

Brainstormers welcome.

By Tracy Crow

This issue's focus on the insights, thought leaders, and promising work in progress in the field that will be featured at Learning Forward's Annual Conference is a starting point to launch readers and learners into exploring ideas.

The big money question:

Action research projects give district a clear picture of professional learning's impact.

By Barbara Dill-Varga

How do you know if the resources you have allocated to support professional learning in your school district are improving the quality of teaching and/or impacting student performance? A Chicago-area district, facing a budget deficit, used teacher action research to determine whether its investment in cooperative learning paid off. Along the way, the district learned that empowering teachers to investigate and evaluate their own instructional practices is key to sustaining authentic professional learning.

Visible leading:

Principal Academy connects and empowers principals.

By Jennifer Hindman, Jan Rozzelle, Rachel Ball, and John Fabey

Answering a challenge from John Hattie, School-University Research Network leaders at the College of William & Mary in Virginia created the SURN Principal Academy to improve principals' instructional leadership and relationship-building skills. A hallmark of the academy is collaborative observation using a protocol that measures student engagement. Academy principals take on the role of lead learner as they design and lead professional learning for faculty and conduct action research using data to monitor growth and assess impact.

Digital distinction:

Badges add a new dimension to adult learning.

By Kellie Ady, Keli Kinsella, and Amber Paynter

Digital badges are icons that represent achievements for specific endeavors. These badges, which can be attached to someone's digital or online profile and viewed publicly, add a new dimension to adult learning. Educators at Cherry Creek School District in Colorado developed a digital badge system for professional learning that creates a consistent and intentional structure for both publicly recognizing the work teachers are doing and supporting a culture and climate of celebration. This system also focuses learning on mastery of content in smaller steps.

If I could run a school:

Teacher-powered schools require a divergent set of skills.

By Lori Nazareno

Most teachers are accustomed to operating in the traditional model of teaching and learning. Teacher-powered schools require teachers to develop a divergent set of skills. Two of the most important are how to manage a school collaboratively and how to observe and evaluate one another. When teachers design and operate teacher-powered schools, they must learn these skills so that their students, team, and school can thrive.

How principals can reshape the teaching bell curve.

By Kim Marshall

Within every school, there is a bell-shaped curve of teaching quality. Some teachers use highly effective practices almost all the time, a larger group is solidly effective, others work at a mediocre level, and a few are mostly unsuccessful with students. To improve subpar teaching and motivate solid teachers to take their work to a higher level requires five key elements: Create professional working conditions, foster teacher teamwork, coach teachers, use student surveys, and hire and fire well.

Make time to recharge:

Growth and renewal play key roles in sustaining school leaders.

By Ellie Drago-Severson and Jessica Blum-DeStefano

Being a school leader in any role is hard, gratifying, and a gift of love. While it can be enormously satisfying to serve students, teachers, families, and school communities, leaders need to refill themselves in order to continue giving to others. A learning-oriented model of leadership development and capacity building emphasizes the importance of caring for one's own self-development and renewal while caring for and supporting others.

Why do I go to the conference?

It's where conversation, collaboration, and critical thinking abound.

By Mark Onuscheck

Not only does Learning Forward's Annual Conference bring together leading minds in education, it also opens up important dialogue around continuous improvement, says an Illinois high school's director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. And that's why he's coming back — to be a part of conversations that lead positive educational changes, collaborate with other educators working to actualize these changes, and think more critically about how we should all collaborate around the challenges educators face day to day.

features



Focus first on outcomes:

When planning change, improved student learning is the ultimate goal.

By Janice Bradley, Linda Munger, and Shirley Hord

Baseball Hall of Famer Yogi Berra once said, “If you don’t know where you are going, you’ll end up someplace else.” Educators working to achieve changes in classroom teaching practices that lead to improvement in student learning need to gain clarity in where they are going — what they want to accomplish. Two tools to help educators map this path are a logic model and a theory of change.

Variations on a theme:

As needs change, new models of Critical Friends Groups emerge.

By Kevin Fahey and Jacy Ippolito

While the original Critical Friends Group model has existed since 1994, the changing demographics of students nationwide, widening gaps in student achievement, new national standards, and increased accountability pressures are pushing educators to innovate. Critical Friends Groups can now be found in many forms: used by faculty in higher education settings, employed as bridges between university and district partnerships, developed by school leaders to meet across districts, and even taking the form of online virtual Critical Friends Groups.

Write for JSD

- Themes for the 2016 publication year will be posted soon at www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.
- Please send manuscripts and questions to Christy Colclasure (christy.colclasure@learningforward.org).
- Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines.



INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Just ASK Publications & Professional Development..... outside back cover
 Learning Sciences International inside back cover
 School Improvement Network.....1
 Solution Tree inside front cover

columns

Lessons from research:

Researchers pinpoint factors that influence teachers’ responses to data.

By Joellen Killion

Coaches and professional learning communities within supportive contexts influence how teachers respond to and use data to change delivery of instruction.

From the director:

Annual Conference opens the door to possibilities.

By Stephanie Hirsh

The unsung heroes of professional learning share their learning, resources, and results at Learning Forward’s Annual Conference.

Share your story

Learning Forward is eager to read manuscripts from educators at every level in every position. If your work includes a focus on effective professional learning, we want to hear your story.

JSD publishes a range of types of articles, including:

- First-person accounts of change efforts;
- Practitioner-focused articles about school- and district-level initiatives;
- Program descriptions and results from schools, districts, or external partners;
- How-tos from practitioners and thought leaders; and
- Protocols and tools with guidance on use and application.

To learn more about key topics and what reviewers look for in article submissions, visit www.learningforward.com/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.