



BEING FORWARD

Scott Laurence

Highlights from the past year show strategic priorities in action

As the Learning Forward board president, I see a lot of the work that the organization does and am proud to be a part of it. I'm especially proud of Learning Forward's Strategic Plan, which outlines the organization's strategic priorities that set its direction. These strategic priorities demonstrate how the organization is responding to the needs of its members and stakeholders, while also addressing issues in the field of education and professional learning. I believe there is a lot of fidelity in the organization to follow our Strategic Plan and make it a living, working document.

There are three areas of strategic focus in this plan, each with its own stated priority. I would like to give you an outline of what we thought were the highlights from this past year. I hope this helps you see just how Learning Forward is working on behalf of teachers and students to improve outcomes.

AREA 1: Standards and impact.

Priority: Learning Forward establishes standards and examines evidence to strengthen and document the impact of professional learning.

I believe that we see this as an overall positive collective effort of the organization. You can see the effort in the Annual Conference in Vancouver last December as well as in academies, institutes, our study on *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada*, and other publications. The study in Canada was perhaps most

significant. It was the first such study of its kind of professional learning in Canada, and it expanded the industry's knowledge of professional learning internationally. We need to continue such efforts in this category.

AREA 2: Leadership and practice.

Priority: Learning Forward builds the capacity of its members, clients, partners, and staff to establish and sustain effective professional learning.

Learning Forward used every tool available to show positive effects in leadership and practice. Supported by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, the organization continued its work leading the Redesign PD Community of Practice: a program in which 22 of the nation's leading school districts and charter management organizations address systemwide educator and student learning priorities. As well, Learning Forward executives Stephanie Hirsh and Tracy Crow published *Becoming a Learning Team*, which offers teachers step-by-step guidance in using collaborative learning time to solve specific student learning challenges.

The organization also continued building the learning leaders of tomorrow with the Learning Forward Academy. The Academy is a 2½-year program in which its members work collaboratively to gain knowledge to solve significant student learning problems in their schools, districts, or organizations. It's just one more dynamic way Learning Forward

worked to build capacity to sustain effective professional learning.

AREA 3: Advocacy and policy.

Priority: Learning Forward advocates policies and practices that strengthen the field of professional learning.

This might be the most important part of the Strategic Plan. The advocacy that Hirsh, the board, and the organization began on behalf of Title II — funds that can be used for professional learning — is critical to our mission. Regardless of the final budget outcome, we are creating a lot of pressure on policymakers to recognize the importance of high-quality professional learning that improves student outcomes.

By elevating the voice of teachers and showing politicians how those funds directly benefit public education, we became a very powerful voice in support of Title II. This was made possible in part because of another crucial decision made this past year: the merger between Learning Forward and the National Commission on Teaching & America's Future. This increased our voice in Washington and beyond.

You can see from this partial list that Learning Forward has had a major impact in professional learning this past year. And you can see that following the Strategic Plan was a big reason why that is so.

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