

## 2 DISTRICTS JOIN REDESIGN PD COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

Two school districts have joined the Redesign PD Community of Practice, bringing to 22 the number of school systems collaborating to improve professional learning systems and share their progress with districts across the country.

Metro Nashville Public Schools in Tennessee and Guilford County Schools in Greensboro, North Carolina, will participate in the remaining in-person and virtual gatherings of the district teams until the community finishes its work next year.

The two districts have completed the vision and goal-setting phases of addressing their critical professional learning priorities during initial site visits with Learning Forward staff members. Both Metro Nashville and Guilford County have selected the coherence and relevance problem of practice: “How do we ensure that decisions made at central office, school, and teacher levels ensure both coherent and relevant learning experiences for teachers that improve their practices?”

“Professional development is on the radar of any large school district,” says Nakia Hardy, chief academic officer for Guilford County, a 72,000-student district with 127 schools. “We want to focus on leveraging resources to reach each and every teacher with the support they need.”

Learning Forward coordinates and facilitates the work of the community for the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Facing common challenges, teams from each district are working to create more coherent professional learning systems and measure how learning for teachers impacts their practice and leads to better outcomes for students.

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— Nakia Hardy,  
chief academic officer,  
Guilford County Schools

The teams will continue to work together and share their progress through the middle of 2017. Learning Forward is capturing stories on the work of the districts and sharing lessons learned with members and the education field more broadly.

### CONNECTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Both Guilford County and Metro Nashville leaders say it’s important that professional learning opportunities are not disjointed. Tonisha Walden, Guilford County’s director of professional development, says leaders have worked hard to expand professional learning opportunities, but adds, “One of the pieces we’ve struggled with is how those offerings connect with one another and how we monitor and sustain that down to the school level.”

Hardy adds that professional learning should also be connected to “some improvement outcomes,” whether related to academics or school climate, such as better attendance.

In the 88,000-student Metro Nashville district, Monique T. Felder, chief academic officer, said leaders were drawn to join the community because, while professional learning is offered, “it isn’t always relevant, executed well, aligned, coherent, or assessed.”

The Metro Nashville team will

focus on coherence and also hopes to tackle the challenges of sustaining the learning teachers receive and moving away from an “overreliance on the training-the-trainer model,” Felder says.

The two new districts are also looking forward to sharing their strategies with other districts in the community. For example, Metro Nashville Public Schools has worked to give school teams a time to plan as part of their regular professional learning agenda.

The community did not expect to add more districts, but Metro Nashville and Guilford County expressed interest in joining because their superintendents have worked in districts that were already involved. Guilford County Superintendent Sharon L. Contreras previously served as superintendent for the Syracuse (New York) City School District, and Shawn Joseph, Metro Nashville’s new director of schools, worked as the deputy superintendent of teaching and learning in the Prince George’s County Public Schools in Maryland.

Both Syracuse and Prince George’s County have been part of the community since it began last year, so Contreras and Joseph were already familiar with the goals and the commitment involved.

“I’m really excited about both systems joining the community,” says Michelle King, who facilitates the community for Learning Forward. “In Metro Nashville, the common theme was a passion and commitment to develop ‘clarity and coherence in the system.’ Similarly, in Guilford County, there is an intention to focus on coherence in order to create and sustain a learning organization.”



## English learners need high-quality grade-level experiences

One of the big equity lessons our district has learned is that we can't deny students access to grade-level content. When we insisted that English learners learn English first, we positioned them to be behind in grade-level content — sometimes for the rest of their school career.

Traditional English language learner (ELL) pullout programs often do not let students learn English through cohesive learning experiences. Since language is not learned absent content, and content is not learned absent language, our district realized that students could not afford to be pulled out of the classroom to focus on English. As educators, we are obligated to provide access to grade-level content. For English learners, this must happen at the same time they learn English.

To understand how this approach works, our district looked at student science achievement and experiences. We found three components that are necessary for any child to have a quality science experience.

First, teachers have to teach science with the fidelity of time and resources. This means providing teachers access to high-quality materials and dedicated time for teaching science.

The second component is to ensure that students have multiple opportunities to experience hands-on

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### on board JOHN EYOLFSON

investigations. The hands-on experiences help students become more scientifically literate and construct understandings through investigations. Investigations generally begin with a focus question and result in the development of a scientific concept and explanation.

The third component is to connect the experience with grade-level informational text and opportunities for students to write in science notebooks.

In many situations, especially for English language learners, access to grade-level content is difficult to accomplish. In schools across the country, these students are being pulled out of classrooms, meaning they have a different educational experience. The question is: How can we provide high-quality grade-level experiences and still have explicit instruction of English? The solution our district has chosen is to move from addressing a deficit through a pullout process to working cooperatively in a co-teaching model.

Moving to this model requires leaders to take a bold step: Instead of pulling students out of the classroom, have the classroom teacher and English specialist collaborate. This is vital to create the space for the change. However, without support, this first step will most likely lead to a difficult

transition and, in many cases, teachers' practices will slide back to the old method of educating English learners.

Our district found that, to make co-teaching work, teachers need:

- Time to plan and reflect;
- Ongoing professional learning;
- Collaboration skills;
- Opportunities for coaching conversations;
- A variety of instructional delivery models aligned to student learning (supportive, parallel, complementary, team teaching);
- Assessment tools for content and language; and
- Various sheltering techniques, which integrate language and content instruction to promote comprehensible input.

We began to see a change in achievement in the acquisition of English and the formation of scientific concepts almost immediately. Students were no longer missing grade-level concepts. Over a five-year period, English language learners' performance on the 5th-grade Colorado state assessment increased 25%. Scores for English learners classified as fluent English proficient increased 29%, and we eliminated the achievement gap between fluent English proficient and non-ELL students.

What steps has your school or district taken to ensure that English learners have access to high-quality grade-level experiences? We'd like to hear from you. ■

# Survey evaluates Learning Forward services and resources

**F**indings from surveys of Learning Forward members and subscribers show which of Learning Forward's services and resources are most useful to respondents and point to ways the organization can more effectively serve its stakeholders.

The surveys, conducted by Resources for Learning earlier this year, asked 22 questions related to several categories of information, including:

- Familiarity with, and perception of, the Standards for Professional Learning;
- Perception of the utility of new research in general as well as new research provided by Learning Forward specifically;
- Use of available resources, publications, and opportunities for involvement;
- Perceived impact of these resources on responders' practice; and
- Level of advocacy.

In all, 1,682 people responded to the member survey and 508 people responded to the subscriber survey, which included former members and those who subscribe to Learning Forward's free resources. Here is an overview of survey results.

**A majority of respondents have read the Standards for Professional Learning.** The professional role group district — teacher/teacher leader appeared least likely to have read the standards. Respondents within the technical assistance provider/organization/government role were most likely to have read the standards.

**A majority of respondents find the standards either moderately or extremely useful.** Respondents within the teacher/teacher leader and principal/assistant principal category were most likely to state that the standards were

**The Standards for Professional Learning are the most frequently used Learning Forward resource. Those in the technical assistance provider/organization/government role were most likely to have read the standards.**

“not at all useful.” Respondents most frequently reported using the standards “to plan professional learning,” “to help my colleagues understand effective professional learning,” and “to implement professional learning.” Respondents reported using the standards “to advocate for effective professional learning” the least often.

**The Standards for Professional Learning are the most frequently used Learning Forward resource.** Innovation Configuration Maps and the Standards Assessment Inventory were the least frequently used resources among respondents.

**Members are more likely than subscribers to take advantage of the majority of Learning Forward's opportunities, with the exception of the Institutes, online courses, and webinars.** Overall, respondents were most likely to use the Annual Conference often or to a great extent.

**Members often take advantage of the Learning Forward Affiliates.** This proved true more so than other opportunities. Over twice as many members as subscribers reported being highly involved in both of these opportunities.

**JSD is the most frequently used publication, though more by members than subscribers.** Members reported using bookstore items and *JSD*

at double the rate that subscribers did, but there were no striking differences in use of other resources.

**Respondents within the central office professional role category advocate for effective professional learning daily more often than other survey respondents.** Over 60% of the member survey respondents stated that they advocate for effective professional learning daily or weekly. Within districts, members with high levels of decision power (superintendent/assistant superintendent and central office) reported being more likely to advocate for effective professional learning regularly than others within the districts.

**Respondents who did advocate reported advocating primarily to their school system or extended professional networks.** Respondents in the central office and superintendent/assistant superintendent roles advocate more to their school system than respondents in other roles. Respondents within the principal/assistant principal and teacher/teacher leader roles advocate to their school system, but tended also to advocate to their schools more often, probably because central office staff tend not to be located within one school. Respondents within the technical assistance provider/organization/government role were most likely to advocate to extended professional networks and policymakers.

**Learning Forward resources help survey respondents in their advocacy efforts.** In fact, 85% of member survey respondents and 78% of subscriber survey respondents stated that Learning Forward resources are either essential or sometimes helpful in aiding advocacy efforts. However, some respondents indicated a lack of awareness of Learning Forward's resources.

### book club

HIGH EXPECTATIONS TEACHING:  
How We Persuade Students to Believe and Act on  
"Smart is Something You Can Get"

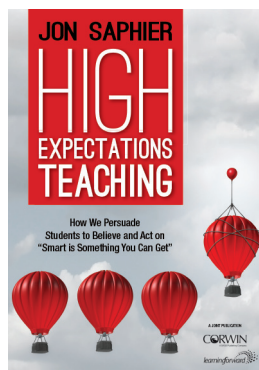
By Jon Saphier

**H**igh Expectations Teaching is an assets-based approach to advancing student achievement by helping students believe that "smart is something you can get" and that one's ability to do something is based on the effort extended to build it.

Author Jon Saphier debunks the myth of fixed intelligence by presenting evidence that effort creates ability. He emphasizes the critical importance of teacher language in building student self-confidence, promoting healthy risk taking, and perseverance.

High Expectations Teaching can serve as a catalyst for educational equity by helping teachers uncover biases that hamper their effectiveness with struggling students. Case studies highlight experiences of teachers and administrators who worked to implement high expectations practices in their work with students and teachers. A series of original video clips provide depictions of strategies in action.

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 November 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call 800-727-7288 or email [office@learningforward.org](mailto:office@learningforward.org).



## Learning Forward makes the case for ESSA implementation

Learning Forward and partners have submitted a letter to the U.S. Department of Education recommending changes in Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) regulations and guidelines that would help states and districts implement effective professional learning.

Recommendations include:

1. Expressly ensure that states (and districts) align their strategies for professional development to the definition in ESSA, and focus on building systems of professional learning.
2. Ask states to establish guardrails for local consolidated planning requirements.
3. Support states and districts in building educators' capacity and skill to effectively implement evidence-based strategies in school improvement.
4. Provide adequate time for states to comprehensively define their approach to professional learning through their consolidated plan application.  
"Professional learning is critical to achieving ESSA's goals of equity and excellence," the letter states. "As a result, we ask that further attention be directed to the elements of effective professional learning systems including the new definition of professional learning in ESSA."

For more information: [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/essa](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/essa)



THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

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