

“ Professional learning needs to allow teachers to inquire, be curious, explore, and grow in their practice.”

Maria Warren

K-4/RTI supervisor
Loudon County (Tennessee)
School District

JSD: What do you wish you had known when you first began your journey as a learning leader?



Warren: I wish that I had known the importance of establishing priority and balance. In doing this, I feel that I would have had a more purposeful focus of needs at the

beginning of my journey. I tried to have my hand in many pots and felt that I had to know everything that was going on in my school. Balance of learning, understanding routines, district initiatives, faculty strengths/weaknesses, students, parents, community, and overall responsibilities, oh my!

I felt that if I didn't know all about the ins and outs of school, teachers would be frustrated with me when I couldn't answer their questions. I later reflected that I had a width of knowledge, but lacked the needed depth that could have strengthened particular areas of need. I wish that I had established a priority list with my

leadership team that, in turn, would have helped me to build depth in the area of priority — a focused plan that could be outlined, modified, and restructured throughout the year.

JSD: What is the one crucial piece of advice you would give to those just starting out in the professional learning world?

Warren: Determine needs, involve stakeholders, map out a plan, share expectations that are realistic and purposeful, then measure to determine effectiveness. Remember to differentiate just as we would differentiate in the classroom. The more that you include stakeholders, the more buy-in that you will have and the more that the stakeholders will feel that they are heard and their input is valued.

Create a large-scale graphic organizer (a month-to-month plan, like a to-do list) with the district-level team and post in the office to help the team stay on track. This way everyone knows the expectations, time frame of completion, and responsibilities of stakeholders.

JSD: What fundamental resource do you find yourself going back to often, and therefore you would be quickest to recommend (and why)?

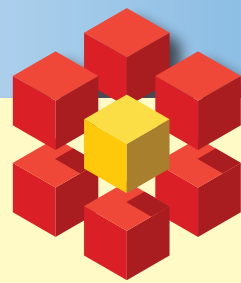
Warren: The practices that I used

when I was in the classroom. As a teacher, I was always looking for new and innovative ways to capture my students' attention and measure the effectiveness of my lessons. I wanted to provide all my students with opportunities to inquire, be curious, and explore. I also needed my lessons to be relevant and connect with other powerful ideas.

The same applies in the professional learning world. Professional learning needs to allow teachers to inquire, be curious, explore, and grow in their practice. The learning also needs to be relevant and be able to connect the needs of the learner. Teachers assess through each lesson, the same needs to hold true on professional learning. ... This year, we will run all of our professional learning (district- and schoolwide) through a rubric to ensure consistency and relevancy.

JSD: What have we not asked that you would most like to say to beginning learning leaders?

Warren: Collaboration, planning, and measurement are key. You can build a professional learning program, but its effectiveness will be determined through focused planning, feedback, and measurement of effectiveness. ■



advice FROM LEARNING PROFESSIONALS

We asked Learning Forward members around the country for the counsel they'd like to give to new learning leaders.