



## A national border doesn't have to stand in the way of a good idea

International comparisons in education have come in waves over the last several decades. As early as 1957, U.S. educators undertook reforms in mathematics and science curricula when the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, creating fears that the U.S. was lagging in the space race. The 1983 landmark report *A Nation at Risk* (The National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) included recommendations to counter the increasing sense that the nation's standing was in decline relative to the rest of the world due in part to failings of our education system. In their research, the authors of *A Nation at Risk* looked to data from other countries to consider what practices might be helping other nations excel in education.

Recently, more educators have turned to international benchmarking studies and comparisons with a genuine eagerness to learn about strategies that have proven successful in other contexts. Those educators not only consider what they might learn from teachers and leaders in other countries but also explore the cultural, social, and economic contexts in which schools operate. A practice in one country might not make sense in another, many realize, yet a national border doesn't

•  
**Tracy Crow** ([tracy.crow@learningforward.org](mailto:tracy.crow@learningforward.org)) is director of communications for Learning Forward.

stand in the way of a good idea. Curious educators are more open than ever to the world of possibilities available to them. Technology, networks of like-minded educators, and social media make global exploration a breeze.

When Learning Forward (then NSDC) undertook the Status of Professional Learning research project in 2008, it was a given that we couldn't understand the state of the field without looking at the role of professional learning in other nations. That report, along with other data, helped to crystalize the belief that a sustained investment in job-embedded professional learning is no longer optional as school systems strive for high performance. International perspectives were also critical in shaping the 2011 Standards for Professional Learning. We understand the need to not only learn with our colleagues around the world but also to extend our reach as we influence the future of professional learning and understand its evolution and impact.

This issue of *JSD* explores professional learning practices around the world with the hope that readers will make new connections in new corners.



Start with Lois Brown Easton's overview on p. 10 to get a big-picture sense of what professional learning looks like in several other countries. In my interview with Kristen Weatherby on p. 22, you'll learn about the work of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, the organization behind PISA and a key player in understanding

international practices.

It's no surprise that there are a lot of smart, high-achieving educators out there doing great work, and they're not all in the United States. The more we take advantage of the opportunity to learn alongside those who have very different perspectives and experiences, the more effectively we are engaging in the kind of collaboration that can transform teaching and learning. I invite submissions from all over — I'd love to showcase international colleagues in every issue.

### REFERENCE

**The National Commission on Excellence in Education. (1983, April).** *A nation at risk: The imperative for educational reform.* Washington, DC: Author. ■