



## Ground professional learning with outcomes

The journey to effective professional learning begins with knowing where you're going. This is a truism, but it doesn't mean all school system leaders use it to guide their decisions and actions. In many school systems, professional development is such a routine activity that it rolls on from one year to the next, subject to little scrutiny or reflection. It's easy for education leaders to take it for granted. They may even lapse into assumptions about the purpose and results of professional learning, without pausing to examine its outcomes or whether they address current needs.

This is why the seventh of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning emphasizes the importance of outcomes. The six standards that precede it work in tandem to achieve the optimum results of professional learning — higher levels of performance by educators and their students. Developing the professional learning building blocks the six standards describe, and putting them in place, is no easy task, but the effort will be for naught unless it is informed by the Outcomes standard. To put it another way, conscientiously and effectively addressing the first six standards requires grounding them in the seventh.

There is no better example of this

than many school systems' current focus on implementing the Common Core State Standards. As the Outcomes standard makes clear:

“With student learning outcomes as the focus, professional learning deepens educators' content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and understanding of how students learn the specific discipline. Using student learning outcomes as its outcomes, professional learning can model and engage educators in practices they are expected to implement within their classroom and workplace” (Learning Forward, 2011).

Because Common Core language arts and mathematics standards call for higher levels of student learning, they implicitly require new learning and higher levels of performance by the students' teachers. Curricula and pedagogy that educators considered adequate in the No Child Left Behind era will not suffice. Students will not perform at standard unless their teachers learn how to align their curricula and instruction to the Common Core or other rigorous college- and career-ready standards. That is the outcome that should be driving professional learning in school systems committed to Common Core standards implementation.

Though the outcomes are clear, school systems face major challenges in achieving them. If up to this point a school system's professional development has been unfocused, weak, and unaccountable, it will be difficult to overcome these ingrained bad habits

of practice. If a school system has operated professional development at the margins, supporting it with minimal financing and providing it with limited time, school board members may resist recommendations for investing greater resources.

However, the Common Core standards also provide an opportunity. School systems can choose a new path. They can begin now to develop professional learning that prepares teachers to meet the challenges of rigorous content standards. Fortunately, Learning Forward has produced a valuable resource that can help — *Professional Learning Policy Review: A Workbook for States and Districts*.

The workbook provides clear, practical, step-by-step guidance for how school systems can critically review and analyze their current professional learning policies and practices. For school system leaders who want to get serious about professional learning to enable educators and students to meet the high performance outcomes inherent in the Common Core State Standards, a policy review is how to begin.

### REFERENCE

**Learning Forward. (2011).** *Standards for Professional Learning*. Available at [www.learningforward.org/standards/outcomes](http://www.learningforward.org/standards/outcomes).

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*Professional Learning Policy Review: A Workbook for States and Districts* is available at [www.learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core).