



## BEING FORWARD

# Alan Ingram

Let's work together  
to keep moving forward

I'm honored to serve on the Learning Forward board of trustees and excited to serve this year as president.

Learning Forward is the premiere professional learning organization dedicated to improving the practice of all educators that leads to better results for students. The importance of our work as an organization is best illustrated in this quote from Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world."

My introduction to Learning Forward came more than 20 years ago while participating in a collaborative project in Oklahoma City Public Schools with Joellen Killion, now Learning Forward's senior advisor.

At the time, our team was working to leverage limited federal grant funds and district resources to implement a targeted instructional facilitator initiative. Killion shared her consultancy expertise to help us plan implementation, develop content, and facilitate training to build capacity for a cadre of teacher leaders that would be deployed strategically in high-need secondary schools across the district.

I've learned a lot about professional learning since then. My core beliefs about teaching and learning are rooted in the words of former Oklahoma Gov. Brad Henry, "A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning." My own K-12 experience as a student included stints at nine schools in Michigan and

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South Carolina.

I changed schools every year in high school but along the way benefited from a few great teachers, some tough coaches who were staunch disciplinarians, and other caring adults. What I learned to appreciate most from those experiences is the power of great teachers and caring adults. However, developing great teachers requires purposeful collaboration and must be rooted in evidence-based professional learning that gives rise to teacher voice as a part of the process.

As a former superintendent and deputy commissioner at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Massachusetts, I learned firsthand the challenges and opportunities that can be derived from aligned state policies and sound educational practices, rigorous state standards, systems of support, high expectations for all students, and stakeholder engagement. Massachusetts is widely viewed as having the best school system in the nation. We can learn a lot from the Bay State.

One of the critical factors in Massachusetts' educational achievements is that the state remains

committed to closing persistent gaps in student achievement while working to address poverty-based obstacles. For example, to help mitigate high concentrations of poverty, the state is giving more attention to social emotional learning and wellness of the whole child.

Another factor in Massachusetts' success is the state's ongoing efforts to find the right balance between accountability and assistance, which has significant implications for professional learning policies and implementation at the school, district, state, and provincial levels.

Since its inception, Learning Forward has worked with educators at all levels to provide a wide range of supports. The organization's purpose — excellence in teaching and learning — connects professional development with student learning and emphasizes that all educators have a responsibility to engage in continuous learning to improve student performance. In effective professional learning systems, professional development is aligned with rigorous state standards along with district and school improvement goals.

Successful organizations must have a clear vision, compelling mission, short- and long-term goals, core values and beliefs, and strategic priorities. They must also embrace continuous improvement, use resources effectively and efficiently to execute on high-yield strategies, deliver high-quality products and services, and adapt to change or



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new challenges.

Learning Forward is no exception. Board members continue to invest considerable time on aspects of those components while working together for the good of the organization. A look at some of Learning Forward's impact affirms we are heading in the right direction as an organization:

- More than 35 states have adopted or adapted the Standards for Professional Learning.
- There are 40 Learning Forward affiliates at the state, regional, provincial, and international level.
- Learning Forward is actively

engaged in 35 states, supporting schools and systems to develop effective learning teams, strong instructional coaching programs, effective school and district leaders, and a vision for systemwide professional learning.

Each of us brings his or her own unique experiences, skill sets, and belief systems to our work. My personal strengths include a proven commitment to improving equity, excellence, and access opportunities for all students, a passion for learning, a deep belief that teachers and public schools matter, and a strong desire to make a difference.

As president of the board of

trustees, I want to work with the other trustees and Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh to ensure we have a high-performing governance team that can take Learning Forward to new heights.

The challenges ahead for all of us will require a total team effort, adaptive and innovative solutions, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to excellence in moving professional learning systems beyond the status quo.

**Alan Ingram is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees. ■**