning is collective responsibility.



raise this concern, few principals or teachers have anything substantive to say in response.

My hope is for more principals and teachers to be able to respond to these parents' concerns by assuring them that within their school, teachers share collective responsibility for the success of each student. The most important phrase in Learning Forward's definition of professional learning is collective responsibility. Schoolwide and team-based professional learning embedded in the daily work of educators is essential when professionals commit to sharing responsibility for the success of all students.

When a school fully understands and commits to collective responsibility for student success, educators are prepared to answer parents' concerns in a profound way. A deep understanding of what collective responsibility means for schools will not only reassure parents about their own children's educations but can also enlist them as advocates for job-embedded, collaborative professional learning. I am hopeful that in the near future more teachers and principals will use some of the following points to describe collective responsibility in their schools.

Continued on p. 2



is ...

learningforward

Learning Forward is the new name of the National Staff Development Council.

We are an *international association of learning educators* committed to advancing professional learning for student success.

www.learningforward.org

Continued from p. 1

• **Collective responsibility means** that all staff members share a commitment to the success of each student. Our teachers take pride in getting to know all the students in their grade level or particular course first, and after that they do their best to get to know the students in the grades they will serve next. When our teachers learn that any teacher or student is struggling and they have information or strategies that can help, they feel a responsibility to share it. They celebrate with their colleagues when things go well, and commit to changes when things do not go the way they had anticipated.

• **Collective responsibility means** we do not allow any single teacher to fail in an attempt to ensure success of any one student. Teachers in our school understand and appreciate the benefits of working collaboratively. Our teachers ensure their colleagues understand they are all members of the same team; whenever one teacher has a problem, the team is there for support. They use collaborative learning and planning to quickly target students experiencing learning challenges. They focus their combined attention to ensure no child falls between the cracks.

• **Collective responsibility means** our students benefit from the wisdom and expertise of all teachers in a grade

DESIGNING A CYCLE OF IMPROVEMENT

Cycles of improvement support the development of lessons and assessments that ensure higher levels of learning for all students in a particular grade or subject.

1. A team of teachers examines student performance data to determine where students may struggle in relation to the next set of objectives they must master.
2. The team clarifies the knowledge and skills they need in order to successfully teach the standards.
3. The team shares their previous experience with the objectives. Those who did not achieve the desired results learn from those who had demonstrated greater success. If no one on the team experienced the desired level of success, the group agrees to seek expertise from beyond the group.

Repeat this cycle throughout the year to build a powerful set of lessons and assessments that are used by all teachers on the team.

To view this process in action, see the *Stults Road Elementary: Professional Development in Action* video on Learning Forward's web site.



AN INVITATION

I invite you to share this description of collective responsibility with your colleagues. Enter into a discussion with the educators in your building.

The tools on pp. 4-5 will help you examine together your reflections on the current state of your school regarding collective responsibility and your aspirations for how to grow in this area.

When teams build the school's collective capacity, I'm certain that next fall you will have a much more powerful answer for any parent concerned about a class assignment. You'll also build a supportive group of parents who won't let anyone touch the time you have established for important team-based professional learning.

— Stephanie Hirsh

level or subject, rather than just their own teachers. In our school, regular time is scheduled for teams of teachers to follow a cycle of improvement designed to support the development of powerful lessons and assessments that ensure higher levels of learning for all students in a particular grade or subject (see box at left). As a result, every student experiences the same lesson and is graded by the same standard as all other students in the same grade level or subject course.

• **Collective responsibility means** our teachers feel a responsibility to share what is working in their classrooms with their colleagues. In our school, best practices spread from classroom to classroom. Teachers do not hide their most successful strategies from their colleagues. Data are transparent and teachers experiencing success are easily identified. Teachers have different strengths and areas of expertise; they are celebrated when they have success and eager to praise and learn from colleagues who experience success in other areas. This collaboration enables our teachers to observe and understand a variety of strategies they can then use to serve the individual needs of their students.

• **Collective responsibility means** teachers with less experience realize that other teachers are invested in their success and the success of all students. In our school, new and less experienced teachers are assigned buddies, mentors, and grade-level or subject-based teams. Buddies, mentors, and team members serve new teachers in a variety of ways. One may provide emotional support for overcoming the challenges teachers face early in their career. One might

Continued on p. 3

Continued from p. 2

teach the ropes of the school. One may support planning for all the big firsts of a new teacher, including first days, first parent conferences, and first assessments. And one might ensure the new teachers feel supported year-round with access to great lessons, assessments, and expertise. From day one, all teachers know that their responsibility goes beyond the walls of the classroom they are assigned.

- **Collective responsibility means** our teachers learn and work together systematically on a regular basis to collectively ensure higher quality instruction in all classrooms and better results for all students. In our schools, teachers look forward to the time they have for collaborative learning and problem solving. They are deliberate in establishing their learning agenda and develop together the knowledge and skills they need to promote student success. As they gain powerful new evidence-based strategies, they design new lessons and assessments to be used in all classrooms. They make plans for visiting and observing as time permits, and they commit to future sessions focused on reflecting on the strengths and areas for improvement in each lesson they develop together. Over time they develop a rich bank of lessons and strategies that

enable them to address individual student needs as they surface.

Learning Forward BELIEF

Every student learns when every educator engages in effective professional learning.

- **Collective responsibility means** our principals have a strong rationale for advocating for

team-based professional learning embedded in teachers' work schedule. Authentic collective responsibility cannot be achieved through mandate. Teachers need time to achieve this goal. They need time to conduct the work essential to the intended outcomes of collective responsibility. As a result of spending consistent time together, they build trust, learn to take risks, and recognize the value of reflecting on mistakes. At our school, time is scheduled during the workday for teams to meet to do this important work. Teacher leaders use the cycle of continuous improvement to guide the work of the team. They ensure the team takes advantage of every second it is allotted. In addition to scheduled workday time for team meetings, our school faculty meetings are used for learning as well. Each meeting is led by a different team where they seek help with a particular challenge they are facing or share an instructional strategy that has been successful. In addition, the early release days on our schedule are used for cross grade-level teams to build and implement plans that continue to promote a successful

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY IS TIED TO STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Researchers have investigated the role collective responsibility plays in increasing student achievement. In a study of more than 800 U.S. high schools, Lee and Smith (1996) found a significant link between collective responsibility and student outcomes. "Considering teachers' collective responsibility for learning, the findings about its effects on adolescents are unequivocal. In schools with high levels of collective responsibility, where these attitudes are also consistent among the faculty, students learn more in all subjects. Equally important, collective responsibility is associated with less internal stratification in these outcomes by social class. We conclude that schools where most teachers take responsibility for learning are environments that are both more effective and more equitable."

Newmann and Wehlage (1995) have come to similar conclusions.

"In schools where teachers reported higher levels of collective responsibility for student learning...learning was greater in mathematics, science, reading and history" (p. 33). Within the same study, collective responsibility has been linked to achievement gains as high as 137% in mathematics and science (p. 37).



Practitioners agree that collective responsibility is important. In the most recent *MetLife survey of the American teacher* (2010), 80% of teachers and 90% of principals strongly agree that the teachers in a school share responsibility for the achievement of all students.

SOURCES

Lee, V. E., & Smith, J. B. (1996, February). Collective responsibility for learning and its effects on gains in achievement for early secondary school students. *American Journal of Education*, 104(2), 103-147.

MetLife Foundation. (2010, April). *The MetLife survey of the American teacher: Collaborating for student success.* New York, NY: Author.

Newmann, F. M., Gary, W. G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report to the public educators by the center on organization and restructuring of schools.* Madison, WI: The Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools.

education experience for all students.

Establishing collective responsibility is not easy, but it is essential if we believe that our responsibility is to the success of every student in the school. This is how we achieve this goal in our school.

- **Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org) is executive director of Learning Forward.** 

How our school measures up



Facilitators:

Have each team member fill out the table below. Use responses to build a shared understanding of the current state of the school’s commitment to collective responsibility. Then answer the questions on the following page to outline aspirations and action steps over the course of the school year.

	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
Teachers have opportunities to get to know students outside of their classes.				
Teachers meet regularly in teams for collaborative learning and problem solving.				
Teachers have regular access to information about students in classes beyond their own.				
Teachers have frequent opportunities to provide support to their colleagues one-on-one or in teams.				
Learning teams emphasize sharing best practices and examining individual challenges.				
Teachers make an effort to get to know all students in the building.				
Teachers are eager to share helpful information or strategies.				
Teachers know they can turn to their colleagues anytime for support.				
Teachers celebrate the successes of their colleagues.				
Teachers pool their talents to ensure no student falls behind.				

FURTHER READING

- “A culture of collaborative inquiry: Learning to develop and support professional learning communities,” by Tamara Nelson, David Slavit, Martha Perkins, and Tom Hathorn. (2008). *Teachers College Record*, 110(6), 1269-1303. Available at www.tcrecord.org/ExecSummary.asp?contentid=14745

This narrative case study seeks to discover how to foster and sustain a “culture of collaborative inquiry” for teachers. The study follows a group of 12 professional development providers tasked with building a three-year professional development project, Partnerships for Reform in Secondary Science and Mathematics (PRiSSM). To better understand the dynamic of sustaining collaborative inquiry, the group agreed to use the processes they were building to guide

their own activities as a group. Assuming the inquiry stance allowed the group to experience the same challenges that teacher groups would typically experience, such as communication difficulties and schedule demands, and the protocols that help overcome these challenges.

- “Teachers’ learning communities: Catalyst for change or a new infrastructure for the status quo?” By Diane Wood. (2007). *Teachers College Record*, 109(3), 699–739. Available at www.tcrecord.org/content.asp?contentid=12829

This study explores conflicts and challenges that can arise when cultures and policies of schools and districts inadvertently conflict with systemic efforts to support teacher collaboration. Based on two and a half years of data from a mid-Atlantic city, the district sought

Exploring our aspirations



Facilitators:

In pairs or in learning teams, discuss the questions below and outline preliminary steps to move your school forward to develop collective responsibility.

What kinds of words would you hear and actions would you see in a school that values collective responsibility?
In what ways do we already demonstrate collective responsibility in our school?
In what ways would additional commitment to collective responsibility benefit our school?
What are barriers that prevent us from achieving these additional benefits?
What are opportunities for advancing collective responsibility and achieving additional benefits?
Given our strengths and collective outlook, what changes are most necessary to advance our efforts?
What professional learning do we need to strengthen our capacity for collective responsibility?
What support do we need from within our building? From beyond our building?
Who else might we involve in our next discussion of this topic?
What is our next step as a team? What is my next step as an individual?

to avoid state mandated intervention by creating professional learning communities in all of its schools. Despite sincere efforts on all levels, district culture and policies may be unwittingly causing conditions that threaten to undermine the sustainability of the learning communities. Ultimately, the author makes six recommendations for the collaborative groups and the district to improve the likelihood of success.

- “From hunger aid to school reform: Positive deviance approach seeks solutions that already exist.” Dennis Sparks. (2004). *JSD*. 25(1), 46-51. Available at www.learningforward.org/news/articleDetails.cfm?articleID=456
In this article, Dennis Sparks discusses positive deviance, where solutions are found within a group instead of from external sources,

with Jerry Sternin. Sternin reflects on his work using positive deviance to alleviate malnourishment in Vietnamese children and offers six steps for implementing and evaluating the positive deviance approach.

- *Professional community and professional development in the learning-centered school* by Judith Warren Little. (2006). Washington, DC: National Education Association. Available at www.nea.org/assets/docs/mf_pdreport.pdf
This report offers an overview of research and practice that support professional learning in improving student outcomes. Little offers best practices, content opportunities, and the importance of collective and comprehensive support from the school.



NSDC is Learning Forward

We have a new name. Our commitment to ensure that every educator engages in effective professional development every day so every student achieves is stronger than ever. We invite every member to join in this effort.

Our new name symbolizes what we stand for. Learning is first in the name because it is what we advocate. We are committed to educator learning as a primary means of ensuring educator quality and student success. Forward symbolizes our future focus. The learning students experience today impacts their future. A recent economic analysis, not yet peer reviewed (Leonhardt, 2010), concludes that, as adults, a class of kindergartners with an effective teacher makes

approximately \$320,000 more over the course of their careers than adults from a kindergarten class with a less effective teacher. This study is one of many that confirms the importance of effective teaching as a significant factor in improving student achievement. Learning that educators experience today influences the

quality of their practice and their impact on students. That, in turn, influences students' quality of life and economic, civic, and physical well-being.

For the past 41 years, our name has served us well. Today, though, we are so much more than our name indicates. We are an international association of learning educators. We focus on professional development, or learning. We are a professional association committed to advocacy, research, and practice.

Learning Forward stands for the link between educator learning and student achievement. Learning Forward intends to energize and engage our members and others to advocate for local, state, provincial, and federal policies, practices, and support systems that ensure collaborative, school-based, daily professional learning guided by a well-prepared facilitator who is frequently a teacher leader. Learning Forward calls for research that examines the link between professional learning, educator practice, and student achievement to inform policy, funding priority, and practice. Merging the words learning and forward in the logo serves as another reminder of the importance of community, collaboration, and common goals.

TEACHER LEADER TITLES

Teacher leaders within schools know about the name game. We

For more information about our name change visit www.learningforward.org/about/newname.cfm.

have collected a list of role titles during the time we've committed to serving teachers in leadership roles. The extensive list contains the various names for a teacher who serves other teachers by facilitating, guiding, supporting and providing effective professional learning that strengthens teaching and increases student achievement. The variation in names or titles causes confusion when attempting to refer to teacher leaders as a group. The distinctions are helpful, though, when seeking to define with precision the many different teacher-leader role configurations. Sometimes the confusion is exacerbated, especially when a teacher leader serving in one capacity in one school or school district is called by one name and another doing the same work in a different school or district is called by a different name.

Names matter. In the business world, company names convey powerful messages. Some refer to this message as the brand of a company. The name of a trusted company speaks of the company's integrity and commitment to customers. Our new name, too, carries a powerful message. Our members and the public can depend on us for the same great service, commitment to disseminating



cutting edge practice and information, advocacy for policies to enhance effective practices, and a renewed effort to ensure professional learning for student success.

ACTIONS TO TAKE

Now that NSDC is Learning Forward, teacher leaders who are members can be proud that their professional association continues to examine how to convey its core message through its brand. They might use this opportunity to examine and recommit to the primary purpose of their leadership — increasing student achievement. There are a number of possible actions for teacher leaders to take.

- They might talk with their school and district administrators about the name change and what it stands for.
- Together they could explore the school's or district's belief about

the role of professional learning in student achievement.

- Teacher leaders might encourage others to join together with the nearly 13,000 members of Learning Forward who are committed to ensuring that professional learning is a vital part of educators' workdays.
- They might embed Learning Forward's core message in their own work by reminding their colleagues, supervisors, and community members that learning is at the heart of any change.
- Teacher leaders might commit to their own professional learning to refine and expand their own practice so that it enriches the practice of others.


Even the new logo exemplifies the essence of Learning Forward's brand. The letters leaning forward convey the importance of looking beyond the present to the future each educator

is creating today. The cluster of dots represents the community of adults and students reaching into the future. Combining the words in the logo depict collaboration.

We celebrate with every teacher leader another new beginning as we launch our new name and look forward to serving each one as the professional association committed to learning forward.

REFERENCE

Leonhardt, David (July 27, 2010). The case for \$320,000 kindergarten teachers. *The New York Times*. Available at www.nytimes.com/2010/07/28/business/economy/28leonhardt.html.

• **Joellen Killion (joellen.killion@learningforward.org) is deputy executive director of Learning Forward.** 

Teachers Teaching Teachers is published eight times a year by Learning Forward, 504 S. Locust St., Oxford, OH 45056.
© Copyright, Learning Forward, 2010. All rights reserved.



COPY/REPRINT POLICY

All content in *Teachers Teaching Teachers* (T3) is copyright protected by Learning Forward and may not be copied or reprinted without permission.

Please see www.learningforward.org/library/publications/permpolicy.cfm for details as well as a form for submitting a request.

BACK COPIES

Articles from all Learning Forward publications are available at no additional charge to members in the members-only area of the Learning Forward web site. Nonmembers may purchase and download individual articles or entire publications for a fee.

POSTMASTER

Send address changes to Learning Forward, 504 S. Locust St., Oxford, OH 45056.

LEARNING FORWARD STAFF

Executive director
Stephanie Hirsh

Deputy executive director
Joellen Killion

Director of business services
Leslie Miller

Director of learning
Carol François

Director of strategy and development
Frederick Brown

Associate director of publications
Tracy Crow

Associate director of member experience
Tom Manning

Distinguished senior fellow
Hayes Mizell

Scholar laureate
Shirley Hord

BUSINESS OFFICE

504 S. Locust St.
Oxford OH 45056
513-523-6029
800-727-7288
Fax: 513-523-0638
office@learningforward.org
www.learningforward.org

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Ingrid Carney (2011)
President

Mark Diaz (2012)
President-elect

Sue Elliott (2011)

Cheryl Love (2010)

Charles Mason (2010)
Past president

Amanda Rivera (2012)

Kenneth Salim (2012)

Ed Wittchen (2010)

Editor: Anthony Armstrong

Designer: Kitty Black



The clang of dissonance can signal a paradigm shift

By Valerie von Frank

Q How do you get teachers to reconceptualize established frameworks?

I try to shift teachers from what I think has been the latent function of schools to sort and rank students, where teachers serve as gatekeepers, to embracing enthusiastically all kids learning at high levels.

When we start talking about all kids learning at high levels, some teachers say, "You're crazy. Be realistic about what's achievable in our classrooms on a day-to-day basis." Talking about all kids learning and student engagement is a paradigm shift. Coaches use a two-step process.

First, just ask the question, ask teachers to consciously reflect. Then begin to present some models, some examples of how that can happen.

At Heritage High School we

have chosen to focus on professional collaboration among teachers, as well as collaboration as an instructional model. Educators have to move away from relying excessively on whole group instruction. We've had to be intentionally progressive in learning how to embrace differentiation. Teachers at Heritage are becoming much more conscious of the critical nature of formative assessment so they can meet students where they are in the learning process.


We've also looked at grading. As educators, are we looking at sorting and ranking kids and at compliance, or are we pushing kids to understand at a higher level? Do our grading practices reflect our values? A growing number of our faculty are consciously trying to distinguish between grading a students' ability to apply their knowledge at the understanding level of learning, and grading simple recall at the knowledge level of learning. If we want learning to be enduring, we must demand that our students move beyond recall.

I think learning happens from

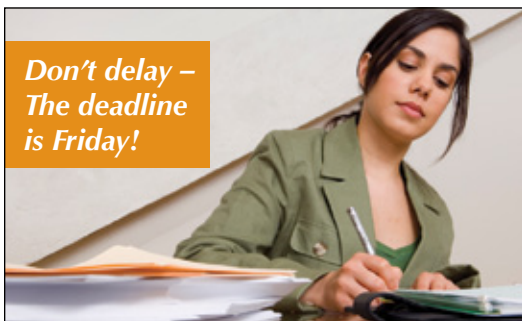
cognitive dissonance, for students and for teachers. When there's a conflict, people think, "I have to work this out." We try to find ways to create that dissonance, whether through reading *Understanding by Design* or bringing in outside leaders or asking teachers questions.

For some, awareness alone creates the paradigm shift. The coach needs to continually present data. Relative to other schools, our school's performance is high. Relative to the standards, there's still room to grow. We look at where the gaps are for individual students.

As a coach, you go where the energy is. One of my jobs is to keep us connected to our passion. I don't think we got into education, most of us, to sort and rank students or to be record keepers for kids' progress to get into the best colleges. We got into education to make a difference.

•
Valerie von Frank (valerievonfrank@aol.com) is an education writer and editor of *Learning Forward's* books. 

Tony Winger (TWinger@lps.k12.co.us) is a part-time social studies teacher and part-time instructional coach at Heritage High School in Littleton, Colo.



**Don't delay –
The deadline
is Friday!**

learningforward

2011 SUMMER CONFERENCE

for Teacher Leaders and the Administrators Who Support Them

Indianapolis • July 17–20, 2011

Apply online at www.learningforward.org/summerconference11.

**Proposal Deadline
Sept. 17**



Dream.Dare.Do.

Learning Forward 2010 Annual Conference

Dec. 4–8, 2010 • Atlanta, Georgia

“I had a wonderful experience and left with many ideas to implement and ways to facilitate.”

– 2009 Annual Conference attendee

DREAM of professional learning that advances student achievement.

DARE to experience learning and networking that will transform teaching and leadership practices.

DO what it takes – attend the Learning Forward Annual Conference in Atlanta!

*Register today for **THE** Learning Conference!*

- Over 300 concurrent and roundtable sessions in seven strands such as leadership, examining the impact, teaching quality, technology, fundamentals of professional learning, equity, and advocacy.
- More than 100 exhibitors offering valuable products and resources specific to professional learning.

Learn more and register at www.learningforward.org/conference10

SAVE \$50 on a 3- or 5-day registration fee when you register by Oct. 15, 2010.

“Overall, I loved the experience and feel as if it evoked the leader within me and provided me with the opportunity to reflect on my purpose and future goals in this role.”

– 2009 Annual Conference attendee

Keynote Speakers

Beverly Hall,
Douglas Reeves,
Andy Hargreaves,
Michele Norris,
and Ron Clark



Advancing professional learning for student success

800-727-7288 • www.learningforward.org