



Standards have the most muscle when used together

In the introduction to Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, we describe how educators can use the standards to plan, implement, and evaluate professional learning. The standards offer criteria against which to measure the quality of professional learning. In simpler terms, they are absolute must-haves for professional learning that leads to the results we desire for all learners.

We explore the standards one by one, whether in the published Standards for Professional Learning volume or in any of the tools, including the Innovation Configuration maps, Standards Assessment Inventory, or even this issue of *JSD*. As with any complex concept, we break apart the whole to study the parts. We go through each of the seven methodically to understand its components and what it means.

Perhaps some educators even have a favorite standard. I know I do, but I won't tell you which it is. Yet in the on-the-ground learning through which the standards come to life, the standards interlock to function as a whole. They can't stand alone, or what they are intended to accomplish is impossible.

As we go deeper in understanding the standards, it is just as important to seek connections among them as it is

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to know what a single standard looks like. Take the Learning Communities standard, for example. In learning teams at the school level, this standard seems like the most important to study and comprehend. To be effective, teams know how to collaborate. They use steps of the cycle of continuous improvement to guide their learning and problem solving. Further, they develop a sense of collective responsibility as they commit to shared goals for all the students they teach. Learning teams operate in alignment with school and district visions for results and help schools achieve those results.

Those are the key concepts of the Learning Communities standard and are important guideposts to know that collaborative professional learning can lead to changed practices and improved student outcomes. Yet those critical elements of just one standard are both difficult to achieve and likely ineffective without the interplay of the others.

Teams can't sustain their work without the support of leaders who advocate for professional learning and who serve as learners themselves — that's the Leadership standard. Without clear information about where students struggle related to a school's vision and goals, adults won't be able to set meaningful learning goals for themselves. They need the conditions and elements that the Data standard outlines. Without coordinated attention to time structures and other resources, the team won't have time to meet, which is why the Resources standard is critical.

Team members will need to carefully select the adult learning strategies that help them achieve their learning goals. They'll apply their knowledge of how adults learn throughout the process, which is where the Learning Designs standard comes in. And without support to sustain their learning and attention to the change process, the team's learning won't stick, thus the Implementation standard. Finally, their learning is just an exercise if it isn't planned, implemented, and evaluated in light of the Outcomes standard, which highlights the importance of tying adult learning to student learning standards — and to adult performance standards.

As you read through this issue of *JSD*, please take note of the connections you see among the standards. The learning opportunities and systems you're building to serve educators and students will be stronger for it. ■