

LAY THE FOUNDATION FOR GREAT TEACHING AND LEARNING

By Eric Celeste

With rare exception, leaders are made, not born. That's because "leadership potential is not something that some people have and other people don't," note authors James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner (2016). "It's more broadly distributed than traditionally accepted views suggest."

Everyone has the capacity to lead, they say, but not until a leadership foundation is laid: "To become an exemplary leader, you have to ... [apply] the fundamentals that will enable you to learn and grow as a leader" (Kouzes & Posner, 2016).

That's what we set out to do with this issue of *JSD*: Give learning leaders — prospective, new, and longtime — a broad sample of the fundamental concepts and strategies they must have in their development tool kit. We want this to be a go-to resource whether you're building your skill set or you need a refresher after decades in the professional learning field.

In this issue, we explore what we mean when we say "learn-

ing leader." To do this, we asked ourselves, "What is professional learning leadership at its core?"

Let's start with the definition of leadership from Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning:

Leadership: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

That's the quality we want to build, but we want to go deeper to understand: Who are you, where do you work, and what type of work do you do? Why is your understanding of these fundamentals so important? Why are learning leaders necessary to education professionals and the students who benefit from their expertise?

MANY ROLES, MANY PLACES

Leaders of professional learning come to their responsibility from many roles, from teacher to district administrator to instructional coach. They can be found doing their work at the classroom, school, and system levels. They set the agenda for professional learning by aligning it to classroom, school, and school system goals for student and educator learning, using



data to monitor and measure its effects on educator and student performance. They may facilitate professional learning, coach and supervise those who facilitate it, or do both.

As facilitators of professional learning, they apply a body of technical knowledge and skills to plan, design, implement, and evaluate professional learning. As coaches and supervisors of those who facilitate professional learning, they develop expertise in others about effective professional learning, set high standards for their performance, and use data to give frequent, constructive feedback.

Teacher leaders are vital to establishing a collaborative school culture that fosters continuous improvement of teaching and student achievement. Teacher leaders model, facilitate, advocate for, and support ongoing professional learning within schools.

Research has shown that teaching quality and school leadership are the most important school-based factors in raising student achievement. For teachers and school and district leaders to be as effective as possible, they continually expand their knowledge and skills to implement the best educational practices. Educators learn to help students learn at the highest levels.

Many people may not be aware of their local school system's methods for improving teaching and student learning. Professional development is the only strategy school systems have to strengthen educators' performance levels. Professional development is also the only way educators can learn so that they are able to better their performance and raise student achievement.

As Thomas Guskey (2000, p. 4) states, "One constant finding in the research literature is that notable improvements in education almost never take place in the absence of professional development." Professional development is key to meeting today's educational demands, and you are the agent of change for systems, schools, and people charged with improving student outcomes.

"It's important to note that this is not just about providing professional development but about providing *effective* professional development," notes the Center for Public Education's 2013 report *Teaching the Teachers*. "Availability alone is not an issue. In fact, in a recent study, researchers found that, while 90% of teachers reported participating in professional development, most of those teachers also reported that it was totally useless (Darling-Hammond et al., 2009).

"Thus, the real issue isn't that teachers aren't provided professional development, but that the typical offerings are ineffective at changing teachers' practice or student learning. ... The real challenge schools face is how to create opportunities for

teachers to grow and develop in their practice so that they, in turn, can help students grow and develop their knowledge and ability to think critically" (Gulamhussein, 2013).

FOCUS ON TEACHER LEADERS

Learning Forward's focus on teacher leadership began in 2004 with the advent of its first national academy for school-based staff developers, as they were called then. Over the last seven years, Learning Forward's support of teacher leaders has focused more on teachers who support their colleagues by serving in one or more of many roles with one of many diverse job titles.

Whether as coaches, instructional facilitators, teacher leaders, or school-based staff developers, highly dedicated and well-prepared teacher leaders work in these roles. They choose to make a difference beyond their classroom, some while remaining in their classrooms full- or part-time, and others who leave their role of classroom teacher to serve in one of these new teacher leadership roles.

No matter which role you serve, we hope these articles will help you build a foundation for your work that will remain rock-solid for years to come.

We don't consider this issue to be an exhaustive list of the fundamental aspects of professional learning leadership. The articles we've included here give everyone a sample of the critical aspects of the craft that are essential to growing your leadership capacity. We hope that, for this reason, you'll come back to this issue often as you strive to become the best leader you can be.

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