

THE LEARNING System

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

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TEACHER EVALUATION:

An opportunity
to leverage learning
at all levels



By **Stephanie Hirsh**

The national discussion about how to ensure effective teachers for all students is currently focused on specific elements of teacher evaluation systems. Such systems include a set of teacher performance standards that outline teacher knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with improved student performance. In addition to setting performance standards that specify effective practice, these systems establish procedures for objective judgment about teacher performance, identify strategies for developing teachers' competencies, and specify procedures for intervention or dismissal when necessary.

In addition, the national conversations about measuring teacher effectiveness and evaluating teachers have raised a number of concerns. Here are some of those concerns.

1. There is insufficient evidence about which teaching practices are most essential to producing better results for students.
2. Many teachers have never participated in a meaningful evaluation process and therefore do not connect their evaluation to professional improvement goals or processes.
3. Existing evaluation systems fail to distinguish between effective and ineffective teaching practices.

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Learning Forward has created this special expanded issue of *The Learning System* on one of the year's most important issues — teacher evaluation.

We hope the information and tools within are a valuable resource as you address this complex topic.



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

We are a nonprofit, international membership association of learning educators committed to advancing professional learning for student success.

www.learningforward.org



Learning Forward offers a challenge to school systems

Learning Forward is the new name of the National Staff Development Council. But it is much more. It is a vision and a new way of thinking. For school systems serious about enhancing human resources to increase student achievement, Learning Forward is a great opportunity. The name provides a powerful watchword school systems can use to spark courageous conversations that transform ineffective professional development.

Ironically, the best way a school system can begin to move forward is to pause. When organizations are engaged in frenetic activity — as many school systems are — they may not make time to reflect on their assumptions and effectiveness.

So it is with professional development. Unless a school system pauses to soberly review its processes for professional learning and the corresponding results, the momentum of the past will define the future.

What is known, what is familiar, and what is comfortable, rather than what is effective, will continue to shape educators' learning.


A thoughtful review of a school system's professional development will not occur without the leadership of one or more central office administrators. Everyone in a school system defers to authority for cues about priorities and new directions.

Central office administrators have the responsibility to demonstrate that they are personally open to new learning, even if the experience challenges their assumptions or perspectives. They can do that by seeking and taking seriously practitioners' honest feedback about the relevance, quality, and utility of the school systems' extant professional development. If teachers experience these administrators as sincere learners, the teachers will become helpful partners in changing professional development to make it more engaging and productive.

Implicit in Learning Forward is the concept that learning is a continuous process that is integral to how school systems administer professional development. Many central office administrators refer to their school systems "providing" or "delivering" professional development, but do they learn from it? School systems devote enormous resources to learning about their students' education, and its results, but they fail to examine and learn from the professional development of adults responsible for the students' education. To do so, administrators will want to regularly monitor and assess whether and to what extent professional development is accomplishing its intended purpose—raising the performance levels of educators and their students. Only by systematically and consistently collecting such data can school systems obtain the information necessary to learn how well professional development is working and how to increase its impact.

However, Learning Forward will mean little if the practice of professional development does not change. Enlightened school system administrators are increasingly using the right words when they talk about professional development: job-embedded, school-based, sustained, and learning communities. This may not be the breakthrough it seems because sooner or later most savvy administrators weave into their rhetoric the language of cutting-edge education concepts. What really matters is whether the day-to-day performance of teachers and principals improves as a direct result of their professional learning experiences. That will not occur without changing the substance as well as the language of professional development.

Learning Forward calls for central office administrators to use their positions and authority to move professional development into a future that is more demonstrably beneficial for both individual educators and the school system as a whole. The first step is for the administrators themselves to risk new learning about current professional development and how best to transform it. The second step is for administrators to lead, support, monitor, and assess the implementation of new, more effective professional learning practice. Learning Forward offers the resources, community, and support to take these bold steps.

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School systems can use Learning Forward's name to spark courageous conversations.



Leading professional learning for social justice

The Principal's Role in Professional Development for Social Justice: An Empirically Based Transformative Framework

Brad W. Kose. *Urban Education*, 44(6), November 2009, pp. 628-663.

OVERVIEW

The purpose of this particular study was to develop a framework outlining the principal's role in professional development for social justice.

STUDY APPROACH

The author identified specific principals committed to socially just teaching and learning and studied their leadership practices related to leading professional learning.

Selected findings

Through a review of the existing literature, the author identified five interrelated roles of the principal related to professional development. He used the roles to outline a framework to describe principals who effectively lead social justice professional development.

To promote social justice learning, principals' practices in particular roles included:

As **transformative visionaries**, principals developed and communicated a vision and goals. Their visions affirmed diversity, high achievement goals, and inclusion. They re-envisioned entire systems rather than modifying existing practices.

As **transformative structural leaders**, principals fostered teacher and organizational learning for social

justice by establishing teams and placing a high value on time and effective structures for team learning. Moving to an inclusion model for serving all students, principals fostered collaborative learning among general education teachers and specialists.

As **transformative cultural leaders**, principals established cultures with trusting relationships and collective responsibility for all students. Principals valued reflection on how personal and professional beliefs impacted socially just schooling. They demonstrated their values through what they read and shared, through participation in team learning, and by questioning whether school practices were serving all students.

As **transformative learning leaders**, principals promoted a combination of content-area learning and social identity development. Educators reflected on their social identity (including race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status), affirmed and learned about other cultures, and learned to teach students about diversity and social justice. In this role, principals also linked teachers with internal and external expertise and differentiated teacher learning.

As **transformative political leaders**, principals maximized external resources for professional learning and built schoolwide support for change.

Implications for system leaders

Principals concerned about social justice need to reflect on their social identities and develop deep commit-

Exploring the research base

Find syntheses of research studies that have implications for professional learning beginning with the fall issues of *The Learning Principal* and *The Learning System*. The newsletters will explore both current and seminal works. The syntheses are not necessarily comprehensive; rather descriptions are selective to serve the specific interests of newsletter readers.


To learn more about the research base that informs effective professional learning, search the evidence database on the Learning Forward web site (www.learningforward.org/evidence).

ments to a social justice agenda. Consider what support this will require in recruiting and developing school leaders.

Principals need professional learning and systemic support to become learning leaders for social justice. Explore the systemwide capacity and resources to support such principal development.

Principals often looked outside the school to find professional learning opportunities that supported academic learning and social justice objectives. Examine what professional learning the district offers for all staff to support the combined goals.

Consider how school goals for social justice professional learning align with districtwide improvement plans and whether the culture of the district supports the development of socially just cultures.

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tive teachers, recognize or reward excellent teachers, or support those who struggle.

4. Districts struggle with creating evaluation systems that appropriately balance formative and summative assessments.

As a result of these concerns and many others, policymakers at all levels are demanding attention to teacher evaluation systems. Several foundations, researchers, national organizations, and most school districts in Race to the Top states are engaged in designing better teacher evaluation systems.

While the current conversation is focused on the development of the criteria for effective teaching and the logistics of the evaluation

system, soon educators will begin to consider the professional development component of the evaluation system. It is essential that districts begin now to plan how they will leverage existing and create new professional development strategies to support teacher development as an essential element of every evaluation systems. District leaders will determine how their current professional development system will need to change to accommodate the targeted professional development associated with the new evaluation system.

ENSURING QUALITY LEARNING

It is incumbent on those designing targeted professional development to ensure that it meets the same standards of quality that are expected of team, school, and systemwide professional development. If targeted professional development is to achieve its intended outcomes, adhering to NSDC's Standards for Staff Development is essential. Three examples of the application of the standards to targeted professional development follow.

- **The Learning Communities standard:** District and school leaders will need to work with individuals to leverage their existing team and schoolwide professional learning opportunities to achieve individual learning goals.
- **The Learning standard:** As teachers and leaders shape targeted learning, they honor teachers' preferences about the learning and support that will best serve them. Teachers at different stages in their careers have different needs and expertise, and these are considered in the



Teacher evaluation systems, when well-developed and thoughtfully implemented, contribute to a district's efforts to ensure effective teaching for every student.

creation of the individual development plan.

- **The Equity standard:** The Equity standard identifies expected practices of teachers that support all students experiencing high expectations, supportive learning environments, and equitable opportunities for success. The Equity standard offers one example of content that may become the focus for a targeted learning plan if the evaluator and teacher agree it is a priority.

DIFFERENT LEARNING, DIFFERENT PURPOSES

Detailed performance standards and targeted professional development are frequently identified as key components of evaluation systems. District and school leaders will plan targeted professional development to help individual teachers develop, refine, and successfully implement those teaching practices most highly correlated with improving student learning. When there is a gap between a teacher's practices and predetermined performance standards, districts and principals will use targeted professional development to bridge the gap.

The use of targeted professional development as a part of an improvement framework is essential, yet insufficient to meet a school's goals of reaching all children. Targeted professional development can be narrowly focused on the needs of individual teachers or classrooms and potentially fragment a school's efforts to achieve schoolwide goals. Targeted professional development doesn't erase the continued need for team and schoolwide professional learning in which educa-



How targeted professional learning fits into a comprehensive cycle of continuous learning supported by teams of peers, p. 6.

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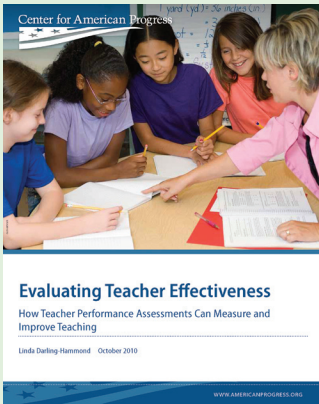
For further reading

Several educators and organizations are addressing aspects of the teacher evaluation question. To examine various facets of the topic, explore these resources.

Evaluating Teacher Effectiveness: How Teacher Performance Assessments Can Measure and Improve Teaching

Center for American Progress, October 2010

Meeting the expectation that all students will learn to high standards will require a transformation in



the ways in which our education system attracts, prepares, supports, and develops expert teachers who can teach in more powerful ways, a transformation that depends in part on the ways in which these abilities are understood and assessed. This report describes how

assessments of teacher performance for licensing and certification can both reflect and predict teachers' success with children so that they can not only inform

personnel decisions, but also leverage improvements in preparation, mentoring, and professional development.

www.americanprogress.org/issues/2010/10/teacher_effectiveness.html

Measures of Effective Teaching Project

Funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to develop reliable measures of effective teaching, this project partners researchers with school districts, principals, teachers, and unions to gather data to inform teacher observations, evaluations, and continuous improvement. Explore questions related to teacher effectiveness and read a recent report with preliminary findings from the project's first stage of research.

www.metproject.org

National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality

This web site offers a variety of reports and resources related to teacher evaluation and effectiveness, including a recent brief on the particular challenges of evaluating special education and ELL specialists. Also available for exploring teacher evaluation and ties to professional learning are *Critical Decisions Guide: Building Teacher Effectiveness Systems* and *Job-Embedded Professional Development: What It Is, Who Is Responsible, and How to Get It Done Well* (a report on which Learning Forward served as a coauthor).

www.tqsource.org

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tors examine data for grade levels, subject areas, or entire schools; set achievement goals for larger groups of students; and engage in professional learning to meet those goals. Through these collaborative professional learning opportunities, teachers develop collective responsibility for ensuring that all students have access to the best teaching in a grade level, subject matter, or entire school. With a true sense of collective responsibility, teachers share best practices across classrooms, develop common language for and practices in instruction and assessment, and implement consistent, calibrated grading practices. It is in these settings that teachers can tap the internal expertise among their colleagues to design the most powerful lessons and leverage outside expertise to supplement their internal efforts.

Teacher evaluation systems, when well-developed and thoughtfully implemented, contribute to a district's efforts to ensure effective teaching for every student. In addition, a strong evaluation system supports continuous professional growth for educators. If the professional development component is weak or missing from a teacher evaluation system, the system will remain the perfunctory exercise it is now for so many educators. When effective professional development is a core component of an evaluation system, it strengthens and refines teaching and increases student learning.

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How targeted professional learning fits into a comprehensive cycle of continuous learning supported by teams of peers

At Benson High, it's the time of year when teachers are writing their individual professional development plans. After her principal conducted the last in a series of observations, Rita, a fifth-year science teacher, met with her principal for her summative evaluation conference. Together they reviewed the performance standards, notes from the observations the principal had recorded throughout the year, and documentation Rita had captured in her professional portfolio. Rita and the principal agreed that she exceeded expectations in almost every standard. Rita acknowledged that she continued to be challenged with the differentiating instruction standard, in particular for her English language learners. The principal and Rita agreed that this would be an appropriate place to focus her professional learning for the next year. The principal mentioned that she was aware that the school improvement team had already identified some professional learning strategies for next year that she thought would be helpful to Rita and encouraged her to meet with a member of the team to learn more about them.

Over the next few weeks, Rita prepared her individual professional development plan. She drafted her SMART goals and identified the professional development and support that she needed to address them.

At the weekly learning team



meeting, Rita asked her colleagues if any others were focusing their learning plans on differentiating for ELL students. She shared her goal with her colleagues, hoping that she would be able to work collaboratively with them to achieve it. Several teachers agreed that it was an area of focus for them as well and they welcomed collaboration around this goal. Other members of the team said they had some strategies they would be glad to share and then identified their own goals for the next year, describing the help they wanted from their colleagues. By the end of the meeting, everyone had completed a significant portion of his or her individual professional development plan and was looking forward

to the follow-up meetings with the principal.

Later that week Rita met with a representative of the schoolwide council to learn more about what was being planned for next year that would contribute to her goals. Finally, she met with the instructional coach to get suggestions that she might integrate into her plan to support her learning and improve her practice.

When Rita returned to her principal with a draft of her plan, she was able to say that she was confident that the professional development she outlined would enable her to meet her goals as well as contribute to the learning of her colleagues and their students.

— *Stephanie Hirsh*

EXPANDED EDITION

Integrating targeted professional development into comprehensive learning systems:

A discussion protocol

When targeted professional development is introduced as a component of reformed teacher evaluation systems, it simultaneously becomes a part of a district professional development plan. As a result, it is important that leaders consider the linkages between teacher evaluation systems and the targeted professional development as well as connections among targeted professional development and the other parts of the professional development system. Leaders have a responsibility to ensure all professional development connects and supports the achievement of district and school goals for educators and students.

The tools that follow offer suggestions for examining and discussing professional learning within and beyond the context of teacher evaluation systems.



TOOLS

- Connecting teacher evaluation and targeted professional development, pp. 8-9
- Integrating targeted professional development into comprehensive learning systems, pp. 10-11

Student learning needs should drive professional development

Hayes Mizell, Learning Forward's distinguished senior fellow, commenting recently on the topic of teacher evaluation, noted:



The fact that many districts will now add a new dimension to their professional development agenda called targeted professional development seems to implicitly raise the issue of what should be the priority use of what are currently limited professional development resources.

One big question is whether teacher evaluation, and the professional development dimensions of it, will swamp attention to and resource allocations for other worthy professional development roles. One possibility is that school systems will spread professional resources among all possible professional development functions.

Both scenarios surface the real problem -- that people are not thinking about professional development in a coherent way, and that leads to it lurching from one purpose to another. There is no anchor philosophy or beliefs or use of professional development, so everyone seizes on professional development as a response to whatever they perceive as a particular problem. It is important to remember that student learning needs should drive professional development.

Connecting teacher evaluation and targeted professional development

As districts begin to implement new evaluation systems and expand their current professional development system to provide for targeted support, stakeholders will benefit from answering several questions related to both processes.

Use the questions below to guide a preliminary

discussion as new systems are implemented. Seek clarity about the intersection of these systems and think about how these systems support the district's broader goals for professional development and student learning.

	TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM	TARGETED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
What principles, beliefs, or assumptions guide our systems?		
What is its purpose?		
What are the core processes?		
What are roles and responsibilities for those being evaluated?		

	TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM	TARGETED PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT
What are roles and responsibilities for those conducting evaluation?		
What are possible roles and contributions for central office administrators?		
Are there contributions, roles, or responsibilities for other support staff. i.e. coaches, resource staff, mentors, etc.?		
What is the timeline?		
What resources (human, fiscal, physical) are needed and available?		
What are the measures for success?		

Integrating targeted professional development into comprehensive learning systems

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT SERVES FOUR PURPOSES:

- **Individual, targeted development** to enhance individual competencies related to performance standards and individual results.
- **Team-based** (grade level, subject area, vertical) to ensure consistency and quality in instruction, curriculum implementation, assessment, and student results.
- **Schoolwide** to ensure schoolwide consistency and quality aligned with the school’s instructional framework and student support systems.
- **Program implementation** to ensure high fidelity of implementation with district programs such as curriculum, social skills, etc.

To clarify the roles and purposes of all professional learning in the district, districts might consider convening stakeholders in professional development (including teachers, teacher leaders, principals, district office administrators, and professional development providers) to discuss potential responses to the questions posed on p. 11 and add other questions relevant to its unique teacher evaluation and professional development systems.

It will be useful in the discussion to identify common expectations and responses across items and to continue the conversation even when there may be disagreements across the various groups. Clear and consistent expectations for



each professional development component contribute to the strength and success of the overall plan. In addition, as stakeholders engage others in these conversations, they will find new opportunities for increasing the impact from individual classrooms to teams to schools to systems and to communities so that these efforts accelerate investment and produce widespread, deep changes in student learning.

As a final stage in the discussion, stakeholders might consider

the principles, beliefs, or assumptions that underlie all the answers and the goals the district sets out to achieve with its professional development. Write a vision statement and guiding principles as a result of this conversation.

EXAMINING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMPREHENSIVELY

Questions	Individual targeted professional development	Team-based professional development	Schoolwide professional development	Program implementation professional development
What are district examples of professional learning?				
Who sets learning goals?				
Who sets the learning agenda?				
How is success measured?				
Who is responsible for measuring success?				
How is progress monitored?				
Who is responsible for monitoring progress?				
What are typical artifacts used as evidence of change in teacher practice?				
What are typical artifacts used as evidence of change in student learning?				