No more excuses — let's get busy with the challenges at hand

Today we know more than ever about what constitutes effective teaching and how we can ensure more students leave their K-12 education career- and college-ready. Research has consistently affirmed the importance of two factors in schools that produce the best results for students: the quality of teaching and leadership. Two foundations have stepped up to provide educators with a deeper understanding of findings from research and their application in schools. The 10-year investment by The Wallace Foundation in school leadership has led to the revision of leadership standards, development of leadership frameworks, validation of leader evaluation tools, and guidance for the development of future leaders. District staff members concerned about poor leadership or inadequate support can turn to **www.wallacefoundation. org/knowledge-center** for guidance.

Equally important is the emergence of research on what constitutes effective teaching. While many independent efforts have been under way for years, the intensive focus of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation on what constitutes effective teaching has put the nation's spotlight on the issue. The foundation's website (**www. gatesfoundation.org/college-ready-education**) includes research, tools, and resources for building systems that lead to more effective teaching.

However, translating these important findings into successful outcomes for students and educators will live or die by state, provincial, and school district systems of professional learning. Professional learning is the only process educators have for systematically moving research findings into practice. School systems need commitment, leadership, resources, designs, and data — in other words, attention to the Standards for Professional Learning.

Everyone has an important role to play in moving research into practice.

Policymakers: Govern and regulate with expectation and support for continuous improvement as key to achieving goals. Support the development of systems of professional learning that ensure educators understand the standards by which their performance will be assessed and the means they can access to support continuous growth.

District office staff: Build systems of professional learning that are focused on supporting all students and staff members to achieve performance outcomes. Adopt a vision for professional learning that builds collective responsibility, supports school-focused improvement, and provides skilled facilitation for ongoing team-based learning and problem solving. Use the Standards for Professional Learning to guide the work.

Principals and teachers: Focus on data to determine the results you want for all students and the learning and support you need to ensure their success. Organize as learning communities and assume responsibilities for the success of all students and educators. Commit to ongoing learning and see that your best practices spread from classroom to classroom and school to school. Document the impact of your professional learning so that others understand why continued support and advocacy is essential.

Technical assistance providers: Listen to your education partners to understand the help they seek in meeting student and educator needs. When designing professional learning, put the standards front and center so your partners understand the body of research from which you work. Be the advocate for standards-based professional learning and help educators get it right. Document results and share findings so that more schools and school systems understand professional learning's importance and support increases for best practices.

Let's get busy with the challenges at hand. We have valuable new tools to address them. ■

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