



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# Kimberly Honnick

## A champion for learning keeps students front and center

**K**imberly Honnick, principal at Barringer Academy of the Arts & Humanities in Newark, New Jersey, has been a part of Learning Forward since 2003. Then the director of curriculum and instruction, she joined Learning Forward to further her research on curriculum development and professional learning. In 2017, Honnick was awarded the Learning Forward Foundation's *The Principal as a Leader of Professional Learning* scholarship.

### How did you get involved with Learning Forward?

At the Annual Conferences and other Learning Forward events, Honnick participated in professional learning led by former Executive Director Dennis Sparks and Senior Advisor Joellen Killion. "As soon as I met Joellen, I knew I wanted to be her when I grew up," Honnick says. "I had to become more involved with this organization because I learned so much and was impressed with what I experienced."

After that, Honnick jumped in with both feet. "I joined the Academy, the Coaching Academy with Ann Delehant and her colleagues, and the New Jersey Affiliate board. I traveled to China as part of a delegation that included Shirley Hord and Bill Sommers to present at an international conference on educational leadership. I joined the Learning School Alliance twice with two different teams, and, in addition to learning a great deal, we connected with coaches and colleagues from around the world."

Honnick's involvement grew to include becoming a presenter at the Annual Conference and attending Affiliate meetings at the Summer Institutes, where, she says, "I continued to learn and grow. I fell in love with Learning Forward years ago and have been committed to the work and organization ever since."

### How has the Learning Forward Foundation impacted what you're doing as an educator?

Now in her 26th year in public education, Honnick says she's facing more challenges than ever and looks to the Learning Forward Foundation for expertise and guidance. "I felt compelled to apply for the Learning Forward Foundation grant because I needed help, and I knew that I could turn to my Learning Forward family for the support I needed."

That support has made a difference in her work. "The support I have received for my work and the relationships I have made are rooted in genuine care for me and successful outcomes for my students," she says. "I have been prompted to unpack my thinking, reflect on my approach and practices, and received guidance and understanding."

### Describe your professional journey and the lessons you've learned along the way.

Honnick says she has wanted to be a teacher since she was a child. "I loved

school and learning and always knew that I was born to teach."

After earning a degree in education, she completed two master's degrees in curriculum and instruction and educational administration as well as a doctorate in educational leadership. Her student teaching experience was a major influence in shaping her teaching practice.

"As I approached my final year in college, I was assigned to Glenfield Middle School in Montclair, New Jersey, for my student teaching practicum," Honnick says. "I was assigned to a social studies teacher leading a team of four content-area teachers who worked collaboratively in an open classroom setting where the four classrooms were divided by a bookcase and the students cycled through the classes daily."

"This is where my education began. I was not treated as a student teacher, but as the fifth member of the team. The language arts teacher took me under her wing and became my mentor, role model, and best friend," she says. "I learned that the lessons we created to complement the language arts and social studies content is called interdisciplinary thematic curriculum and tailoring instruction to meet the needs of students is differentiated instruction."

Realizing just how important the student teaching experience is in anchoring one's career, Honnick hopes someday to assist in making young

teachers' experiences as powerful as hers was. She also learned early on the value of professional learning.

"As a young teacher, I knew the major impact teachers had on students, and that both good and bad experiences stay with people throughout their lives. While serving as a teacher, I consistently asked my principal if I could attend professional learning offerings. I went to every district and state offering that I could and saw so much growth in my students and myself as I implemented what I learned. I feel very strongly in continually investing in my own learning and applying new ideas into my professional practice."

Since leaving the classroom, Honnick has served as vice principal, principal, and director and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Her experience at both school and central office levels affirmed her decision to focus on the best interests of students. "In my career, I have experienced many things, but, most importantly, I do this work for the kids. They bring me most joy. It is imperative that we keep them front and center."

### **Tell us how you use what you know about effective professional learning to improve outcomes for educators and students.**

"I believe effective professional learning involves taking the time to build relationships by engaging in team-building activities and showing the staff who I am as person," Honnick says. "I make a really big deal about professional learning and designed the structures of the school to support it. Our school improvement efforts are rooted in professional learning."

Honnick says her professional learning is anchored in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. "My primary goal is to model the learning we want to see in

#### **TAKEAWAYS AND INSIGHTS**

1. Love what you do, even on the days you don't.
2. Keep learning and growing.
3. Take time to invest in your well-being.
4. Form a tribe. Surround yourself with people who are like-minded and can help you grow.
5. Learn about areas different from education, such as business, finance, systems, and social research. You will be surprised by how much you can apply at school.
6. Know your why. It keeps you going through the tough times.
7. Ask for help. You will be amazed and surprised by the support you receive and where it comes from.
8. Be patient. It will fall into place.
9. Involve staff and students in the change, initiative, etc.
10. Do things differently than the way they have always been done. Innovate.

classrooms. I surveyed the staff to see where they needed the most support, and the top three responses were: classroom management, instructional designs, and design thinking, which is our initiative this year."

Honnick uses blended learning models, including various platforms and Google Classroom, to facilitate book clubs and topic studies. She embeds reflection and self-assessment into the learning design and applies various resources from Learning Forward, including the Standards Assessment Inventory, Innovative Configuration

maps, and Learning Forward books and publications.

"Designing, facilitating, and evaluating standards-based professional learning is challenging, as developing and nurturing professional capital is important to the successful outcomes we set for our students," Honnick says. "I frame my content decisions around what the data reveal and sometimes find myself challenged as to how I can provide teachers with what they need."

Trust, she has discovered, is a key component. "I have found that building a culture of trust and cultivating a growth mindset is critical to enhancing collective professional practice, but it often is challenging and takes some time. I am challenged with balancing being patient while having a sense of urgency, wanting to see more growth while celebrating the small victories, and wanting my school to better reflect the 21st-century global knowledge economy rather than the antiquated industrial model practices that still exist," she says.

"I have a clear vision and robust goals, but I take a moment each day to stop, breathe, and find something to be proud about and shout it off the rooftop — or, rather, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter."

Honnick says the school's culture reflects its core values. "We have three core values: 'Be brave,' 'show up,' and 'I am enough,'" she says. "Unpacking these, teaching them to the children, and modeling them has begun to transform our culture. These core values resonate with my inner being."

Her advice to others: "Champion that which you believe and weave it into the fabric of your learning community. You will manifest a community that values learning and the lifelong journey of self-awareness, growth, and development and attract those who generously give of themselves to help you along the way." ■