3 ways to align professional learning goals to student goals using data

With the onset of widespread school improvement and reform efforts, including accountability and educator effectiveness systems, data has gained recognition as a lever for assessing student learning, increasing teacher effectiveness, improving classroom practice, and narrowing achievement gaps among student subgroups. Interestingly, though, collecting, analyzing, and using data to inform practice has somehow escaped professional learning planning.

The Standards for Professional Learning stress that effective professional learning is embedded in a culture committed to continuous improvement and informed by data and research on student and educator performance. The Data standard describes the varied ways that teacher leaders can use data to align professional learning to student learning, including:

1. **To determine content and focus.**
   As a leader and facilitator of learning, deciding the focus of professional learning begins with the analysis of multiple sources and types of data, including student work, grades, formative assessments, and portfolios. These data combine to help identify student learning needs, inform educator learning needs, and contribute to decisions about the appropriate content for professional learning. For example, before planning professional learning for individuals, teams, or whole school staff, ensure that educator learning goals align with corresponding student learning goals to make the connections explicit. This avoids gaps or inconsistencies, limits professional learning based on interests or fads, and ensures that the professional learning is focused on the most appropriate content to impact student results.

2. **To celebrate successes and identify new goals for continuous improvement.**
   Teams need to collect and share data frequently, designating time to share successes and lessons learned, and to identify instructional practices needing refinement based on specific student goals and benchmarks. Work with teams to engage in meaningful collegial conversations using protocols and tools designed to synthesize data analysis, brainstorm possible causes for student learning challenges, and identify additional sources of data. By doing so, participants will have a more comprehensive picture of student learning needs to determine new student learning goals and the appropriate knowledge, skills, and practices to gain through ongoing professional learning. Such practices begin the cycle of continuous improvement.

3. **To determine quality and effectiveness.**
   Learning leaders should collaborate with the school leadership team to identify metrics to determine the impact of a particular program, strategy, or instructional practice. Develop evaluation questions, identify methods, and create a timeline for collecting and interpreting data to engage teams in an ongoing evaluation of professional learning. By illuminating how professional learning goals produce results for students, teacher leaders can identify and share critical information on effectiveness and necessary improvements.

Teacher leaders, coaches, and instructional specialists have an opportunity to help others take more sophisticated steps with their professional learning by using data to inform decisions, set goals and benchmarks, and prioritize resources and support for professional learning.

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> **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.
> **Source: Learning Forward. (2011).** *Standards for professional learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.