

The power of thinking big.

By Eric Celeste

Communities of practice have become important tools for districts striving to improve teacher quality in a way that improves student outcomes, but scaling the benefits of these communities requires a more rigorous, intentional approach. That's why Learning Forward, with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, created the Redesign PD Community of Practice — to add structure and support to the community of practice model, take it across systems, and use it to help large groups of educators wrestle with their most vexing concerns.

6 key features of a successful community of practice.

By Michelle King

Most educators probably know what it feels like to be part of an unproductive professional learning community. But there are ways to create strong communities of practice that allow

schools to address common challenges while also benefitting individual members. Successful communities have six specific characteristics that allow the experience to be rewarding for the members, the students they serve, and the education field in general.

Goals: Coherence and relevance:

3 districts focus on quality of professional learning.

By Linda Jacobson

When many departments offer professional learning in a district and even at each individual school, it can be tough to ensure that the learning is high quality. But that's what teams from the Loudon County and Shelby County school districts in Tennessee and the Bridgeport Public Schools in Connecticut are working toward with new rubrics. As part of the Redesign PD Community of Practice, all three systems chose to work to build a professional learning system that is coherent and relevant to teachers, meaning that the

learning is useful, timely, and related to their practice in the classroom.

Taking a measure of impact:

2 Colorado districts calibrate the effects of high-quality professional learning.

By Linda Jacobson

Snapshots of two Colorado districts in the Redesign PD Community of Practice: Denver Public Schools' professional learning partners help subject-matter experts and others provide educators with a high-quality learning experience. In Jefferson County, Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning guide educators to make teacher professional learning as useful as possible.

Neighbors make great learning partners:

4 Texas districts work together to build strong professional learning systems.

By Kay Psencik, Steven Ebell, and Lisa V. McCulley

Four southeast Texas school districts

Share your story

Learning Forward is eager to read manuscripts from educators at every level in every position. If your work includes a focus on effective professional learning, we want to hear your story.

JSD publishes a range of types of articles, including:

- **First-person accounts** of change efforts;
- **Practitioner-focused articles** about school- and district-level initiatives;
- **Program descriptions and results** from schools, districts, or external partners;
- **How-tos** from practitioners and thought leaders; and
- **Protocols and tools** with guidance on use and application.

To learn more about key topics and what reviewers look for in article submissions, visit www.learningforward.com/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.



Write for JSD

- Themes are posted at www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.
- Please send manuscripts and questions to Christy Colclasure (christy.colclasure@learningforward.org).
- Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines.

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

Crayola	inside back cover
Heinemann	inside front cover
Just ASK Publications & Professional Development.....	outside back cover
National Education Association	5

are working together as part of a three-year initiative to improve professional learning in their districts. Clear Creek Independent School District, Friendswood Independent School District, Santa Fe Independent School District, and Galveston Independent School District became part of Galveston County Learning Leaders in spring 2015 when Learning Forward launched the project with a grant from the Houston Endowment. The community is based on the concept that districts benefit when they can share knowledge with each other.

Creative tension:

Turn the challenges of learning together into opportunities.

By Christina L. Dobbs, Jacy Ippolito, and Megin Charner-Laird

Participants in a high school literacy initiative grappled with and attempted new instructional practices designed to improve students' literacy skills over time. With regular opportunities to



interact around the work of improving literacy and learn to navigate the productive tensions that arose along the way, teachers not only found ideas for improving literacy instruction in their individual classrooms, but also came to agreement on new, shared instructional routines. Moreover, the strength of the collective work allowed the teams to then spread their practices to colleagues outside the project.

Core practices fuel superintendents' equity focus.

By Scott Thompson

The New Jersey Network of Superintendents is a community of practice with a tight focus on advancing equity through improvement of practice in the instructional core. The group's diversity of experiences and perspectives,

combined with the development of open, trusting relationships around a shared focus on leading for equity and improvement of the instructional core, were key factors in transforming a professional network into an authentic community of practice.

Task mastery:

A backward approach to designing instruction propels teaching forward.

By Suzanne Simons

Literacy Design Collaborative is a network of teachers committed to developing literacy-rich instruction in the content areas and building expertise from teacher to teacher. Within the Literacy Design Collaborative instructional design system, the task is the anchor for teacher work and student work. Co-designed with teachers, the system guides teachers in a backward design approach that helps teachers create tasks and, from there, strong instructional plans to teach the tasks.

features

Make evaluation count:

To assess impact, know what to measure.

By Amy Pendray and Jennifer Crockett

How do educators at a systems level know that professional learning is impacting teacher practice in a way that leads to improved student outcomes? California's Long Beach Unified School District, a member of Learning Forward's Redesign PD Community of Practice, partnered with other districts from across the country to answer that question. As educators in the district clarified their understanding of evaluation and developed tools to better measure impact, partner districts provided critical and constructive feedback to help them refine their work.

Foundations for success:

Young people learn best through active and reflective experiences.

By Jenny Nagaoka

A report by the University of Chicago Consortium on School Research describes the personal qualities that underlie a productive and fulfilling adulthood and the kind of experiences that adults can create for children to lead them there. These developmental experiences have two essential characteristics: They must be active, allowing students to design, create, practice, puzzle, experiment, and do. They must also be reflective, helping young people draw meaning from their experiences. *This article is sponsored by The Wallace Foundation.*

columns

Lessons from research:

Instructional rounds contribute to communities of practice.

By Joellen Killian

Instructional rounds are a form of organizational routines among school and district administrators that contribute to establishing social networks within communities of practice to build a districtwide focus on instruction.

From the director:

How the Redesign PD Community of Practice can benefit you.

By Stephanie Hirsh

Consider three actions you can take now to impact teaching and learning in your system.