



Seize opportunities to lead and serve, and create opportunities for others to do so, too

As I come to the end of my term as president of Learning Forward, I have been reflecting on how Learning Forward has influenced my professional growth as an educator and as a leader. When I was nominated to run for Learning Forward's board of trustees, I was honored to be considered for such a significant position in an organization that has continually challenged and developed my thinking and practice as an educator and growing leader. As a trustee and as president, I have contributed to the development of Learning Forward's strategic plan, supported innovative partnerships that expand our international reach, and advocated for effective professional learning with local, state, and federal officials and legislators. I have been privileged to lead and serve in an organization that shared many of my values and beliefs about teaching and learning, school improvement, and educator development.

Indeed, my involvement with and service to Learning Forward grew out of my desire to become part of a community of like-minded professionals. Like other early career teachers, I was interested in exploring leadership opportunities and having an expanded sphere of influence beyond my own classroom (Johnson & the

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Project on the Next Generation of Teachers, 2004). Learning Forward was a great match: Whether through participation in the Learning Forward Academy, presentations at annual and summer conferences, or volunteering with the New England affiliate, I found that Learning Forward continues to provide numerous avenues for leadership. Of course, these experiences did not happen by accident.

Like other aspiring leaders, I benefited from having supervisors who provided me with opportunities: my principal, Charles Skidmore, asked me to lead a small learning community as a young teacher; Sonja Brookins Santelises, then assistant superintendent for professional development in Boston, supported my participation in the Learning Forward Academy; and Past President Ingrid Carney encouraged me to explore leadership roles in Learning Forward. These mentors looked out for me and asked me to assume important responsibilities. Now as I lead and mentor educators, I look to create the same opportunities for others.

It is also important to note that I actively sought opportunities to lead and to serve as a young educator. I looked for volunteer roles in organizations that shared my values. I asked my supervisors and mentors



about their career paths and the roles they played. I did not wait to be tapped by others — I put myself forward as someone ready who was ready to contribute and ready to serve.

Learning Forward's members serve in a variety of leadership roles in their schools and communities, but we can all do more. As we continually cultivate and build the next generation of leaders who will help us realize our collective vision — that every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves — I hope that all of us look out for those who are ready to be drafted while also seizing opportunities to expand our own influence and, ultimately, our own educational legacy.

REFERENCE

Johnson, S.M. & the Project on the Next Generation of Teachers. (2004). *Finders and keepers: Helping new teachers survive and thrive in our schools* (1st ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. ■