



**HERE WE GO**

## Eric Celeste

### Recognition of districts' hard work brings a measure of satisfaction

I was anxious. It was early March, and the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) was naming its first-ever winners of a new initiative called Great Districts for Great Teachers, designed to recognize districts for their exceptional programs and policies on recruiting, encouraging, supporting, and retaining great teachers. I wanted to know if any of the districts we work with at Learning Forward would be recognized.

When the eight winners were announced, I went from anxious to elated: Three of the eight inaugural winners were members of Learning Forward's Redesign PD Community of Practice — Denver Public Schools, District of Columbia Public Schools, and New York City Department of Education. (You can see the full list at [www.greatdistricts.org/district/winners.do](http://www.greatdistricts.org/district/winners.do).)

I was happy for three reasons. One, the award makes clear that professional learning is key to winning such a designation. Specifically, NCTQ looks to ensure that “professional development and coaching are tailored to teachers’ needs and include sufficient collaborative planning time” and that “teachers have multiple opportunities to tackle leadership roles.” Seeing broad recognition of the importance of professional learning makes me smile.

Two, I know from talking to Denver Public Schools representatives for an article on their personal learning measurement efforts (see p. 50) how much the Redesign PD Community of



Practice has helped them to measure professional learning success.

“We had opportunities early on to engage and do some seed-planting during the Learning Forward sessions, especially some of the very first ones,” says Theress Pidick, executive director of the Professional Learning Center in Denver Public Schools. “Afterwards, we were able to come back and have our plans approved by senior leaders. Then, ongoing, we’ve been able to leverage our Learning Forward community partners to be able to get feedback and do problems of practice around some of the specific measurement work.”

Pidick notes that some of the more valuable feedback her team received was collaboration with other urban districts like D.C. and New York, often leading to revised ideas and approaches.

Three, it’s wonderful to see assessments that focus on success. So much of what you’ll read in our Focus section this month — including new pieces from two giants in the field, Joellen Killion and Thomas Guskey —

stresses the importance of professional learning measurement as a tool for goal setting and a continuous cycle of improvement, not punitive scoring methods. It’s good to see other organizations doing what Learning Forward does every day: Highlight districts that are working hard, independently and in conjunction with others, to improve outcomes through professional learning.

There is much else to see in this issue, from a spotlight on a member alternating between coaching and teaching to ESSA toolkit information for districts to exploring communities of practice to improve principal supervision. I hope these stories, each with their own perspective on the importance of professional learning to district success, make you smile, too.

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