



OUR TAKE

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Symposium explores ways to turn exemplars of excellence into learning systems

It might seem obvious to say that Learning Forward believes that education is the learning profession. Yet as obvious as that seems, it isn't the norm, particularly for educators in the U.S. The concept of a learning profession combines the ideals of a continuously improving organization and the aspiration that educators be recognized and supported as members of a legitimate profession.

Fortunately, educators in many nations experience such a profession, to greater and lesser degrees depending on context and location, and Learning Forward is committed to learning with and from the best practices of successful systems around the world.

Representatives from more than 20 organizations met as part of Learning Forward's Annual Conference in Orlando in December 2017 for a symposium on the future of the learning profession. Co-hosted by Learning Forward, the National Center on Education and the Economy, and the Laster Center at the University of Florida, the symposium's goal was to surface critical questions and themes that advance the development of a learning profession.

Participants explored these overarching questions: What does it take to create and support educators in building an authentic learning profession? What can the United States learn from other high-performing countries?

The symposium focused on the

human capital that makes up effective systems. Themes that resonated throughout the day were teacher efficacy, teacher voice, and the critical leadership that creates the conditions that allow the profession to grow and strengthen.

Participants recognized that, in many schools, educators are not going to wait for a system to be refined or developed so that a learning profession can grow. Instead, effective leaders in such schools have the will to build a culture of collaboration and redesign time, space, and people to build the profession from within. Educators in such schools share an expectation of continuous learning for students and for educators.

Andreas Schleicher, director for education and skills and special advisor on education policy to the secretary-general at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, defined three elements necessary for the development of a true learning profession: teacher knowledge (increasing what teachers know about the subjects they teach and how students learn), teacher autonomy (allowing teachers to design their learning environments), and collaborative culture (engaging teachers as part of a profession and sharing knowledge on a daily basis). The degree to which these elements are integral to a system predicts the authenticity of the learning profession.

In the provinces and territories of



Canada, recognized internationally as high-performing education systems, there is an emphasis on collaborative professionalism, the ability to cultivate individual and collective efficacy. Leadership is distributed such that educators have both voice and choice in their professional learning and in their students' success.

In addition, respect for educators is very high, they are accountable for their own work, and there is trust. There is a shared notion of the importance of education and its role in society.

There are many schools and districts in the U.S. and other nations that serve as exemplars of excellence. The symposium was an important reminder that we need to continue to explore how to turn those exemplars into a system — not a set of structures, but a culture of collaboration and the home for the learning profession.

Learning from international colleagues and case studies can ensure and enable a brighter future for the learning profession in the United States and abroad.

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