



BEING FORWARD

Scott Laurence

Bring stakeholders on board by gathering multiple measures of success

I'm pleased that the focus of this issue of *The Learning Professional* is about measurement of professional learning. It's important that professional learning leaders continue to find ways to document success and tie it to teacher excellence and student achievement.

The subject matter is also personal to me because advocating for multiple measures of success was key to systemwide improvements we made in the California school district I oversaw.

When I became superintendent of the San Mateo Union High School District in 2009, I shared with the board and key stakeholders that an investment in professional learning was key to student achievement — and that we'd have to find ways to measure success at key points along that journey.

San Mateo is one of the wealthiest districts in the state, but also one with pockets of poverty and diversity. That disparity presents challenges in analyzing and implementing new programs and measuring their success. You can't just look at test scores when 25% of your student population is in English language learner programs and traditionally struggle with such measures. You need to find ways to tie teacher learning to teacher and student growth.

It's easy to find agreement on this approach until it comes time for implementation, which takes commitment and an application of scarce resources. We needed buy-in for this approach. From the start, I told the board and community that the way we would

improve performance was through professional learning for teachers. Not through a new curriculum or a single program, but by helping teachers become really good at their craft.

We used multiple measures in looking at the growth in student achievement. We looked at the more traditional measures of API/AYP scores, SAT scores, AP scores, ELL movement, and student GPAs. We measured and compared student achievement in Algebra 1 and Algebra 2 over the years. We looked at the data around students meeting the University of California A-G subject admission requirements.

We watched the enrollment in our continuation high school drop because we were finding ways to help students achieve success in their home schools and remain on track for graduation.

The first thing we did was to develop a professional learning structure at the district level and at the sites. That was a challenge because we were spending more money and taking some of our better teachers out of the classroom. Immediately, the call came to measure and show success to justify the change in allocation of resources. This required a specific approach: making a deep commitment for two to three years of data analysis and assessment and being willing to evaluate, revise, or shed a program or investment if results were

not encouraging.

We tackled our concerns on multiple fronts, always driven by data. This affected professional learning in all aspects of the system. One of our most intense efforts was to focus on Algebra 2. We discovered, through analysis, that success in Algebra 2 was the key success standard in college completion.

One crucial learning area for teachers was a new commitment to social-emotional learning to better support

low-income students. The administration and teacher groups wondered why we were spending time and money on emotional

support. We explained that building relationships with students was another way to improve student achievement. Measuring improvement during implementation gathered support to scale and continue the program..

I saw firsthand how important it was to gather multiple measures of success to get buy-in for professional learning programs. If you show teachers, administrators, the board, and the community results from their investment, then you will have wonderful, strong partners in your learning leadership journey.

Scott Laurence is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees. ■