



What a cutting-edge central office staff needs to know

As we talk about how those who work in today's central office contribute to transformative professional learning systems, we consider how they serve other educators in different ways than they used to. We recognize central office staff members' shifting roles and responsibilities.

How does that affect what such educators need to learn? The effective professional learning leader must tend to her own learning needs every bit as much as she does the needs of other educators in the system. As Fort Wayne Community Schools superintendent Wendy Robinson says, "My role as superintendent is to be the district's chief learner and to model that." (See p.10 for more about her district.)

Learning Forward's cycle of continuous improvement outlines a process for determining an educator's most pressing learning needs based on students' high-priority learning needs. At the same time, district leaders have a responsibility to keep themselves at the cutting edge to move their systems forward. They also have the daunting task to keep the district's learning and multiple initiatives focused, integrated, and coherent.

Given these multiple demands, I suggest several critical learning topics for central office staff members — and these

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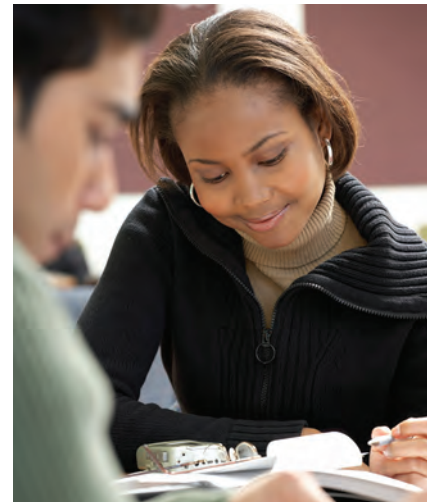
will be relevant for technical assistance providers and other educators, too.

Who's going to become your district's expert in **learning organizations and systems thinking**? With the need to support continuous improvement processes in multiple locations, any district-level leader would benefit from a deep understanding of Peter Senge and Margaret Wheatley, as well as Learning Forward's latest book, *Becoming a Learning System*.

Someone in your district should assume the mantle of **innovation guru**. New strategies, unique solutions, and strange possibilities pop up all the time, and they don't always come from education. TED talks and magazines such as *Fast Company* and *Wired* offer good information, while hard-core geeks stay current through Twitter feeds and daily Internet browsing.

Who in your office is an **articulate advocate for effective professional learning**? More than one leader needs to have the knowledge and skills to do this, and, in the best-case scenarios, one of those leaders is the superintendent. However, messages about the power of the right kinds of professional learning should come from every corner. How can you contribute, and what do you need to learn to do so?

Is your district office fully prepared to **support principals as instructional leaders**? This is critical for system-level leaders. "The principal's job has changed over the last decade, going from a role that revolved around 'buses,



boilers, and books' to one that centers on promoting high-quality teaching and learning in classrooms. But in most districts, the principal supervisor's job hasn't yet adapted to that change." Turn to p. 46 to see how The Wallace Foundation is responding.

Do the folks in your district know where to turn for **research about high-impact professional learning**? While Learning Forward is one source for such information (see Joellen Killion's column on p. 66), your district might need data about specific models for specific purposes. Local universities can often provide valuable access to research journals.

This list is just a start on what topics the well-rounded central office needs to cover. What else are you studying to be your best? We're always eager to hear your thoughts and questions. ■