Q&A with
CARINA WONG

Carina Wong, deputy director of education at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, speaks with Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh about the foundation's investment in iPD.

CREATIVE SPARKS

INNOVATIONS FUEL A NEW VISION FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

By Stephanie Hirsh

Stephanie Hirsh: What is innovative professional development — or iPD — and how does it differ from traditional professional development?

Carina Wong: We think about iPD as creating more effective learning systems for teachers, schools, and districts. We know that many professional learning opportunities are not having an impact on teacher practice. Traditional professional learning seems to be one-size-fits-all, and it's often something done "to" teachers. We think teachers need to have ownership of their growth and to develop both individually and as part of a collective team. iPD uses data about where individual teachers are in their professional practice to identify where they need support, gives teachers access to multiple models of delivery to fit their learning styles, and provides them with continuous feedback.

Hirsh: How will iPD impact how the Gates Foundation scales its investments?

Wong: Over the last three years, we have made significant investments in supporting teachers as they try to implement Common Core State Standards. We've learned a lot about what it takes to have an impact on classroom practice and to get teachers to own the work and be part of a collaborative community. (See www.literacydesigncollaborative.org and www.mygroupgenius.org.)

We are using some of the same strategies that helped us successfully scale that work as part of our iPD scaling strategy. We put teachers at the center of the work, focus on a few key levers that have a ripple effect across the system, create a common language, and think about scale in nontraditional ways (i.e. through viral spread and teacher networks).

CARINA WONG

Carina Wong is deputy director of education at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. She leads the foundation's program work on teacher supports related to standards, assessment, curriculum, and instruction and on student supports related to games as learning and assessment, creating a college-going culture, and academic motivation and engagement.

Wong has worked in education policy at the national, state, and local levels for 15 years. She was director of the Bureau of Assessment and Accountability at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, where she implemented No Child Left Behind reforms for the state.

Previously, she worked in the Philadelphia School District as part of a $150 million Annenberg Challenge Grant and served as director of youth policy and education at the Washington, D.C.-based National Center on Education and the Economy.

Most recently, Wong was executive director of the Chez Panisse Foundation, where she led that organization in addressing a range of issues such as implementing a districtwide healthy meal program and developing tools to replicate a national hands-on kitchen and garden educational program.

Hirsh: It's interesting how the notion of iPD has moved from innovative to individualized to personalized.

Wong: One thing that I think folks misperceive when we say "I" and mean innovative or individualized is that this is just about individual development and not about the collective development of teachers. We have to do both — create personalized pathways for teachers and create collaborative communities where teachers are leading the professional learning.

Hirsh: I love the fact that you deliberately recognize that individualized could lead to fragmented teacher learning efforts. What contribution to the field of professional learning do you aspire to make from the iPD investment?

Wong: About a year ago, we launched the iPD portfolio and invested in new modes of delivery, ranging from games that help teachers improve their practice to remote coaching and video feedback systems. This year, we are launching the iPD challenge, an effort to create scalable iPD solutions in a set of districts. (See the list of districts below.)

We wanted to focus on the system and what it would take to redesign it with an eye toward creating effective learning systems. While we are working with a small set of districts to start, we plan to create a much larger community of practice around this work.

HOW DISTRICTS WILL BENEFIT

Hirsh: Tell us more about what will be expected from school systems selected for the challenge.

Wong: The iPD challenge is designed to help districts in several ways. It will create much more effective learning systems that include choices and higher-quality content, a balance of individual and collective learning, higher levels of teacher commitment and ownership, informed by more sophisticated data analyses. The challenge will increase district use of more effective models of delivery — including in-practice feedback, video, simulations, online and blended learning courses — and new forms of teacher collaboration such as professional learning experiences designed by teachers and led by teachers to accelerate implementation of the Common Core.

The challenge will help districts build systems and processes for optimizing existing resources, tracking the quality, cost, and efficacy of professional development, creating supportive policies and structures that remove barriers to innovations, and supporting committed leaders in implementation.

Another goal is to create more scalable solutions that travel across networks quickly and more broadly. All participating districts belong to at least one network and will commit to solutions that can be used across multiple networks rather than boutique solutions that can only be used in one place. With this, districts will demonstrate how professional learning systems connect specifically to improvement of instruction and learning by individuals and groups.

Hirsh: What do you expect at the end of your investment in such district efforts?

Wong: I recently read a book by Will Richardson called *Why School?* (TED Conferences, 2012). He asks students, "How do your teachers learn?" and mostly gets answers like: "They go to conferences. They take after-school workshops. They read books." Students see teachers' learning as an event, not an ongoing process. How sad and how true, I thought.

With the iPD challenge, we want to change that image of professional learning. We want to see a variety of roles for teachers in leading professional learning and greater ownership. We should see high-quality professional learning choices in the marketplace that have stronger alignment to Common Core and effective teaching practices. There should be assessment systems and feedback loops built into professional learning so we can have better data on their impact and quality. Ultimately, this is about doing whatever it takes to improve teaching and learning for our students.

Hirsh: What challenges do you expect your sites to address?

Wong: I think one of the biggest challenges that the districts will face is how to think very differently about engaging teachers in developing and leading an iPD system. If you really put teachers at the center of this work, it means redesigning systems so that they can lead and their work is more manageable.

Another challenge is going to be getting districts to really adopt scalable solutions that travel well. We're not looking for boutique solutions but are asking professional learning providers to partner with us on a variety of fronts to ensure that we

DISTRICTS PARTICIPATING IN iPD CHALLENGE

Location	Number of students	% free/reduced lunch	Number of teachers
Fresno, Calif.	75,000	83%	3,100
Long Beach, Calif. (former Broad Prize winner)	85,000	69%	3,400
Bridgeport, Conn.	21,000	98%	1,380
New Haven, Conn.	20,000	73%	1,570
Jefferson County, Colo.	86,000	33%	4,870

have good ways to identify which options are best suited for which teachers and which offerings have the most impact.

FINDING TIME

Hirsh: Let's talk about a specific challenge — finding time. How are you asking districts to think differently about this?

Wong: We want districts to think much more creatively about people, time, resources, and the vendors they use. Through a series of audits, districts will gain information about their use of resources (financial, time, personnel, technology) for professional development and for optimizing instructional conditions when teachers try to implement what they are learning.
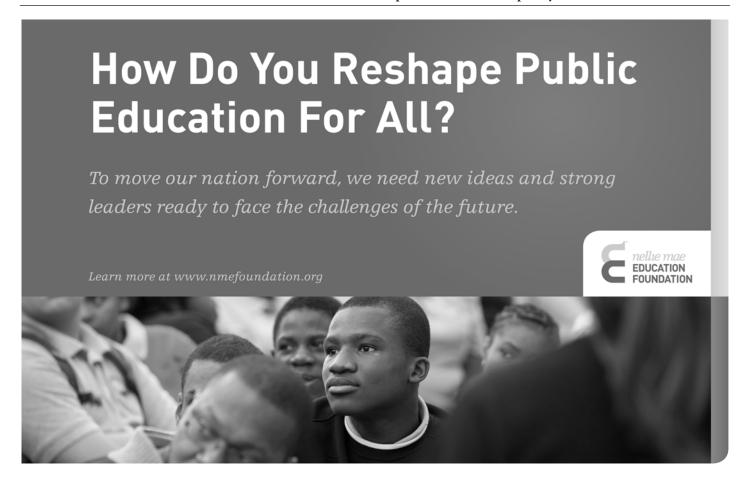
As part of the audit process, they will be asked to analyze what they see, looking at impacts from a range of factors such as policies and regulations, budget constraints, and leadership capacity. They will then take the time to push the envelope and imagine: If you could use these people in different ways, what would you do? What policies and systems would have to change to make next-generation innovation possible?

Imagine if every student in the district had to complete online courses of study, and, along with that, every teacher had to teach one course online for kids. What would that look like?

How do we then reimagine individual and community teacher time, and what they do with that time? And how would we ultimately need to design schools, districts, policies, and budgets differently to make that idea a reality? I'm hoping that teachers will put all of these questions on the table and rethink how they use their resources very differently for very different instructional results.

Hirsh: Explain the foundation's interests in the concept of the teacher's professional development wallet.

Wong: One thing that intrigues us is the idea of teacher autonomy — where and under what conditions systems might create more opportunities for teacher autonomy. If we gave teachers a wallet for their professional learning, what would they use it on, what would the impact be, and how do we think about that? Under what conditions is it ideal to put learning decisions and resources in the hands of the teachers? We've also been thinking about teacher wallets with respect to purchasing curriculum materials and decentralizing those choices.

Hirsh: How do teachers and districts mesh targeted professional development with collaborative professional development? What I see frequently is that those two kinds

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of learning operate on parallel paths. Teachers use one set of skills or standards to prepare for an evaluation session and another while they are working on Common Core implementation with their colleagues.

Wong: The iPD challenge is trying to bring this work together. All of the districts involved are committed to implementing the Common Core and linking it to their measurement and support systems. I'm looking forward to seeing what creative solutions the districts will come up with.

Hirsh: What are the responsibilities of system and school leaders to successfully implement these processes?

Wong: We identified a set of enabling conditions and building blocks that we think are important. Building blocks include data infrastructure, delivery infrastructure, and high-quality digital content and tools. Some of the enabling conditions are creating supportive policies, building leadership capacity, optimizing resources (time, money, and people), getting teacher input and ownership, and focusing on collective development.

RAISING TEACHERS' VOICES

Hirsh: iPD isn't the only teacher-centered work funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. How does iPD tie to your other investments?

Wong: We have a number of efforts to support teachers, including the Literacy and Math Design Collaboratives, a Teacher Advisory Council, and an annual conference called Elevating and Celebrating Effective Teachers and Teaching. We fund a number of advocacy and teacher leadership organizations. We want to elevate teachers' voices in all of our work. Melinda Gates recently released a video (above) about teachers that celebrates all their hard work.

Victor Hugo wrote, "Nothing is so powerful as an idea whose time has come." I feel like the time has come for this work. iPD is going to be a powerful lever to integrate what is happening right now in implementing Common Core, using technology, and teaching effectively. IPD is about raising teachers' voices in all of those places.

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Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh@learningforward. org) is Learning Forward's executive director. ■