



CALL TO ACTION

Stephanie Hirsh

Greatness is within the grasp of every teacher

As part of my participation in the Redesign PD Partnership, I had the opportunity to learn from Brian Dassler, an amazing educator and deputy chancellor in the Florida Department of Education. Dassler, who died suddenly in March, advocated for a deep appreciation of the complexity of teaching. He challenged us to describe great teaching, and I realized that talking knowledgeably about what makes teaching effective isn't something that even experienced experts in education can all do.

Great teaching does not occur by accident. It is developed through an intentional process that ideally includes study, practice, feedback, reflection, and more practice. It is a continuous improvement process that defines the core work of our most successful teachers. Reflecting on these conversations with Dassler leads me to ask: How do we ensure all teachers have the opportunity to develop a profound understanding of teaching?

Considering this question led me to wonder about a particular finding in *The State of Teacher Professional Learning*, a survey Learning Forward conducted with Corwin and NEA. Just over half of teachers who responded said they have "some say" in decisions about their professional development. My assumption is that teachers responding to this question focused on professional development that was planned and executed at the district or school level.

I wonder if there is another way to ask

Find *The State of Teacher Professional Learning* at www.learningforward.org/teacher-report.

this question and potentially shift some of that responsibility to include more teachers. There are many ways teachers can engage in powerful professional learning that do not require approval from another person and that demonstrate the power of self-directed learning.

Engaging in such learning, both as individuals and in teams, can lead to teachers gaining responsibility for planning and executing professional learning that impacts teams, schools, and entire systems. More importantly, the kinds of learning I am talking about potentially have the most impact on what happens for students every day.

I have never met a teacher who does not want the very best for the students in her charge. I have met teachers who are frustrated because they do not have the tools or expertise to address the diverse needs of their students. I have met teachers who are looking for support in addressing some of their greatest challenges. I have met teachers who, while content with their student results, believe there are things they could do to get even better outcomes.

Every teacher has the ultimate authority to ensure she is the very best teacher she can be, and the central responsibility associated with that is to understand the complexities of skillful and effective teaching. Every teacher has the authority to engage in professional

learning that focuses on this priority.

Every teacher can develop a professional growth plan to strengthen teaching expertise, determine learning priorities, and set a plan of actions to address them. Supervisors, coaches, and peers can be great sources of support.

Every teacher can ask for feedback and support about how to improve her teaching. When teachers can't access feedback from peers, coaches, or supervisors, there are other sources to tap, including online services and communities, external partners, and students.

Every teacher can set aside regular time for reflection on teaching. There are countless tools to assist teachers in capturing their practice in the classroom and protocols to support reflection. Student work and surveys can also provide rich material for deep reflection.

While debates will continue about who has the authority to allocate district time and dollars for professional learning, it gives me hope to know that, ultimately, teachers have authority and autonomy over the most important purpose for professional learning: improving their practice so that more students achieve better outcomes. Learning Forward is committed to supporting our stakeholders in achieving this purpose through resources, information, and services.

Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org) is executive director of Learning Forward. ■