

Agents for Learning competition spurs teacher engagement in ESSA

Learning Forward and the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future (NCTAF) are hosting a competition that invites teachers to submit written proposals for the best use of federal funding for professional learning under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

As part of their effort to highlight the critical role of teacher agency in professional learning, Learning Forward and NCTAF will use the competition to amplify and support teachers in understanding the provisions of ESSA aligning the allowable uses of funds under the law with their learning needs.

Through the Agents for Learning competition, teams of educators will be invited to submit proposals for best uses of Title II and other federal funds under ESSA. The proposals will include:

1. Analysis of teachers' primary professional learning needs;
2. An educator-informed theory of action around how to leverage professional learning to advance teaching and learning; and
3. Specific recommendations for states, districts, and schools to consider as guides to their Consolidated State Plans and/or state and district Title II plans, a requirement of ESSA, and the design of effective professional learning in their systems.

Teams interested in participating

AGENTS FOR LEARNING SPONSORS AS OF APRIL 15

- America Achieves
- American Federation of Teachers
- Center for American Progress
- Corwin
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- Educators 4 Excellence
- Hope Street Group
- National Board for Professional Teaching Standards
- National Education Association
- National Network of State Teachers of the Year
- Scholastic Corporation
- Teach Plus

will be invited to a series of webinars helping them to understand the new law, including the rights and responsibilities of states regarding use of federal funds for professional development, as well as how those funds can support a systematic vision for continuous improvement in schools.

Teams will then respond to several questions that will be reviewed by an independent panel. The finalists will travel to Chicago in July to participate in further training and feedback to develop their plans, then present their proposals to a panel of judges.

The finalists' proposals will

COMPETITION TIMELINE

April 27, May 11: Informational webinars.

May 25: Live Q&A for support on team applications.

June 10: Applications due by 8 p.m. Eastern time.

June 21: Finalist teams announced.

July 21-22: Finalists present proposals in Chicago, Illinois.

be available online, as will the presentations and feedback to be used as a planning tool for states, districts, and schools as they work toward ESSA implementation. Supporting partners will disseminate the plans to advocate for effective professional learning with their stakeholders.

A number of educator advocacy organizations (see box above) will support educator teams' participation in the competition and deepen their engagement in advocating for the meaningful implementation of ESSA.

"Many teachers are already learning in effective and innovative ways alongside their colleagues in schools," said Stephanie Hirsh, executive director of Learning Forward. "Our goal with this effort is to raise the visibility of the learning that helps teachers improve in service to their students, and to influence policymakers at all levels as they implement ESSA."

GET STARTED

Gather your colleagues and your insights. Through the application process, you'll share a vision for effective professional learning and identify your highest needs. You'll also provide input on particular aspects of ESSA and how its implementation can most meaningfully support schools. See the tool on pp. 64-65 to begin the application process.

The deadline for applications is June 10. Learn more at www.learningforward.org/get-involved/agents-for-learning-competition.



Finding the sweet spot

Earlier this year, I engaged in professional learning with a group of elementary school teachers. We were investigating Madagascar hissing cockroaches and how they behave under different conditions. Throughout the experience, teachers gathered observations to help construct a scientific explanation and developed additional questions to be researched and investigated. One of these questions had to do with the differences between male and female cockroaches.

As the teachers worked independently, my curiosity took over. I went to the *National Geographic Kids* website and began to read about hissing cockroaches. Suddenly, the room became disturbingly quiet. It turns out that my computer was connected to a projector, and all of the participants were reading along with me.

Although having learners read from a projected website isn't best practice, I believe that I hit the sweet spot. Allowing the teachers to experience a hands-on investigation created an intrinsic motivation to learn more about cockroaches. I left this session with a new question: How can we create experiences that intentionally take advantage of participants wanting to learn more?

Literacy coordinators in Colorado's

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John Eyolfson is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.

on board JOHN EYOLFSON

Cherry Creek Schools have also been thinking about that sweet spot in literacy professional learning and believe they may have stumbled into it.

In the past, much of our literacy professional learning was centered around the acquisition of knowledge and skills that would improve classroom literacy practices. But, as with students, gaining knowledge and understanding doesn't necessarily mean the learner can use new skills. Because of this concern, the literacy coordinators shifted their approach.

Now, the learning begins in a master teacher's classroom, where teachers can see the knowledge in practice. The master teacher — in a real classroom with real students — instructs using the very knowledge and skills that teachers have been studying. She models the science *and* the art of pulling it off. The teachers are able to see the academic application unfold before their eyes.

After the experience, the coordinator and the master teacher debrief with the teachers. That's where the sweet spot comes. In this moment, there is a palpable hunger for learning in the room. The questions for each teacher's own practice begin to bubble up, and the afternoon is spent planning for upcoming lessons — with a new,

deeper understanding of the academic knowledge partnered with a developing tactical understanding.

At Cherry Creek, this lesson observation is part of the learning cycle we use now and part of a robust literacy professional learning approach:

- Teachers come in with a shared understanding of research-based literacy practices.
- Teachers are immersed in a master teacher's classroom, where those same practices are embedded in authentic instruction.
- As a result of the experiential learning, teachers are intrinsically motivated to dig into, refine, and apply the practices to their own instructional planning.
- Teachers have time with peers and coaches to design purposeful and authentic student learning experiences informed by the knowledge and experience of the immersion.
- Coaches and peers observe teachers implementing new practices and provide targeted feedback and coaching.

By combining academic learning with experiential focus, teachers can attach learning and strategy to their own ideas, students, and curriculum. This cycle can take the plethora of sound educational best practices from isolated knowledge chunks into authentic practice for student growth. ■

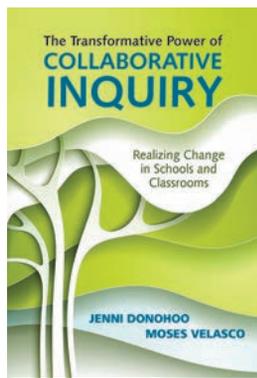
book club

THE TRANSFORMATIVE POWER OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY: Realizing Change in Schools and Classrooms
By *Jenni Donohoo and Moses Velasco*

This guide helps school leaders shape the development of a sustainable professional learning culture with practical suggestions and in-depth research. A follow-up to Jenni Donohoo's *Collaborative Inquiry for Educators: A Facilitator's Guide to School Improvement*, the authors explore:

- A rationale and framework for engaging in inquiry;
- The vital conditions needed to ensure systemwide collaboration; and
- Common pitfalls and the four stages of school improvement.

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 June 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call **800-727-7288** or email office@learningforward.org.



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Learning Forward is transitioning to a new member database in the coming weeks. Having your current email address is essential to keeping connected. Please take a moment to log in to the website and use the "update profile" link to verify your contact information, including your email address. You can also call **800-727-7288** anytime to verify your information.



LEARNING FORWARD FOUNDATION SEEKS YOUR STORIES

The Learning Forward Foundation wants to share stories that highlight the work and impact foundation grants and scholarships are having within the variety of settings in which foundation awardees and grantees work.

If you or your team have received a foundation grant or scholarship and would like to share your progress and learning with the larger community, contact the Foundation Publicity Committee at foundation@learningforward.org.

LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

- June 10:** Agents for Learning competition applications due.
June 15: Deadline for February 2017 *JSD* manuscripts. Theme: STEM.
June 30: Last day to save \$75 off registration for the 2016 Annual Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
July 21-24: Learning Forward Summer Institutes in Chicago, Illinois.
Aug. 15: Deadline for April 2017 *JSD* manuscripts. Theme: Measuring impact.



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