



## For principals, leadership begins and ends with learning

Although school leaders are responsible for leading everything in a school, many educators I know tell me they frequently feel unprepared to lead a school's mission and vision. They believe they can manage the day-to-day operations, but serving as the education leader is another matter.

I've seen how the role of the school leader in ensuring equity and equality for all students has become increasingly necessary and complex. How can these leaders move their schools or districts beyond providing equity of access to achieve equity of outcomes?

From where I sit, neither policies nor practices are creating the paradigms that align professional learning with the demands school leaders need to meet to help today's students. Here's what I'm seeing that school leaders need to respond to:

- Education reform efforts will continue to place pressure on schools, with ever-changing local, state, and federal regulations.
- Scarce resources (human and financial) within districts make it increasingly challenging to achieve our goals, and leaders have to be more effective and efficient in their work.
- Advances in technology and information systems continue to provide new challenges.

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### on board DEBORAH JACKSON

- Demographic shifts in our communities mean that every educator will need to acquire new instructional practices.
- Changing curricula and new resources for the classroom remain a steady concern.
- Finally, all of the above require continuous learning for every educator in a building. And that is, at least in part, a key responsibility of the school leader.

That's an intimidating list. When I work with principals in my district, they can feel overwhelmed by what faces them.

However, no matter how long the list, the answer begins and ends with learning. Your learning, their learning, our learning, my learning. Ask how you are making time for it, how you're supporting it, and how you're creating cultures that make learning the top priority.

Raising the bar for all educators to support increased achievement, as a colleague in my district put it, will require professional learning that is embedded in a culture of continuous school improvement. Principals need explicit learning to build their own capacity in the instructional leadership necessary to improve teaching and learning, which ultimately impacts student achievement.



### STANDARDS LIGHT THE WAY

I've been proud to lead Learning Forward as its board president this year. When I look at where we still need to go as a field, I know that Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning help educators envision specific steps and actions to support building educator capacity that sustains increased achievement. Those standards serve as a beacon for leaders. When we're faced with another challenge, think about how to help all educators learn meaningfully so they are prepared for what comes next.

As I continue to advocate for continuous learning, I'd also ask state policy leaders and institutions of higher education to become partners in preparing aspiring and practicing leaders to serve as lead learners.

If education leaders are going to keep pace with the expectations of our constituencies and a networked global community, we need to serve as world-class learning leaders rather than thinking of ourselves as education administrators. Let's put learning first for every person in our buildings, systems, and communities. ■