



## Learning is no longer an option — it's a necessity

Throughout my career, I've met educators who have expressed a disdain for professional learning. I don't doubt that many have had experiences that didn't help them see a link between professional learning and what they needed to accomplish in the classroom. And then I've met others who were confident that they had already learned everything necessary to do their jobs well.

Those were the days before disaggregated data, higher standards, benchmark exams, smart technologies, and shifting demographics. But even then, when I heard educators speak this way, I thought, wow, we're all in the learning profession. How could any educator think she or he had learned everything necessary to help every student achieve success? I know that when I was teaching, our school's mission statement was to instill a love of lifelong learning in our students, and yet we had many staff members who were not models for our mission.

I wonder how many other schools have a similar disconnect. They adopt a mission statement that indicates a commitment to instill a love of lifelong learning and yet have teachers protesting any expectations about their own continuous learning. Learning Forward faced a similar disconnect

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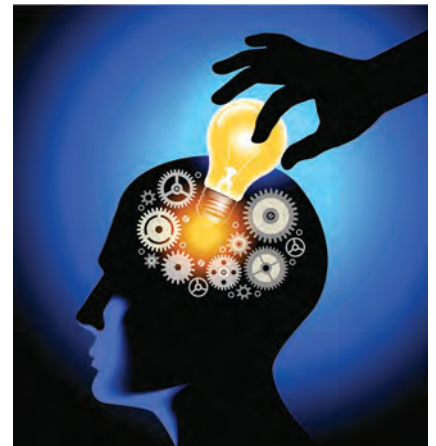
when the organization finally decided to address the problem of its previous name: National Staff Development Council.

With National Staff Development Council, every word was wrong. It did not represent our vision, our mission, or how we wanted to represent ourselves to educators. As we began a process of considering new names, the one nonnegotiable was that our new name must include the word learning. So, filled with the spirit of hope for the future, we became Learning Forward, committed to serving those intent on building a learning profession.

In our field, learning isn't optional anymore. Educators don't have the luxury of saying they don't need to learn. They may have options in what they learn, how they learn, and when they learn — at least I hope they do. And while I know that all professional learning is not of the quality it should be or aligned with our Standards for Professional Learning, the need for adult learning is universal.

Fortunately, the ways educators can and do learn has changed drastically. Learning can take place 24/7. Learning that influences our practice happens informally through hallway conversations and Twitter chats. Learning that improves practice occurs also through more formally organized support, including coaching, scheduled collaboration, conferences, and courses.

Our responsibility to our colleagues and students is to ensure that we



stay up to date on new designs and technologies that support learning and growth. Those of us in the learning profession must find ways to honor and support access to learning in all its various manifestations.

Some policymakers and educators see these developments as supporting an individualized approach to learning. Focusing only on individualized learning is a mistake — educators and students alike benefit from learning communities. In the best of all possible worlds, educators experience both personalized and collaborative professional learning.

At a time when professional learning is often under attack, we know that the future — the one staring us in the face right now — demands change on the part of students and educators. Those changes just don't happen without learning. I am eager to hear how you're moving learning forward. ■