

# Tools *for* LEARNING SCHOOLS

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

## WHERE DO I START?

*How to find entry points for introducing  
the Standards for Professional Learning*

By Anthony Armstrong

A common question many educators ask about the new Standards for Professional Learning is, “Where do I start?” With so much attention focused on more widely discussed topics, such as teacher evaluation or Common Core standards, it can be a daunting task to introduce a new, unfamiliar topic to school and district leaders. The key to getting started, though, is to use current initiatives as entry points for discussions about standards-based professional learning.

The question of where to start is a challenge many educators face, said Jacqueline Kennedy, Learning Forward’s associate director of strategic initiatives. “There may be 12 different central office departments that need to start using the standards to inform decisions and plans for professional learning, so it can be difficult to see where to begin. The question to ask is ‘what am I working on now?’ Whether it is teacher evaluation, teacher leadership, or Common Core, implementing these kinds of initiatives can be the best time to start having conversations about the role of professional learning in making progress, and the standards are a must to achieve effective professional learning.”

Carlos X. Leal, instructional director for professional learning at Rochester City School District (N.Y.), chose to address

this challenge of how to implement the standards in his school district when he joined Learning Forward’s Academy in 2009. “My problem of practice was how to systemically support a move from traditional professional development to standards-based professional learning in my district,” said Leal.

According to Leal, education staff and leadership in Rochester were aware of the standards but had not fully realized implementation, so he started with changing the way district-level leadership thought about professional development. “I wanted for us to collectively redefine professional development as professional learning,” explained Leal. “We went through the standards and additional resources, such as the *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning* (Easton, 2008) book, to get us thinking differently about professional development. Now, when we are having conversations with school leaders, our directors will be able to support and redirect those conversations based on the standards.”

Leal’s department, which consists of Leal and one other person serving a district with 32,000 students, is using the standards to “frame their understanding of the work they should be doing.” This includes such work as retooling the district’s professional de-

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## Resources to help introduce the Standards for Professional Learning

### STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

This free online resource offers the standards and additional resources to support their implementation.

[www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning](http://www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning)

### STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING BOOK

The standards are also available in printed books.

[www.learningforward.org/bookstore/standards-for-professional-learning](http://www.learningforward.org/bookstore/standards-for-professional-learning)

### JSD, AUGUST 2011

This issue of *JSD* introduces the standards with detailed descriptions, articles about how practitioners use each of the standards, and perspectives from numerous professionals throughout the field.

[www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/jsd-landing/jsd/2012/06/30/august-2011-vol.-32-no.-4](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/jsd-landing/jsd/2012/06/30/august-2011-vol.-32-no.-4)

### QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE

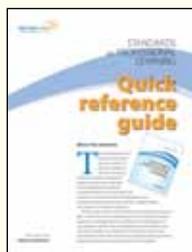
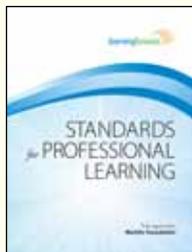
This brief guide introduces the standards and their relationship to effective professional learning and student results. Suggestions for how different roles can use the standards are included.

[www.learningforward.org/docs/pdf/standardsreferenceguide.pdf](http://www.learningforward.org/docs/pdf/standardsreferenceguide.pdf)

### FACILITATOR GUIDE

Designed to assist facilitators in introducing and helping others implement the standards, this free guide includes practical activities, reflection questions, and tools to deepen users' understanding of the standards and how effective professional learning leads to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results.

[www.learningforward.org/standards/facilitator-guide](http://www.learningforward.org/standards/facilitator-guide)



*Continued from p. 1*

velopment plan, how courses are developed, leadership roles, the importance of collaboration, how to combine resources for greater impact, etc.

“We are trying to introduce the standards through application, instead of just telling people about them,” said Leal. “When we develop our sessions, the sessions themselves will use collaborative approaches to professional learning. In the past, people would come alone, but now, for some sessions, we will ask attendees to come in pairs or teams. We have conversations with administrators and teams around developing PD plans, and within those conversations we incorporate the standards. We are trying to live the work and have that be the example.”

To help staffs understand the role of the standards and how they apply, Leal’s office worked with Learning Forward to create a custom standards-based tool kit that includes introductions to the standards, implications for each of the different roles within the district, and protocols for implementation. “This tool kit will be the guiding vehicle for realigning and supporting the professional development plan for staff at each level and role within

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

the district,” said Leal. “It creates a common language and understanding of the work aligned to the standards and our roles to support a change from professional development to professional learning. For instance, one section of the tool kit explores what collaboration is and how we can plan for school wide and team collaboration, including how to structure that time and how to use data to plan collaborative learning.”

Schools participating in the Learning School Alliance use the book *Becoming a Learning School* (NSDC, 2009) in a similar fashion to understand principles of high-quality professional learning and establish common language.

Over the summer, Leal has been talking with building-level leaders, such as principals and school-based planning teams, to help them find entry points for moving toward standards-based professional learning. “I figure out where they are in their process, provide supportive resources, illustrate how the standards apply to their roles and processes, and talk about what resources we have available to help,” said Leal. “When I sit with an administrative team or school-based planning team to discuss their professional development plan or thoughts for planning, we might have a conversation around coordinating available resources at the district level, such as online professional learning texts that can support collegial learning circles, school-wide reads, follow-up to coaching conversations, etc. This equates to a

*Continued on p. 3*

*Continued from p. 2*

cost savings to the school and an entry point to strengthen the relationship between the school and the office of professional learning.”

For the coming school year, Leal will continue to support implementing the standards through workshops and courses, site visits, and on-site meetings at each school to walk teacher leaders and administrators through the various resources available to support the school’s job-embedded professional development.

“Our journey of moving toward professional learning and bringing the standards to life is a collaboration between us, the union, our teacher center, and other various groups within the district,” said Leal. “We have used focus groups and an advisory committee to talk through a lot of the things that are happening as we align practices. It has been a wonderful experience, and we have all learned a great deal from one another. The most powerful lesson learned was that we all want and strive for the same thing — high-quality professional learning across the system.”

“People ask me, ‘I’m just a teacher, or coach, or curriculum person, what can I do?’” said Kennedy. “I tell them to start using the standards with their own department or in their own work, which is a great opportunity to share the standards with more people. This kind of organic growth is how it all starts,” said Kennedy.

## REFERENCES

**Easton, L.B. (Ed.). (2008).** *Powerful designs for professional learning* (2nd ed.). Oxford, OH: NSDC.

**Killion, J. & Roy, P. (2009).** *Becoming a learning school*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

**Anthony Armstrong (anthony.armstrong@learningforward.org) is publications editor for Learning Forward.** ●

## 5 steps to help others see the standards in practice

**W**hen the new standards were introduced, Learning Forward, supported by MetLife Foundation, created a free downloadable facilitator’s guide that offers activities and tools to help introduce and deepen understanding of the newly revised Standards for Professional Learning.

Below are some activities taken from Unit 6 of the guide that help others understand what the standards look like in practice. Use the five activities below, and their accompanying tools on pp. 4-7 of this newsletter, to help others make the connections between the standards and their everyday practice.

### 1. Become familiar with how the standards are interconnected.

Each individual standard cannot fulfill its purpose without the other standards. To help others understand these relationships, review the sample questions on the tool on p. 4, Connecting the standards. Discuss how decisions about each standard relate to the other standards.

“The example questions are about learning designs,” said Kennedy. “They consider how learning designs affect each other standard. For example, how learning designs help communities connect to the data they use.”

### 2. Create questions of connectedness.

Use the tool on p. 5, How my standard connects, to have participants create their own questions that demonstrate connectedness among the standards.

“Ask deconstructing questions,” suggests Kennedy. “Such as what exactly do we mean, how do we do it, who is involved, what does this look like, how do we build capacity, etc.”

### 3. Review implications for when elements of a standard are missing.

Use the tool on p. 6, Managing changes in practice, to help learners understand what happens when one of the standards isn’t implemented. Each row contains a missing standard, and the final column of the right

names the implications of not having that standard in place in a system. Explain how the standards are interdependent and an individual standard cannot succeed on its own.

### 4. Have participants identify elements missing in their own work.

Once others understand the implications of neglecting a standard, have participants reflect upon their own work and identify which standards are missing or weak and possible solutions. Reading down the right side of the chart may help participants identify which standards are missing in their school or system.

“The idea is to help participants have dialogue,” explained Kennedy. “If Leadership is missing, the chart indicates that there is a lack of support. So the conversation is ‘yes, we agree, and this is how we might address the missing Leadership elements.’ The group can then explore the core elements of the Leadership standard and what actions or solutions would be most helpful.”

### 5. Identify driving and restraining forces and how to increase or decrease.

Participants then partner with others to use the tool on p. 7, Moving standards into practice, to examine the various driving and restraining forces and how to increase or decrease them.

“This exercise helps participants recognize the two forces at work and to start thinking of how to best navigate those. For example, driving forces might be a new superintendent who is forward thinking, or the new implementation of Common Core,” said Kennedy. “While restraining forces could be budget cuts and layoffs.”

*For more details about these and other guided activities and presentations to help introduce the standards to others, download the Facilitator Guide for the Standards for Professional Learning at [www.learningforward.org/standards/facilitator-guide](http://www.learningforward.org/standards/facilitator-guide).*

**Adapted from: Learning Forward. (2012).** *Facilitator guide: Standards for Professional Learning*. Oxford, OH: Author.

## Connecting the standards

Use this handout as an example of how the standards work interdependently. Review the chart with participants. Explain that the focus of the example is on Learning Designs, and discuss each set of standards' questions and how they demonstrate how decisions about the Learning Designs standard relate to the other standards.

STANDARDS	CONNECTING QUESTIONS
<b>Learning Communities</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do learning communities select learning designs that contribute to building collective responsibility while maintaining accountability and alignment?</li> <li>• Which learning designs support continuous improvement?</li> </ul>
<b>Leadership</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do leaders contribute to decisions about learning designs?</li> <li>• What are leaders expected to know about learning designs?</li> <li>• What types of support systems and structures are needed for the more frequently used learning designs?</li> </ul>
<b>Resources</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Which learning designs require more resources? Fewer resources?</li> <li>• How can technology enhance learning designs to extend learning and results?</li> <li>• What resources exist within a school to support various learning designs?</li> </ul>
<b>Data</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How can data about educators, students, and systems contribute to the selection of learning designs?</li> <li>• What other data are helpful in selecting learning designs?</li> <li>• What data are useful to assess the effectiveness of selected learning designs?</li> </ul>
<b>Learning Designs</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What factors are important to consider when selecting learning designs?</li> <li>• Which learning designs contribute to active engagement of learners?</li> <li>• What theories and principles about learning guide the selection of learning designs?</li> </ul>
<b>Implementation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What learning designs advance implementation?</li> <li>• How can selected learning designs be enhanced to integrate frequent constructive feedback?</li> <li>• Which learning designs are more appropriate for various stages of implementation?</li> </ul>
<b>Outcomes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do designers of professional learning use performance standards and student learning outcomes as they design learning?</li> <li>• How can designers link past learning with current and future learning through their choice of learning designs?</li> </ul>

## How my standard connects

**A**fter reviewing Connecting the Standards on the previous page, assign the remaining six standards among table groups.

Have participants use this form to create their own set of questions that demonstrate the connectivity of their standard with the others. (As a rule of thumb, allow 10 minutes for groups of four to six participants, adding two minutes for each additional participant per group.)

Once time has elapsed, debrief which standards were easier to make connections to and which were more difficult. Ask for volunteers to share.

<b>Standard</b> _____	<b>My standard</b> _____	<b>Standard</b> _____
<b>Standard</b> _____		<b>Standard</b> _____
<b>Standard</b> _____		<b>Standard</b> _____

# Moving standards into practice

Ask participants to connect with an elbow partner to identify driving and restraining forces to implementing the standards and make suggestions for increasing and decreasing their respective effects.

<b>DRIVING FORCES</b> Resources and conditions that support implementation and application of the standards.	<b>RESTRAINING FORCES</b> Barriers and challenges to implementation and application of the standards.

<b>How can you increase the driving forces?</b>	<b>How can you decrease the restraining forces?</b>

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### BUSINESS OFFICE

504 S. Locust St.

Oxford OH 45056

513-523-6029

800-727-7288

Fax: 513-523-0638

[office@learningforward.org](mailto:office@learningforward.org)

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## Reports highlight elements of effective professional learning

Learning Forward has released two reports to give educators, policymakers, and community members a deeper understanding of high-quality professional learning and the role it plays in building educator capacity.

- **Meet the Promise of Content Standards: Professional Learning Required** focuses on the critical role that professional learning plays in implementing content standards. Outlining a vision for educators supported through high-quality professional learning, the brief describes elements of effective professional learning as well as recommendations for action for educators at the federal, state, system, school, and individual level. The brief is part of Learning Forward's initiative Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core. [www.learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core)
- **Building a Learning Community: A Tale of Two Schools** documents the elements that make professional learning communities effective. Authors Dan Mindich and Ann Lieberman present case studies of two schools drawn from survey data of 33 New Jersey public schools involved in a state-sponsored professional learning community training program. Among the key findings: Sustaining focus is vital, collegiality is not enough, and leadership is key. [www.learningforward.org/publications/status-of-professional-learning](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/status-of-professional-learning)