



## What professional learning story will you tell at the end of the school year?

We have all heard these criticisms of professional development: Too many teachers complain it is ineffective and a waste of their time; too little research documents its impact on educator practice or student results; well-constructed and respected research studies are too complicated and expensive for people whose first responsibility is to run schools.

A challenge that comes to mind for me is: Because effective professional

learning is part of a larger continuous improvement system, it is difficult and expensive to isolate its effect on the system. So how do we talk with authority about professional

learning's impact on school improvement and student learning?

One of Learning Forward's three strategic priorities is impact and accountability. That means that we'll be providing not only resources and information that help you make an impact, but also resources to help you

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document the impact of professional learning.

This is why Learning Forward is launching an effort this year called "Tell Your Story," which invites you to detail your professional learning journey and its results. We'll partner with organizations such as My Learning Plan and The Teaching Channel that have the capacity to help you capture the information that documents the impact of professional learning on your school, team, or individuals in the system.

Your stories will help build the case for why professional learning matters, how it makes a difference for educators and students, and why it merits the attention and investment of policymakers and education leaders alike.

Professional development is the best strategy we have for helping all educators improve their performance and helping all students achieve. Too frequently, we are distracted by those who would reallocate professional learning resources, including personnel and time, to other, sexier ideas. Professional learning requires serious and substantive commitment. When it is aligned with the Standards for Professional Learning, professional learning makes the level of difference schools require.

As you think about documenting your success with professional learning this year, I suggest this process:

- Think about how you will collect answers to these questions:
  - What professional learning will

you evaluate?

- What will educators learn and be able to do?
  - What data will be collected to show that educators' behaviors have changed?
  - What knowledge will students gain, and how will they demonstrate it?
  - Specify the professional learning plan, including content and strategies for building knowledge and skills. Describe how you will collaborate with others at the school to build collective responsibility and knowledge so that all other educators and students benefit.
  - Keep track of your growth. What benchmarks can you identify along the way to show progress?
  - Finally, share your results at the end of the year with your colleagues and community. Acknowledge the challenges and recognize your deeper expertise in advancing closer to your highest goals. Think about what will take you further next year. Imagine if, by the end of this school year, we have 100 stories to share, and hundreds more the next year. The professional learning landscape will shift, and your conversations and state and national conversations should shift as well.
- I hope that you take our challenge and join us in this effort. Call on Learning Forward for help in thinking through your plan — we are ready to assist you. ■