

## New staff members extend Learning Forward's reach

Learning Forward welcomes new staff members Michelle King and Laurie Calvert.

King is Learning Forward's associate director of communities. She coordinates Learning Forward's online communities of practice, supporting a network of districts committed to professional development redesign.

King joins Learning Forward through an agreement with Lewisville (Texas) Independent School District, where she was executive director of professional learning. King will continue to support the district's efforts to build cultural proficiency.

At Learning Forward, King will not only support and facilitate communities of practice but will also extend the organization's capacity to provide on-the-ground consulting to districts.

"Michelle's perspective as a district leader in professional learning is invaluable in her role at Learning Forward, as is her deep knowledge and skill in our field," said Stephanie Hirsh, Learning Forward's executive director. "We also know that Michelle's embrace of online networks and new technologies will be critical in ensuring we provide a learning environment that is both vibrant and grounded in surfacing solutions for district leaders," said Hirsh.

Calvert serves Learning Forward and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future (NCTAF)



Michelle King



Laurie Calvert

as education policy advisor. In this full-time joint position, Calvert uses her education and communications expertise to develop research publications and coordinate policy and advocacy initiatives for both organizations.

Calvert worked most recently as teacher liaison for the U.S. Department of Education, where she spearheaded teacher leadership and outreach efforts.

She coordinated much of the Teach to Lead initiative, conceptualized and wrote the *Teachers Edition* newsletter, and advised the department and the secretary on policy matters. She joined the department in the 2010-11 school year as a Washington Teaching Ambassador Fellow. Calvert is also a former middle school and high school teacher who holds national board certification.

"Laurie's unique experience and skill set will help both of our organizations prioritize the teacher leadership perspective as we work to achieve our specific missions in advancing educator effectiveness," said Hirsh.

Learning Forward and NCTAF are working together to advance national and regional policy and advocacy goals that address some of the most pressing issues facing American teachers. This strategic alliance is an opportunity for both organizations to have greater impact and achieve ambitious goals for educators and students alike.

### book club

HAVING HARD CONVERSATIONS 2.0:  
Extending the Learning

By Jennifer Abrams

This update of the author's original *Hard Conversations* book is designed to promote a deeper understanding of what needs to happen before, during, and after hard conversations. The author emphasizes the critical need for greater clarity around the goals and desired outcomes of hard conversations.

This version includes topics that weren't addressed in the first book, including filters of perception such as race and

gender, the significance of organizational politics, productive responses, and effective listening strategies.

The book comes with an array of tools, templates, and checklists and a variety of vignettes and case studies based on Abrams' own practice.

Through a partnership with Corwin Press, Learning Forward members can add the Book Club to their membership at any time and receive four books a year for \$69 (for U.S. mailing addresses). To receive this book, add the Book Club to your membership before Dec. 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call **800-727-7288** or email **office@learningforward.org**.



## Twists and turns on the road to where I am today

People who know me realize how passionate I am about education, and that's been true for a long time. However, my pathway to where I am now hasn't been entirely predictable. At times, I have found myself at a crossroads where I had to make a choice. Every turn has led me to where I am today, even though I didn't exactly map it all out from the start. Here are a few of the more surprising moments in my life and how they got me to where I am.

When I went to college, I didn't prepare for a career in education. I loved history and politics and envisioned going to law school so I could champion a cause I believed in. As it turns out, education was my cause. Through my experience tutoring young people at church, I realized how much I loved teaching. When I had a pause in my professional career to give birth to my daughter, I took that time to get a teaching certificate — and I was off on a new path.

This love of teaching and the impact I could have kept me exhilarated. I couldn't imagine myself outside of a classroom. Then a former area superintendent planted a seed in my brain when he asked if I had ever considered a leadership position. I hadn't — until that moment. As that seed took root, I considered how my

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**Deborah Jackson is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.**

### on board DEBORAH JACKSON

impact might spread, and I pursued an administrator endorsement.

With that qualification in hand, I was able to say yes when a principal offered me my first leadership position as an assistant principal. That position, and her high expectations, helped me understand a leader's responsibility for and impact on the learning of everyone in a school, from the new student to the veteran teacher to the engaged parent.

I began to realize how lucky I was as a teacher to have principals who believed that all teachers must learn continuously. We work hard at Learning Forward to instill this belief in all educators: Learning is continuous for all and an absolute for us in the field of education. I was fortunate that my supervisors and mentors lived that motto.

My journey through more progressive leadership positions allowed me to continue my passion for teaching. I strived to create supportive learning contexts for adults and refined my focus as an advocate for children who might not have other champions.

As principal of a progressive high school, I was settled and pleased with the impact I was having on my students and community. I was there for the long haul. Then came the opportunity to lead a team designing

and implementing a new teacher and school-based administrator evaluation program. This led me to the central office, where I am a mentor/coach to other principals. And even though I couldn't have predicted where I'd be right now, it seems like the most natural role in the world.

While I did not plan the twists I've taken on my leadership pathway,



I do know this: I met the right people at the right times who helped me see something in myself, I was open to continuous learning, and I never lost my passion for education. I hope that, along the way, I've been that right person for someone else. ■



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## Grant funds principal professional learning

Learning Forward, in partnership with the Arizona Department of Education, is one of five recipients of nearly \$2.5 million in the Principals Path to Leadership grant program, designed to expand effective principal preparation programs and share their best practices broadly to impact education reform.

Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh says that the \$465,000 three-year grant from American Express and National Association of Secondary School Principals will allow the organization to expand its Learning Leaders for Learning Schools program for 80 principals and aspiring principals in the Greater Phoenix area and, later, scale up nationally.

“Research tells us that school leadership is second only to classroom instruction as a school-based influence on student achievement,” Hirsh said. “The Leadership standard of the Standards for Professional Learning stresses that leaders make learning a top priority for themselves, other educators, and students. A focus on teaching and learning means they need knowledge and skills not only in curriculum, instruction, and assessment but also in effective adult learning. Our leadership program will help principals develop this knowledge as they learn how to develop systems of learning for the adults in their schools.”

The Learning Leaders for Learning Schools program will include seminars, small communities of practice, and personalized coaching. A multimedia field guide to be co-developed with participants will allow educators in other districts to scale up the practices.

The other four recipients of Principal Paths to Leadership grants are the Alabama State Department of Education, Arlington (Texas) Independent School District, New York City Leadership Academy, and North Carolina Principals & Assistant Principals’ Association.

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### LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

- Oct. 30:** Last day to donate artwork to ScholARTship 2015, a fundraiser supporting educator scholarships.
- Nov. 2:** Webinar: Nonverbal Communication Skills to Positively Influence Classroom Behavior.
- Nov. 10:** Webinar: PARCC Assessments: Get It Right Campaign.
- Dec. 4-6:** Learning Forward Academy meets in Washington, D.C.
- Dec. 5-9:** 2015 Annual Conference in Washington, D.C.
- Jan. 31, 2016:** Deadline to apply to present at Learning Forward’s 2016 Annual Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.