

THE IMPACT FACTOR:

Why we can't neglect professional learning evaluation.
By Stephanie Hirsh

The Standards for Professional Learning and the guidance they provide lay the foundation for an effective professional learning system that demonstrates improvement and results. Aligning professional learning to the standards will help educators document impact by keeping them focused on what is most important, telling them whether they are on the right track to achieve their goals, and giving evidence to reassure those responsible for investments in professional learning.

MOVING IN UNEXPECTED DIRECTIONS:

Texas elementary uses exploratory research to map out an evaluation plan.

By Sue Chapman, Debora Ortloff, Laurie Weaver, Winona Vesey, Mary Anderson, Michael Marquez, and Melissa Sanchez

After a sudden and dramatic drop in reading scores at McWhirter Elementary Professional Development Laboratory School in Webster, Texas, school leaders needed to know what to do differently. The leadership team chose exploratory action research as the first step of its instructional improvement strategy because team members needed a more complex picture of what was happening in reading instruction than standardized test scores could reveal. The results of the research would inform their theory of change, long-term professional learning plan, and evaluation framework.

CHECKS AND BALANCES:

Built-in data routines monitor the impact of Boston's teacher leader program.

By Jill Harrison Berg, Christina A. Bosch, Nina Lessin-Joseph, and Phomdaen Souvanna

By incorporating time and tools to review data at multiple levels of the program, the Boston Teacher Leadership Certificate program team has not only been able to monitor the effectiveness of this professional learning model, but has also constantly refined its process for ensuring participants succeed in their roles, facilitators lead effective learning experiences, and the larger program design meets the needs of Boston Public Schools' reform plan.

INSTRUCTIONAL COACH WEIGHS 3 TYPES OF DATA TO GET TRIPLE-STRENGTH FEEDBACK.

By Monica Boehle

Because coaching is unique and personal to each teacher, broad measurements do not accurately take into account the significant growth and change of both teacher learning and student learning. Weighing three types of data over

time — shifts in teacher reflective tendencies, the use of student performance as an indicator of success, and the contextualization of a change into long-term habits — can provide more valid program evaluation and give coaches the timely feedback they need.

COMPLETE THE PICTURE:

Evaluation fills in the missing pieces that feedback can't provide.

By Chad Dumas and Lee Jenkins

Both feedback and evaluation play an important role in determining what professional learning participants have learned. While immediate feedback ensures that participants' questions or concerns can be resolved on the spot, a deeper measure of learning is evaluation. A tool called the LtoJ process measures knowledge gained throughout learning experiences. Interviewing a random sample of participants is an effective way to gauge implementation. Using both in combination provides a complete picture of any professional learning experience.

A CONVERGENCE OF ENERGY AND TALENT:

External support boosts New York district's literacy initiative.

By Mike Murphy and Linda Sykut

Sandwiched between shrinking resources and looming imperatives, the Webster (N.Y.) Central School District chose to focus on its elementary literacy program as part of a multiyear initiative. External consultants from Learning Forward's Center for Results became part of the team to provide planning, support, and professional learning to guide the literacy initiative. The team created a change theory that led to definitive action steps that could be measured at strategic points. These action steps drove the professional learning that threaded through the district.

MAKE THE CASE FOR COACHING:

Bolster support with evidence that coaching makes a difference.

By Ellen Eisenberg and Elliott Medrich

Evidence of positive gains in student outcomes is critical to getting support for instructional coaching. As with any other form of effective professional learning, showing results is often the hardest thing to do. Policymakers want to see evidence that coaching makes a difference for teachers and students. Follow these evaluation guidelines to persuade school boards, superintendents, and school leaders that instructional coaching represents a good investment.

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THE EMERGING LEADER

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WEAVE DATA INTO LEARNING:

Support and planning are key to integrating data use into teacher practice.

By Jo Beth Jimerson

Effective professional learning practices seem to get lost when the learning involves data use or data systems. Responsibility for supporting data use and cohesive planning related to professional learning for data use are instrumental in ensuring that data becomes a tool used to continually improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment. To accomplish this, assign a leader, make sure supports are in place, and include data with other professional learning.

TOP SKILLS FOR TOUGH CONVERSATIONS:

Spark effective dialogue to solve complex issues.

By Steven A. Schiola

School-based, classroom-focused, teacher-initiated reform requires school and district leaders who possess the skills to create conditions that allow teachers to collaborate effectively. Although teacher and administrator preparation programs might not equip educators to do this, school and district leaders can teach and model the skills necessary to facilitate productive conversations among teachers. These skills include: Understand the problem clearly, understand the purpose of each meeting, establish working agreements, use effective decision-making strategies, and ensure every voice is in the room.

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Collaborative culture:

Deep, honest conversations build trust and strengthen working relationships.

By Susan Scott and Angela Brooks-Rallins

A school principal describes how her relationships with staff members evolve as she steps out from behind her professional image and models authentic conversations.

From the director:

What professional learning story will you tell at the end of the school year?

By Stephanie Hirsh

Learning Forward launches “Tell Your Story” to build the case for why professional learning matters, how it makes a difference for educators and students, and why it merits the attention and investment of policymakers and education leaders.

Writing for JSD

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