

Learning Forward launches community of practice

Learning Forward has launched the Redesign PD Community of Practice to support 20 of the nation's leading school districts and charter management organizations in addressing systemwide educator and student learning priorities.

The community engages teams from the districts in identifying their local professional learning challenges and then creating scalable solutions. Learning Forward serves as the facilitator and coordinator of the community, offering expertise and support during face-to-face and virtual meetings.

The community provides focus, guidance, and shared accountability to the participating systems to make dramatic improvements to their professional development systems.

Collectively, the participating systems enroll more than 5% of the public school students in the country and the community offers a strong path to improving professional learning at a national scale.

Further, Learning Forward will capture and publish lessons learned and tools from the community to share with the broader field

of education, especially to Learning Forward's more than 50,000 members and stakeholders.

PARTICIPATING DISTRICTS AND CHARTER MANAGEMENT ORGANIZATIONS

- Aspire Public Schools
- Bridgeport Public Schools (Connecticut)
- District of Columbia Public Schools
- Denver Public Schools (Colorado)
- Fresno Unified School District (California)
- Fulton County Schools (Georgia)
- Hillsborough County Public Schools (Florida)
- Jefferson County Public Schools (Colorado)
- Knox County Schools (Tennessee)
- Lake County Schools (Florida)
- Long Beach Public Schools (California)
- Loudon County Schools (Tennessee)
- New Haven Public Schools (Connecticut)
- New York City Department of Education (New York)
- Pittsburgh Public Schools (Pennsylvania)
- Prince George's County Public Schools (Maryland)
- Riverside Unified School District (California)
- Syracuse City School District (New York)
- Shelby County Schools (Tennessee)
- Tulsa Public Schools (Oklahoma)

"Equitable access to powerful teaching remains one of our nation's critical challenges," said Stephanie Hirsh, executive director of Learning Forward. "While we know that effective professional learning is the means to increase that access, we haven't found the answer for ensuring that all teachers in all systems experience the learning that will help them reach and teach all students. I'm excited that our district partners in this community are joining with us to create solutions that will work both locally and across multiple contexts."

Many of the participating school districts have already created professional learning innovations and programs that result in changes in educator practice and improvements in student learning. They have received funding support for their past work from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which also funds the Redesign PD Community of Practice.

The community assists systems in not only building on previous successes but also examining what works and what doesn't to support teachers in

continually improving their practice in implementing rigorous college- and career-ready standards.

Over the course of 18 months, district teams in the community of practice engage in continuous improvement cycles to improve how they manage their professional learning systems, with each team conducting multiple inquiry cycles to propel rapid learning and improvement. Complementing this inquiry work are opportunities to problem solve collectively with other districts in the community. District teams serve as critical friends to one another, sharing expertise and demanding mutual accountability.

"The sheer volume of expertise in this community gives me such confidence that we'll find really practical solutions for learning leaders," Hirsh said. "These district innovators navigate an extraordinary number of priorities to focus on what will ultimately make a difference for students. It's a very complex task, and I'm proud of the role the community will play in moving everyone forward."

AT A GLANCE Redesign PD Community of Practice

- **20** school systems
- More than **3,700** schools
- **2.3 million** students
- More than **164,000** certified educators
- **\$500 million to \$1 billion** in professional development spending
- **10** states represented

For more information: www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/redesign-pd-community-of-practice.



Keep these essentials at the ready for the next challenge

As a young boy in Colorado, I spent much of my time exploring, hiking, and climbing the Rocky Mountains. I learned early on the importance of being prepared for the elements. For instance, I knew I would always have in my backpack a way to start a fire, a knife, a compass, rain gear, and water. With my essentials at the ready, I could take on the next exciting challenge.

For a new professional developer, it is equally important to have certain essentials. Here are three I have carried with me over the years.

1. BUILD RELATIONSHIPS EARLY.

This saying rings true for educators working together: “They do not care how much you know until they know how much you care.” Professional learning is a highly personal process. It often involves taking risks and can stir emotions.

As a learning leader, take the time to get to know the people you are supporting. Listen to their stories and meet them where they are. Enter conversations with a positive presupposition. I noticed a participant in one learning session spend the first 20 minutes on email. After inquiring, I learned that her son had been in a car accident earlier that week and she was checking in with his doctor.

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

on board JOHN EYOLFSON

2. EMBRACE AND ACKNOWLEDGE THE PROCESS OF CHANGE.

Being an educator will always include an element of changing landscapes. Educators are expected to model the process of being lifelong learners as they look to improve their practice. There are several research-based models that not only describe various stages of change, but also have strategies for how to support teachers effectively and efficiently through these stages.

Shirley Hord and Gene Hall developed one model that I rely on often — the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, which recognizes the distinct stages that occur as adults build readiness for a change by moving through awareness to collaboration and refocusing. Having the knowledge and skills to manage the change process is an important tool when providing support, coaching, and professional development to other educators.

3. CLARIFY THE GOAL.

Early on in my career as a professional developer, I was introduced to KASAB, a framework for establishing outcomes. KASAB stands for knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors.

In each learning situation, the goal

is to provide a change. The question is: What are we trying to change? If the goal is to increase learners' knowledge, design a rich learning experience with that in mind. Throughout the process, create opportunities for participants to demonstrate their knowledge, and make sure the evaluation gathers evidence of participants' knowledge acquisition.

This same process applies if the desired change involves skills, aspirations, attitudes, or behaviors. Design learning appropriate for the outcome desired. Often we use a knowledge-oriented approach when we intend changes in skills or behaviors. Without the opportunity for practice and feedback to develop new skills, nothing changes.

Just as I still turn to those first essentials I load in my backpack each time I go for a hike, I also rely on these and other professional learning essentials no matter how much I continue to learn about leading professional learning. What essentials do you put in your tool kit? ■



Foundation announces 2016 award winners

The Learning Forward Foundation, which supports the development of educators' capacity to improve student learning through innovation and

For more information: www.learningforward.org/foundation.

improvement that transform professional learning, has announced the 2016 winners of its scholarships and grants.

Learning Forward Foundation Academy Scholarship supports participation in the Learning Forward Academy for one school-based and one district-based practitioner. Awarded to: **Andrea Von Biberstein**, Ridgeville Charter Middle School, Atlanta,

Georgia; **Anna Jackson**, Lubbock (Texas) ISD.

Patsy Hochman Academy Scholarship supports participation in the Learning Forward Academy. Awarded to: **Shannon Terry**, Arlington (Texas) ISD.

The Principal as a Leader of Professional Learning Scholarship will assist an already effective principal to strengthen his or her leadership knowledge, skills, and dispositions to improve the outcomes of professional learning for staff resulting in improved student learning outcomes. Awarded to: **Kelly Hastings**, Young Junior High School, Arlington, Texas.

Learning Forward Foundation Team Grant supports teams in an effort

to advance Learning Forward's vision: Excellent teaching and learning every day. Awarded to: **Northern Valley High School District**, Demarest, New Jersey.

Learning Forward Foundation Affiliate Grant provides an affiliate the opportunity to further its work in professional learning within its respective state/region/province. Awarded to: **Learning Forward Nebraska**.

Learning Forward Foundation System Grant is a partnership grant that will provide an opportunity for a district team to develop and implement a comprehensive learning system throughout the district. Awarded to: **Hartford (Connecticut) Public Schools**.



Photo by SALLY J. HAMMOND

Carver's leadership team receives Learning School Designation. From left: Russell Booker, district superintendent; Darrell Barringer, AdvancED; Nicole Thompson, principal; Janice Poda, Learning Forward; Lisa Foster, instructional coach; and Terry Pruitt, deputy superintendent.

CARVER MIDDLE SCHOOL RECEIVES FIRST LEARNING SCHOOL DESIGNATION

Carver Middle School in Spartanburg, South Carolina, is the first recipient of the Learning School Designation, which identifies a school as a model for results-driven, standards-based, and job-embedded professional learning.

Learning Forward collaborates with

AdvancED to offer this designation to recognize those schools that prioritize high-quality continuous professional learning as a critical school improvement strategy.

"The leadership team at Carver Middle School has demonstrated that they hold learning for educators as a top

priority, and that commitment will reap results for all learners in the school," says Stephanie Hirsh, executive director of Learning Forward.

To learn more about the Learning School Designation, visit www.learningforward.org/get-involved/learning-school-designation.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN ESSA: 3 NEXT STEPS

With the recent release of the U.S. Department of Education’s draft regulations for implementation of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), Learning Forward is encouraging educators to offer their input during the comment period, noting three points in particular that relate to professional learning.

1. The draft regulations include a requirement for consolidated state plans to describe states’ systems for educator development, retention, and advancement, including how the state will ensure that each local educational agency “has and is implementing a system of professional growth and improvement for teachers, principals, and other school leaders,” according to the draft regulations. ESSA has elevated professional learning in a unique and significant way, requiring states to address how they will leverage professional learning in the law’s implementation.

Highlighting such systems in regulations is valuable to effective implementation of the law. Learning Forward will say so in its comments and is inviting members to do the same. “Prioritizing effective professional learning is paramount for achieving the outcomes all stakeholders want for children,” says Stephanie Hirsh, Learning Forward’s executive director. “States and districts will only achieve the law’s aspirations for equity and excellence for all students if they offer teachers and school leaders systems of sustained support for growth.”

2. Learning Forward is urging the U.S. Department of Education to additionally specify in its regulations

that professional development align with the definition of professional development outlined in the law itself. The definition states clearly that professional development is “sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused” and can encompass many strategies and content areas aligned to student and teacher needs.

“Unfortunately, the learning that most educators experience is not yet aligned to this definition, despite evidence from research and practice that

excellence if regulations encourage a more coherent approach to professional development. State plans can describe states’ vision for professional learning and how they intend to use all available federal funding sources to achieve it. Often, Title II funding is treated independently of other Titles and state and local funding sources, leading to parallel or competing systems of support.

Through its regulations, the U.S. Department of Education can encourage states to think differently and establish a coherent system that is

TO READ THE DRAFT REGULATIONS:
<https://federalregister.gov/a/2016-12451>

TO COMMENT:
www.federalregister.gov/articles/2016/05/31/2016-12451/elementary-and-secondary-education-act-of-1965-as-amended-by-the-every-student-succeeds#open-comment

indicates these elements are essential for professional learning to achieve its intended outcomes,” Hirsh says. Given the inclusion of the definition in the law, Learning Forward will ask that regulations specify that professional learning align with the definition in order to have its full impact. Learning Forward is urging members to consider doing the same.

3. Learning Forward and its partners continue to elevate the importance of coherent systems of professional learning that are grounded in evidence, adequately supported, and designed to achieve the goals of equity and excellence. Learning Forward believes the consolidated plans can spur advancement to educational

relevant to educators. Learning Forward is urging members to join in asking that the regulations help states conceive a coherent system, aligning its state and district visions for teacher and student learning and detailing how it will use its federal dollars to support such a system.

“Learning Forward appreciates the opportunity to continue to engage with the Department of Education to shape effective implementation of ESSA,” says Hirsh. “I urge you to offer your input on the regulations, consider the requests we outline here, and most importantly, use this opportunity to reinforce the critical role effective professional learning systems play in achieving ambitious goals for all students.”

The comment period will be open until August 1.



LEARNING FORWARD'S VISION:

Excellent teaching and learning every day.

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New study will examine professional learning in Canada

In collaboration with Canadian researchers and education stakeholders, Learning Forward has launched a research study examining the state of professional learning across Canada. The study's purpose is to understand the current landscape of educator professional learning throughout Canada and to advance a priority focus on the elements of and conditions for effective professional learning in Canada and across the world.

"Just as we aim for all students to have equitable access to quality education, our goal is to provide research results that will support educators in experiencing high-quality, evidence-informed professional learning within and across the provinces and territories of Canada and internationally," said Stephanie Hirsh, executive director of Learning Forward.

Carol Campbell, principal researcher for the study, said, "While Canada is internationally recognized as valuing education and committing to both excellence and equity, there is a gap in shared knowledge about the

professional learning practices that contribute to improved educational outcomes within and across Canada and in the unique and diverse contexts of each province and territory."

Campbell, associate professor of leadership and educational change at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto, continued, "This study will significantly expand what we know about the learning educators are experiencing within Canada and how their learning opportunities compare to that of educators in other high-performing nations."

This research study will investigate promising learning practices, opportunities, and challenges and amplify the system conditions essential to effective professional learning. The project will culminate in a call to action at Learning Forward's 2016 Annual Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, to champion the importance of educators' professional learning in and across Canada, within a wider context of international evidence and experiences.

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

