



## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

# Heather Lageman

## Awardees' grant projects demonstrate foundation's impact

**B**uilt on the belief that we need to support more people in the profession, the Learning Forward Foundation has been leveraging money, time, and relationships through coaching to transform beliefs and practice in adult learning since it began as the Lynne Chidley Foundation in 1985.

Centered around the Standards for Professional Learning and their power to transform educator practice and student learning, the foundation's impact has a ripple effect across individuals, teams, and organizations.

Beginning with the application process and continuing through the selection of awardees, their ongoing reports of progress, and Touchpoint conversations, the Learning Forward Foundation maintains an unwavering focus on the standards and key principles for professional learning.

Touchpoint conversations are the foundation's method for supporting awardees as they create a structure for learning and a place for collaborative reflection. A Touchpoint is a one-hour phone conversation during which awardees have time with other foundation members to reflect on their change project and/or problem of practice, identify intended outcomes and activities to reach desired changes, celebrate successes, and identify challenges of implementation.

The Touchpoint is a safe space to reflect on learning. It is not judgmental or evaluative. During



these conversations, awardees provide examples of how they apply the standards and key principles in their project. This process contributes to and reinforces the vision and mission of both Learning Forward and the foundation.

### **BRIGHT SPOTS AND CHALLENGES**

In Learning Forward Foundation's living laboratory of learning, we see similar bright spots and challenges bubbling up in the larger educational ecosystem. Through the life of a grant or scholarship, awardees grow in their knowledge and skills about professional learning as essential to creating impact in their school and district system.

They shift their thinking about professional learning as a series of discrete components to a way of thinking that connects and uses the standards and principles seamlessly to create a culture of professional learning. Awardees are building a plan to ensure continued growth and sustainability beyond the life of the grant.

Bright spots include seeing change and improvement in professional learning systems, shifting educator practice, creating cultures of professional learning, and seeing awardees come to understand and integrate the Standards for Professional Learning into their work.

## CELEBRATING IMPACT

Each grant project and the processes surrounding it are a living laboratory of the Learning Forward mission — how to transform learning across systems. Here are some examples of grant projects and their impact.

**Shannon Terry**, Patsy Hochman Academy Scholarship, 2016  
**Kelly Hastings**, Principal as Leader of Professional Learning Grant, 2016

Selected for her commitment to growing as a district-based professional learning leader in Texas, Shannon Terry is working with fellow Learning Forward Academy class member Kelly Hastings to collaborate on building stronger PLCs as one strategy for advancing teacher agency and collective efficacy as a districtwide priority. They are using this simple equation to frame the conversation:



Terry

*New teacher induction program + Teacher agency = Collaborative culture, collective efficacy, and attainment of individual and systemwide performance goals*

In Arlington ISD, they are using a new teacher induction program to advance teacher agency. After reviewing research on how teacher agency drives professional learning to advance collective efficacy, Arlington ISD is scaling teacher agency so that every stakeholder in the system is equipped to exercise agency.



Hastings

In doing so, the system provides the infrastructure to allow each stakeholder to maximize agency and be responsive as participants engaged in professional learning. Each level within the organization exercises agency (district leaders, campus administrators, instructional support staff, teachers, and students) to create synergy around the work of improving student learning.

**Ronnie Edwards**, Learning Forward Foundation Academy Scholarship, 2017

In Ronnie Edwards' work as principal at Mayde Creek High School in Houston, Texas, deep learning is beginning to develop as the teachers learn in community with a variety of educator backgrounds and expertise in content areas.



Edwards

Staff have come together to make a difference in learning through common language both for teacher and student learning. Learning to use teacher voice is leading to teaching that creates student voice.

"In the short time I have been working with the Learning Forward Academy, I have been able to make valuable connections to other educational leaders from across the nation who are immersed in the work of school improvement," Edwards says. "They have encouraged and inspired my work. The insight and learning has provided essential support for job-embedded professional learning on my campus as we begin to implement lab classrooms to improve instructional practice."

**Sarah Diggs,**  
**Kris Woods,**  
 Systems Grant, 2016

Learning Forward Foundation Systems Grant recipient leaders Sarah Diggs and Kris Woods, with the guidance and support of



Diggs

coach Kay Psencik, are thoughtfully, strategically, and analytically transforming the Hartford, Connecticut, school



Woods

organization into a culture of continuous professional learning.

In their second year of funding from the Systems

Grant, Diggs says, "We want to transform our current district organization into a learning system where people understand that adult professional learning is the biggest driver for student learning."

The Standards for Professional Learning serve as the anchor for guiding change. "Everything that we do is driven by the standards in an authentic way," Diggs says.

The Hartford leaders will now support others as they learn about the standards and how to use them to guide change and improvement — first for the adults, then for the students. "We've gone from a surface level of what the standards say to an applied level in practice," Diggs says.

Challenges include constant change of leadership, ambiguous role definitions and expectations, difficulty creating shared responsibility with all stakeholders, and difficulty collecting sufficient data and evidence of progress to inform changes.

As we work with and learn from our awardees, it is a critical balance to value the context of learning in each school, district, and region and, at the same time, create deep understanding that builds the conditions for professional learning documented in the standards.

### SYNTHESIZING FOR CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

This living laboratory of learning is committed to synthesis, analysis, and reflection. We have found that these key elements support continuous improvement in learning and leading:

- Nurturing and supporting awardees through reflective processes and cross-role engagement in the learning process becomes evident over time.
- Enhancing professional relationships creates an

## Together, it is our time to inquire, to question, to create, and to act.

environment in which shared responsibility and mutual accountability for student learning thrive.

- Building professional learning networks allows awardees continued advancement in knowledge and practice.
- Increasing systemic thinking promotes the ability to connect the dots for focus, clarity, and coherence toward meeting intended outcomes.

As we work to refine and enhance the foundation awardee experience, we are focusing on:

- Data collection and documentation of impact; and
- Knowledge production: What new learning is being produced and how it contributes to the advancement of Learning Forward and Learning Forward Foundation vision and mission.

Looking ahead, our collaboration

will focus on increasing documentation of impact and sharing that evidence in formal reports, as well as identifying the enabling conditions that allow professional learning to grow in a system.

Together, Learning Forward and Learning Forward Foundation are aligned in our commitment to transform learning across systems and support the development of educators' capacity to improve student learning.

Together, it is our time to inquire, to question, to create, and to act.

Together, it is our opportunity to pivot toward the positive and the power of us.

Together, let's shine the light of professional learning on the students, educators, and learners of the world.

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### CALL TO ACTION / Stephanie Hirsh

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were similar to those you are seeking. Interview or, even better, visit educators at that site to learn what contributed to the success. This will provide essential background to promoting success.

**Create a strong communication plan.** Even if you opt for the pilot approach, many people will be critical to the ultimate institutionalization of a program. Consider their role and what they will want to know.

For example, if the program results in a change to the school schedule, parents may be interested to know how something that initially appears to be an

inconvenience to them will ultimately result in something that benefits their children.

If the program requires substantive professional learning to implement successfully, what information will district administrators need if their support and resources are essential to effective implementation? Consider these questions as the foundation for building a successful communication plan.

- Who needs to know?
- Why do they need to know?
- What information do they need?
- How will you provide it?
- Who else can help you

communicate meaningfully to various audiences concerned with the change?

- How will you share successes and challenges as the program continues to build support?

To what degree do these three areas for consideration resonate with your own experiences? What else have you found is essential to a great start? Please share so we can all benefit from your insights.

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