



OUR TAKE

Elizabeth Foster

New report and tool kit build momentum for effective professional learning

Across the country right now, states and districts are thinking about their ESSA plans — the funding, the requirements, the changes that are in the plan that will need to be implemented in the coming years. While there is a lot to consider, ESSA can potentially create real opportunity to improve teaching and learning because of the way it defines and lays out expectations for professional learning.

Because of the call for equity along with excellence as well as for an increased use of evidence and data, ESSA could catalyze new visions of professional learning systems and greater emphasis on what the evidence says constitutes effective professional development. However, given concerns about funding and the other requirements competing for attention, how do we seize this opportunity?

With all of this in our heads, Learning Forward joined with the Learning Policy Institute and the Center for American Progress in early June to discuss Learning Policy Institute's new report about how professional development has a positive impact on student outcomes. *Effective Teacher Professional Development*, written by Linda Darling-Hammond, Maria E. Hyler, and Madelyn Gardner, is based on an analysis of 35 rigorous studies and provides examples of effective strategies, detailed and interesting program profiles, and recommendations for

practice and policy. In brief, Learning Policy Institute found that effective professional development:

- **Is content-focused**, with an intentional focus on discipline-specific curriculum and pedagogies;
- **Incorporates active learning** that provides teachers with opportunities to design, test, and refine teaching strategies using authentic and relevant activities;
- **Supports collaboration and “creates space for teachers to share ideas and collaborate in their learning, often in job-embedded contexts”;**
- **Uses models of effective practice** to provide teachers with a clear vision of what effective practices, plans, and student work look like;
- **Provides coaching and expert support** that addresses teachers' individual needs by calling on expertise about content and evidence-based practices;
- **Offers feedback and reflection**, including observation and discussion time built in to encourage teachers to move toward their vision of accomplished teaching; and
- **Is of sustained duration** with adequate time to learn, practice, implement, and reflect on strategies that facilitate changes in their practice.

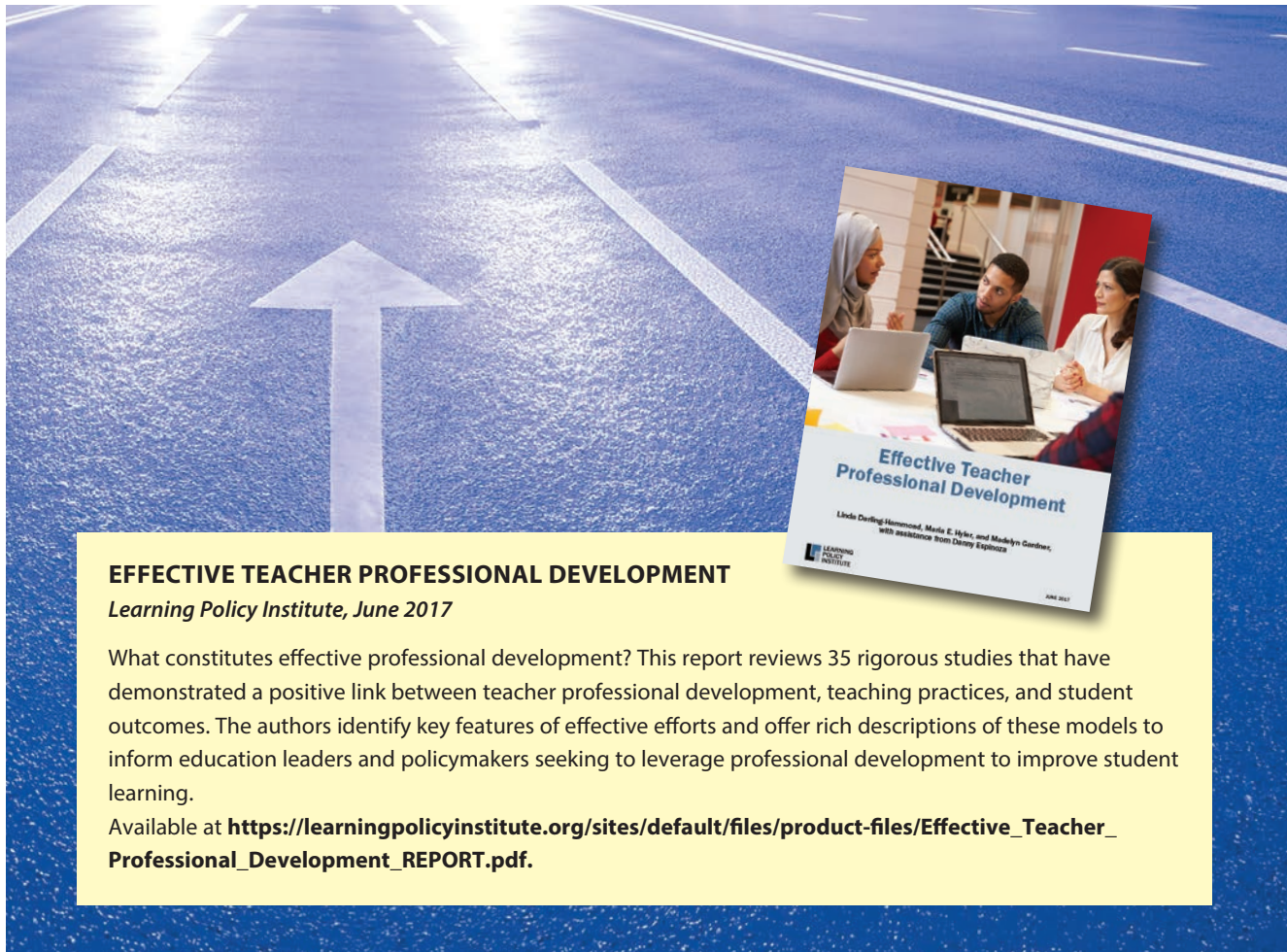
ESSA TOOLS AND RESOURCES
FROM LEARNING FORWARD

www.learningforward.org/get-involved/essa/essa-tools-and-resources

These program elements will be familiar to Learning Forward members and readers. Learning Policy Institute's research supports Learning Forward's theory of action that collaborative, job-embedded professional learning changes teaching practice and results for students for the better. The findings align well with the research behind Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). This alignment is important because the more we can add to the momentum around looking at evidence of impact and create demand for effective professional learning that leads to changes for teachers and students, the better.

In this alignment lies the real opportunity. The ESSA conversations have opened the door for increased dialogue and feedback among policymakers and administrators about what effective professional learning is and can do — what are effective strategies and elements, how do we support educators' continuous improvement, what are we doing that we know we should stop doing.

Leveraging new reports like this one with the well-established research-based



EFFECTIVE TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Learning Policy Institute, June 2017

What constitutes effective professional development? This report reviews 35 rigorous studies that have demonstrated a positive link between teacher professional development, teaching practices, and student outcomes. The authors identify key features of effective efforts and offer rich descriptions of these models to inform education leaders and policymakers seeking to leverage professional development to improve student learning.

Available at https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/sites/default/files/product-files/Effective_Teacher_Professional_Development_REPORT.pdf.

Standards for Professional Learning can provide a strong foundation for advocacy. We may not know everything about what works in professional learning, but we know enough to ask informed questions and put forth strong examples of effective strategies.

Learning Policy Institute's report provides a good jumping off point for this work. Among its recommendations are to evaluate time and schedules, ask about opportunities for professional learning and collaboration, collect data about what educators want and need, and integrate professional learning into school improvement initiatives. All of these recommendations provide

good guidance about what questions educators and advocates can raise and pursue.

To that end, Learning Forward has created several tools to inform and support your advocacy efforts. We have a new tool kit about ESSA and a new rubric for analyzing state plans with an eye toward expanding and enhancing their strategies about professional learning (vetted by Learning Forward state affiliate leaders).

And because we know the quality of the implementation of any strategies is absolutely critical to success, Learning Forward is also committed to providing more evidence about what works in the

states and districts we work with day to day.

REFERENCES

Darling-Hammond, L., Hyler, M.E., Gardner, M. (2017). *Effective teacher professional development*. Palo Alto, CA: Learning Policy Institute.

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning*. Oxford, OH: Author.

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