

EVIDENCE OF



EFFECTIVENESS

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Evidence of Effectiveness

A report from Learning Forward

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Learning Forward is the new name of the National Staff Development Council.

We are an international association of learning educators committed

to one purpose in K–12 education:

Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

For more than 40 years, Learning Forward (formerly NSDC) has been the only association committed solely to enhancing educators' professional learning. The organization's purpose, "Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves," connects professional development with student learning and emphasizes that all educators have a responsibility to learn in order to improve student performance.

Since its inception, Learning Forward has provided members with informative, interactive annual conferences, institutes, and professional development programs; research-based and user-friendly publications; and opportunities for professional networking at national, regional, and state levels. In addition, Learning Forward also engages in advocacy, provides contract services to states and school districts, and develops tools and resources for administrators, teachers, and professional development specialists across the country.

Learning Forward has accumulated a body of evidence that its programs and services are linked to improved professional development policy and practice at state, district, and school levels. The organization also has found evidence that implementing these policies and practices can lead to improved school climate, curriculum, assessment, instruction, and student achievement.

Learning Forward defines professional development as a *comprehensive, sustained, intensive, and collaborative* approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement. The organization believes high-quality professional development that helps *individual* teachers improve their practice may be necessary but

is insufficient to ensure that every child has access to the best teaching. To ensure that effective teaching spreads, districts and schools must create *professional learning systems* in which teams of teachers, principals, and other professional staff members meet several times a week to engage in a continuous cycle of improvement. Such learning systems are in stark contrast to the typical on-the-job training that most teachers receive — training that is episodic, often fragmented, and disconnected from school improvement efforts and real problems of practice.

In a professional learning system, professional development is aligned with rigorous state standards and district and school improvement goals. Furthermore, the professional development takes place primarily at the school level; is facilitated by well-prepared principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, or teacher leaders; and is based on a comprehensive assessment of student, teacher, and school learning needs. Teams use data to better understand student learning needs and examine research evidence to identify effective classroom practices, such as lesson study, examination of student work, action research, and developing formative assessments. They regularly assess the professional development's

effectiveness in achieving learning goals, improving teaching, and promoting student achievement, and they use the findings to inform their practice.

Learning Forward is able to enter work at any point in the system. In some cases, the organization assists primarily at the state level; in other cases, it works at the district or the school level. Experience has shown that the most effective approach is work carried out at multiple levels — state, district, and school.

Learning Forward has provided a range of contract services to states and school systems nationwide. Extensive work in Arkansas, Florida, and New Jersey has helped shape those states' professional learning policies and practices. Other clients include large urban districts, such as Chicago, Memphis, and Dallas; small cities, such as Green Bay, Wis., Erie, Pa., Corning, N.Y., and Fargo, N.D.; and suburban communities, including Fairfax, Va., and Rockwall, Texas. As with its services to states, Learning Forward tailors its assistance to the community's needs, providing advice and consultation, designing and leading professional development, or connecting districts and schools to a larger peer network. Three communities that have worked closely with Learning Forward over an extended period are Duval County (Fla.) Public Schools, Fort Wayne (Ind.) Community Schools, and Memphis (Tenn.) City Schools. These districts illustrate how a comprehensive, sustained, multilevel approach to professional learning yields results.

Although it is difficult to attribute improvements in achievement directly to Learning Forward's work and to professional learning in the absence of rigorous experimental research, a cumulative body of evidence suggests that Learning Forward is making a difference in state and district policy regarding professional

development — and that these policies are beginning to affect school and classroom practice. In addition, data suggest that the more professional learning teachers have and the more that professional learning aligns with Learning Forward's professional development standards as measured by the Standards Assessment Inventory, the better students perform on statewide achievement measures.

Case studies of success demonstrate common themes that reflect Learning Forward's basic principles and theory of action:

- 1. Coherence.** All services are guided by Learning Forward's standards for professional learning, its new definition of professional development, and its core beliefs.
- 2. Personalization.** Learning Forward customizes services based on identified needs and encourages state and district leaders to use whatever data are available to identify areas that need improvement.
- 3. A systemic approach.** Learning Forward recognizes that for its services to be effective, it must promote change at all levels in the educational system.
- 4. Focus on results.** Learning Forward advises and assists in program evaluation, encouraging the use of its Standards Assessment Inventory to monitor progress, and fostering the use of data for decision making at all levels.
- 5. Continuity.** In each of the cases described, state and district leaders worked with Learning Forward for at least five years or, in several cases, for more than a decade.
- 6. Capacity building/sustainability.** All of Learning Forward's efforts have focused on creating capacity at the state, province, district, school, and/or classroom levels.



INTRODUCTION

For more than 40 years, Learning Forward (formerly NSDC) has been the only association committed solely to enhancing educators’ professional learning. The organization adopted a bold purpose: “Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.” This purpose connects professional development with student learning and emphasizes that all educators have a responsibility to learn in order to improve student performance.

Since its inception, Learning Forward has provided members with informative, interactive annual conferences, institutes, and other learning programs; research-based and user-friendly publications; and opportunities for professional networking at national, regional, and state levels. Its new name reflects the fact that the organization has grown and is now an international association with more than 14,000 members. In addition, Learning Forward also engages in advocacy, provides contract services to states and school districts, and develops tools and resources for those facilitating professional development across the country.

To advance professional development both at home and abroad, Learning Forward organizes its work around five strategic priorities:

1. Affecting the policy context.
2. Examining the evidence.
3. Narrowing the achievement gap.
4. Developing school leaders.
5. Engaging thought leaders.

To meet these objectives, Learning Forward works at state and local levels to promote policies, structures, and practices that support effective professional development. Through foundation support and contract services, Learning Forward assists state education agencies and school districts in forming and advocating for support policies; auditing existing professional development systems; creating comprehensive professional development systems; evaluating professional development; developing leaders, coaches, and teachers; and providing other services as needed. The organization also works with cohorts of state, district, and school leaders through various educational networks.

Learning Forward has accumulated a body of evidence that its programs and services are

LEARNING FORWARD'S BELIEFS

All of Learning Forward's work reflects a set of core beliefs:

- Every student learns when every educator engages in effective professional learning.
- Schools' most complex problems are best solved by educators collaborating and learning together.
- Remarkable professional learning begins with ambitious goals for students.
- Professional learning decisions are strengthened by diversity.
- Sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.
- Student learning increases when educators reflect on professional practice and student progress.

linked to improved professional development policy and practice at state, district, and school levels. The organization also has found evidence that implementing these policies and practices can lead to improved school climate, curriculum, assessment, instruction, and student achievement. The case examples presented here from all three systems levels illustrate this connection.

All of Learning Forward's programs and services are guided by its definition of professional development and its theory of action.

LEARNING FORWARD'S DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Learning Forward defines professional development as a *comprehensive, sustained, intensive, and collaborative* approach to improving teachers' and principals'



WHY THIS MATTERS

This information should be useful for:

- Federal and state policy makers interested in improving teacher and administrator quality;
- State, district, and school leaders who want to enhance professional learning;
- Corporate sponsors and private foundations interested in making high-leverage, high-impact investments in professional development; and
- Others seeking to advance teaching and learning.

effectiveness in raising student achievement. The organization believes high-quality professional development that helps *individual* teachers improve their practice may be necessary but is insufficient to ensure that every child has access to the best teaching. To ensure that effective teaching spreads, districts and schools must create *professional learning systems* in which teams of teachers, principals, and other professional staff members meet several times a week to engage in a continuous cycle of improvement. Such learning systems are in stark contrast to the typical on-the-job training that most teachers receive — training that is episodic, often fragmented, and disconnected from school improvement efforts and real problems of practice.

In a professional learning system, professional development is aligned with rigorous state standards and district and school improvement goals. Furthermore,

the professional development takes place primarily at the school level; is facilitated by well-prepared principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, or teacher leaders; and is based on a comprehensive assessment of student, teacher, and school learning needs. Teams use data to better understand student learning needs and examine research evidence to identify effective classroom practices, such as lesson study, examine student work, perform action research, and develop formative assessments. They regularly assess the professional development's effectiveness in achieving learning goals, improving teaching, and promoting student achievement, and they use the findings to inform their practice. (See Learning Forward's definition of professional development at www.learningforward.org/standfor/definition.cfm.)

Not all professional development takes place within the building, according to the definition. External learning experiences — including courses, workshops, institutes,

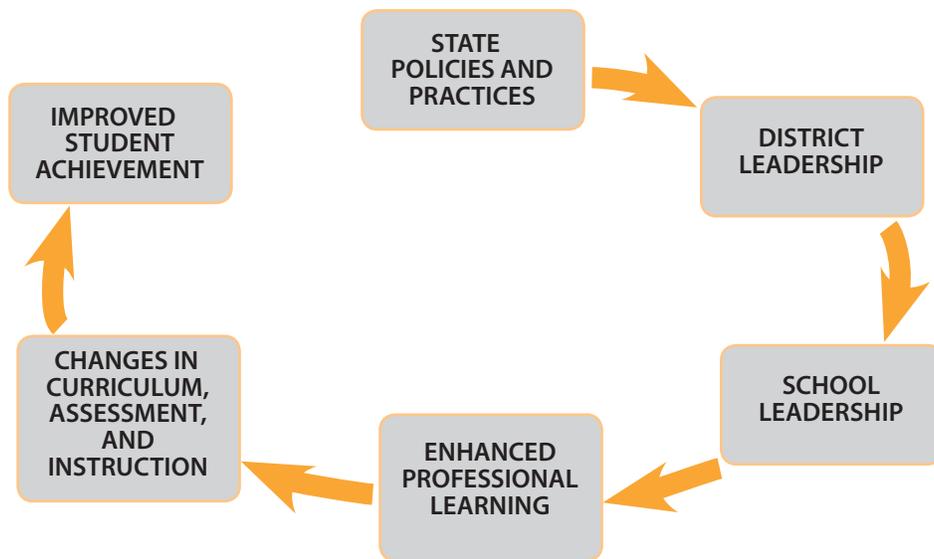


Figure 1. Learning Forward’s theory of action

networks, and conferences — also can advance professional learning. In addition, universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, content-area specialists, and others can provide external assistance aligned to school and/or team goals. To be a part of a strong and cohesive professional learning system, however, these activities must address the professional learning goals and objectives that educators at the school level have established.

LEARNING FORWARD’S THEORY OF ACTION

A theory of action guides Learning Forward’s programs, services, and evaluation methods (see Figure 1). Underlying the theory are several assumptions based on research and the organization’s decades of professional development and evaluation experience:

- State policies, practices, and support influence the quality of professional learning at district and school levels.
- District leadership is a critical factor that affects the quality of professional learning at individual and school levels.

- Effective school leaders promote professional learning that is school-based, data-driven, collaborative, and focused on results. School leadership is second only to teacher quality in improving student performance.
- The effects of school leadership on teacher and student outcomes operate through a mediating pathway — the development of a professional learning community or “learning school” in which teams of teachers, administrators, and other faculty meet several times per week to engage in a continuous cycle of improvement.
- All of these factors contribute to changes in curriculum, assessment, and classroom practice, which in turn lead to improvements in student achievement.

Learning Forward is able to enter work at any point in the system. In some cases, the organization assists primarily at the state level; in other cases, it works at the district or the school level. Experience has shown that the most effective approach is work carried out at multiple levels — state, district, and school — as many of the cases described illustrate.



LEARNING FORWARD'S WORK WITH STATES AND PROVINCES

In 2001, Learning Forward (then NSDC) published a set of standards known as NSDC's Standards for Staff Development. Learning Forward has influenced state and provincial policy by developing and disseminating these professional development standards. Currently, 35 states have either adopted or adapted the standards, which were developed by representatives of various professional associations based on the latest research at the time. The standards now are being revised to incorporate more recent research. Although the new standards may emphasize more school-based learning, professional collaboration, and evaluation, the core ideas will remain.

In addition to developing professional learning standards, Learning Forward has provided contract services and other support to 44 state education agencies and several Canadian provinces. These services include consultation on designing and evaluating effective professional development systems aligned with the standards; administering its Standards Assessment Inventory to measure progress in achieving standards; providing focused professional development for state, provincial, and district leaders as well as instructional coaches; and developing tools, protocols, and other resources to promote effective professional development. In addition, Learning Forward has audited state and provincial professional development programs, provided testimony to legislators and key stakeholders on effective professional development, and researched and evaluated professional development efforts.

The overall impact of Learning Forward’s work at the state and provincial level is difficult to measure because the services provided vary in purpose, strategy, intensity, and duration. Still, the organization has close, long-term working relationships with a number of states and provinces that have benefited from its standards, tools, resources, and hands-on assistance. Specifically, Learning Forward’s comprehensive, sustained, and personalized assistance produced results in Arkansas, Florida, and New Jersey.





ARKANSAS

CONTEXT

Arkansas launched a statewide effort to improve literacy and math skills in 1998. In 2005, the state adopted professional development standards and formed rules to govern professional development. The rules were revised in 2007 to require 60 hours of annual professional development for administrators, teachers, and other certified staff. The state also required districts, schools, and individuals to form professional development plans based on analysis of student data and aligned with Arkansas Comprehensive School Improvement Plans. The goal of these plans is to improve student achievement (Arkansas Department of Education, 2007).

LEARNING FORWARD'S ROLE

Learning Forward played a major role in transforming the state's system of professional development. After helping to shape state policy, the organization created and promoted a tool kit to help districts and schools understand and implement the state's new standards and requirements. Arkansas conducted a statewide Coaches Academy for more than 900 instructional coaches using Learning Forward tools and technical assistance for the state to evaluate its progress.

Adopting Learning Forward standards

Rather than creating new standards, staff in the Arkansas Department of Education adopted Learning Forward's professional development standards. "You've got to have standards that you can hang your hat on," said Deborah Coffman, the department's director of professional development in an interview with Learning Forward. "It's just good business to collaborate with people who have the right vision."

The new requirements also reflected Learning Forward's standards. For example, the rules encourage professional development that is focused on academic content, curriculum alignment, the principles of learning, instructional strategies, and student

assessment. They also emphasize topics critical to the change process: leadership and advocacy, systemic change, supervision, mentoring and coaching, and building a professional learning community. From a process standpoint, the rules allow educators to participate in conferences, workshops, institutes, and college courses, but also promote alternative mechanisms for professional learning, including study groups/learning teams, mentoring and peer coaching, online learning, and action research.

The professional development tool kit

Once the rules were in place, the Arkansas professional development cabinet, a group of professional development leaders from across the state, commissioned Learning Forward to develop a tool kit to help districts and schools understand and implement the state policies. “They wanted to have professional development on professional development,” Coffman said.

Learning Forward created *Redefining Professional Development in Arkansas: Focusing on Student Achievement* (Arizona Department of Education, 2008) to help educators:

- Develop a deep understanding of the standards and the rationale for each;
- Become acquainted with the new state rules concerning professional development, as well as with the relationship between the rules and the Learning Forward’s standards; and
- Analyze past and current professional development and outcomes to determine strengths and needs.

Learning Forward partnered with the Arkansas Department of Education to conduct six regional trainings on the tool kit across the state. Participants included staff from the

state’s 15 regional service cooperatives and district leaders interested in the new state policy. District leaders were encouraged to use the discussion questions, action exercises, and other tools with school administrators who then could engage in similar activities with their faculties. The Arkansas Department of Education also ran a day-long summer conference for more than 800 principals and district administrators. Learning Forward gave an overview of the tool kit, and each participant received a copy.

According to Coffman, “People are still actively using the tool kit. We know because we hear district and school leaders as well as professional development specialists and academic coaches use the language in the tool kit. They talk about their multistep planning process, using a systems approach to professional development, and developing SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound) goals. In addition, schools in need of improvement have incorporated recommendations from the tool kit in their comprehensive school improvement plans.”

The Standards Assessment Inventory

The Arkansas Department of Education also decided to use Learning Forward’s Standards Assessment Inventory to measure changes in professional learning as a result of the new rules. The Standards Assessment Inventory, which was developed in partnership with the national education research organization SEDL, is a reliable and valid instrument that measures how well a school’s practices meet Learning Forward’s professional development standards (Vaden-Kiernan, Jones, & McCann, 2009). The Standards Assessment Inventory addresses each of the 12 standards with a set of five questions. Educators can use the results to see the overall picture of professional development in their

More than 900 instructional facilitators of approximately 1,000 in the state enrolled in the Arkansas Coaches Academy during its first year of operation, 2009–10.

school or district, craft an improvement plan, and measure progress toward goals.

Although the Arkansas Department of Education does not require schools to use the Standards Assessment Inventory, the department made the survey tool available free to districts statewide. More than a quarter of the state's schools took advantage of the opportunity in spring 2008 and 2009 (265 and 285 out of 1,000 schools, respectively). Coffman said school leadership teams used the survey's results to refine their school improvement plans and enhance professional learning. The state's 15 regional service cooperatives also used the findings to inform their own work with districts and schools in the region. Others who used the data were curriculum directors, federal program directors, and the district's academic coaches. "The Standards Assessment Inventory data help coaches see if their efforts are having an impact and what areas may need extra attention," Coffman said.

The Arkansas Department of Education also uses Standards Assessment Inventory results to monitor progress across the state. By examining state averages each year, the department can identify strengths and areas



that need improvement. "While schools show growth overall," Coffman said, "two areas still need improvement: evaluation of professional learning and building learning communities."

Professional development evaluation

Beginning in 2008, Learning Forward advised and guided the Arkansas Department of Education and regional service cooperatives leaders on evaluating professional development's impact on teacher practice and student achievement. Learning Forward conducted a two-day training session for state leaders representing each of Arkansas' major initiatives — primary literacy, adolescent literacy, mathematics, and science. After the formal sessions, participants engaged in facilitated online (wiki) discussions and were individually coached. Learning Forward conducted four more sessions for Arkansas Department of Education staff and their counterparts in the regional service cooperatives. A few district leaders also attended this second round of training, which included working sessions that

allowed participants to examine documents to see if they were on the right track.

Although the primary focus was on how to evaluate professional development, this evaluation work had a major influence on the professional development design, as well. As participants discussed how best to evaluate their statewide initiatives, they asked themselves: What outcomes do we really want? How can we ensure that professional development is intensive enough to achieve these results? What kind of support is needed to ensure that teachers apply their new knowledge and skills in their classroom practice?

Based on Standards Assessment Inventory results, the Arkansas Department of Education asked Learning Forward to also provide regional training for select district and school personnel in 2010–11 — four regional training sessions each for about 50 people. The training will be available online, including video clips, action exercises, and online support.

Coaches Academy

More than 900 instructional facilitators of approximately 1,000 in the state enrolled in the Arkansas Coaches Academy during its first year of operation, 2009–10. The homegrown academy uses a variety of resources. The primary text is Jim Knight's *Instructional Coaching: A Partnership Approach to Improving Instruction* (Corwin Press, 2007), which Coffman said helped participants learn the language and nature of coaching. "At the same time," she said, "we use Learning Forward's Innovation Configurations (rubrics that measure progress against professional development standards), and we integrate some of the ideas from Learning Forward's

publication *Taking the Lead* (Killion & Harrison, 2006), as well."

RESULTS

Improved professional development

Arkansas' quality of professional development has improved markedly since 2005, when the state adopted Learning Forward's professional development standards. Stanford University researchers Wei, Darling-Hammond, and Adamson reviewed the nation's progress on key indicators of professional development and reported their findings in *Professional Development in the United States: Trends and Challenges* (Wei, Darling-Hammond, & Adamson, 2010). The report provides state-by-state comparison data that show Arkansas surpassing every other state on the researchers' access to professional development index. In Arkansas:

- At least 80% of teachers reported participating in professional development that focused on the content of the subject(s) they teach, and more than half reported receiving at least 17 hours of content-based instruction. At least two-thirds of teachers reported participating in professional development on using technology in instruction, reading, and student discipline and classroom management.
- At least 51% of teachers reported participating in professional development on teaching students with disabilities.
- Teachers reported at least 50 cumulative hours of professional development, on average, during the previous 12 months across the six topics that were measured.

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– Deborah Coffman, Arkansas Department of
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Improved student achievement

While causality cannot be determined, student achievement in Arkansas is improving. More students scored at grade level or better on the Arkansas Augmented Benchmark Examinations in math and literacy in 2010 than in 2009. The benchmark exams test student mastery of state academic standards in grades 3 through 8, and two-thirds or more of Arkansas students scored at the proficient or advanced levels on 11 of the 12 exams. The results also showed continued year-to-year progress in student achievement and, for the fourth consecutive year, a narrowing of the achievement gaps among black, white, and Hispanic students.

Arkansas students also showed gains on the state’s 11th-grade literacy test and the Stanford Achievement Test. The Stanford results showed gains in virtually all categories, with particularly strong performances in math. At several grade levels, the achievement gains made since 2005 by black and Hispanic students outpaced those of white students.

“When you have the achievement gap closing while scores of each student subgroup improve, you know that the system is working to produce the right results,” said Tom W. Kimbrell, Arkansas commissioner of education, in an



interview with Learning Forward. “You can’t ask for a better trend.”

Kimbrell credited the improvements to comprehensive reforms, including professional development to ensure effective teaching, strong educational leadership, a rigorous curriculum, and assessments that align to that curriculum.¹

Perceived benefits

According to Coffman, Learning Forward has played a key role in advancing professional development in Arkansas. “It provided strong, yet realistic standards that helped support state-level policy. ... It has helped maintain these high standards through the use of the tool kit, the Standards Assessment Inventory, and the Innovation Configurations,” Coffman said. “Its guidance, resources, and ongoing support have helped the state move forward and make great gains.”

Coffman said the Learning Forward “staff has been tremendously supportive of us and tailored the way it does its work with us.”



FLORIDA

CONTEXT

Florida has taken several steps to improve the quality of its teaching force. In 1988, the state legislature passed a law requiring teachers to complete professional development to renew their teaching certificates. In 1995, the legislature began requiring school districts to create professional development systems that allow teachers the opportunity to complete these recertification requirements. Two years later, however, outside consultants found that these district-based professional development systems were not effective in enhancing the knowledge and skills teachers needed to improve student achievement (Joyce & Byrne, 1997).

In response to the findings, the Florida legislature required beginning in 2000 that each school district's professional development system be substantially revised and approved by the Florida Department of Education. The Florida Department of Education developed the Florida Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol, commonly known as the Florida protocol system, to evaluate the quality of district professional development systems. The new system was the start of a comprehensive and highly effective statewide effort to fundamentally change professional learning in Florida schools.

The Florida protocol system, which has been revised over the years, measures districts against 66 state standards that are closely aligned with Learning Forward's professional development standards and state law. For example, state standards call for "collaborative learning communities whose members use a cycle of continuous improvement to achieve goals that align with individual, school, and district goals for student achievement." They require professional learning that "focuses primarily on developing content knowledge and content-specific research and/or evidence-based instructional strategies and interventions"

that align with state content standards and district and state initiatives. Furthermore, the standards demand that professional learning be “sufficiently sustained and rigorous to ensure learning for participants that leads to high-fidelity classroom implementation for student achievement” (Bergquist, 2006).

What makes Florida’s protocol system unique is that the standards are organized according to the four major components of an effective professional development system: 1) planning; 2) learning, which was initially called delivery; 3) implementing, which was initially called follow-up; and 4) evaluating. The system’s organization means that all parties are responsible not only for planning and carrying out high-quality professional learning, but also for ensuring that teachers apply their learning in the classroom. In addition, everyone in the system is accountable for results. (For a complete description of the protocol system, see www.fldoe.org/profdev/pdf/pdsprotocol.pdf.)

LEARNING FORWARD’S ROLE

Learning Forward played a major role in developing, implementing, evaluating, and revising Florida’s protocol system. It also helped shape other state policy and implement changes in the state’s professional development. Although most of its work was at the state level, Learning Forward also worked intensively at the local level, assisting several districts, including Miami-Dade County and Duval County, which includes the city of Jacksonville.

Protocol development, rollout, and revision

Even before the protocols were developed, Learning Forward worked closely with its Florida affiliate, the Florida Association of Staff Development. Learning Forward also had worked with the state Department of Education to enhance the state’s existing

professional development. One of Learning Forward’s early assignments was to conduct sessions statewide on how to evaluate professional learning. Constance Bergquist, president of Evaluation Systems Designs, which evaluated the Florida protocol system, said in an interview with Learning Forward that Learning Forward’s work “had a tremendous impact on the inclusion of evaluation in the Florida protocols.”

When the state decided that its new protocol system would reflect Learning Forward’s professional development standards, Florida Department of Education leaders sought Learning Forward’s advice and assistance. Deputy Executive Director Joellen Killion played a critical role in the design phase, which included a year-long development and pilot testing process that began in 2001.

Once the protocol system was finalized, the Florida Department of Education asked Learning Forward to help roll out the system. Peer review teams of team leaders and volunteers from various Florida intermediary organizations and universities administer the protocols. Teams visit selected school systems, examine documents, interview district administrators, and interview a sample of school administrators and teachers. Based on these data, the teams generate district, school, and educator scores. An early challenge was getting district superintendents to accept the review process. At the Florida Department of Education’s request, Learning Forward worked with district directors of professional development and recommended strategies to engage district and school leaders.

The Florida protocol system formally launched in 2003 with reviews of five local school districts. Florida then completed two full review cycles for all of the state’s 67 districts. At the end of the second cycle

in 2008–09, the Florida Department of Education paused to take stock and “update the system to better address factors that will ensure effective professional development in all Florida schools” (Hebda, 2009). The Florida Department of Education again convened a statewide advisory committee, gathered public input, and field-tested the revisions in six small, medium, and large districts.

During the revision in 2009–10, Learning Forward played a major role. Killion facilitated the statewide advisory committee and served as an adviser to make sure the new standards aligned with the latest research, reflected national trends, and took into account what other states were doing. Although most of the core indicators remained intact, the new protocols also incorporated Learning Forward’s updated definition of professional development. The new protocols placed greater emphasis on 1) examining the impact of the standards on teaching and student achievement; 2) creating highly functioning learning communities as a means of promoting teacher effectiveness; and 3) ensuring that the content for professional learning is both rigorous and relevant (Florida Department of Education, 2010b; Florida Department of Education, 2010c). Peer review teams began using the new protocols during the 2010–11 school year.

Eileen McDaniel, chief of Florida’s Bureau of Educator Recruitment, Development, and Retention, said the Florida protocol system has had a major impact on professional development across the state.

“The standards provide educators with a systematic way to look at their programs and encourage high-quality professional development with the goal of improving student achievement,” McDaniel said in an interview with Learning Forward. She considers the protocol system transformational

because “the quality of professional development is no longer simply a matter of seat time. Districts and schools use the protocols to assess what they are doing right or wrong and whether it has a direct impact on the classroom.” The Florida legislature, the state Board of Education, and the Florida Department of Education support the protocol system, a major factor in its success, according to McDaniel.

Instructional coaching

Instructional coaches who support school-based learning are a major feature of an effective professional development system. To advance instructional coaching, Learning Forward chose Florida as one of 14 states to participate in its annual Coaches Academy, with grant support from the Wachovia Foundation. Other states were Alabama, Connecticut, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, Maryland, Mississippi, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. In addition, Learning Forward also conducted Coaches Academies for Michigan and North Dakota, as well as for school systems that contracted for these services.

The Florida Department of Education and the Florida Association of Staff Development were actively involved in the Coaches Academy, a requirement for a state to participate. The initial cohort included 10 school and district coaches. The academy was six day-long sessions over one year and provided these teacher leaders (instructional coaches) opportunities to more effectively support teachers in their schools, with the ultimate goal of improving student achievement.

During the year-long program, academy participants worked together to explore what coaches need to know and be able to do to be effective. Participants developed an understanding of the coach’s roles and responsibilities, built communication and



Florida's Hispanic students now tie or outscore the statewide average for all students in 30 states.

topics including action research, effective professional development, backward mapping, and coaching. The organization also provided advice and support to Florida's Comprehensive System of Support for Professional Development, whose purpose is to strengthen professional development for special educators.

relationship skills so they could influence school culture and build trusting relationships, learned to facilitate data conversations that lead to better instructional decisions, developed questioning skills designed to promote deep thinking and reflection, explored an array of job-embedded facilitation strategies to use in different coaching situations, and examined professional learning designs.

After the initial Coaches Academy, the state affiliate conducted additional coaching academies that helped reinforce and support various statewide professional development initiatives. A coaches network also sprang up as a result of these efforts.

Professional development for special education professionals

In addition to its work with the Florida protocol system and instructional coaching, Learning Forward made presentations and provided consulting services to two groups actively involved in enhancing the skills of special educators. Learning Forward worked with the Florida Diagnostic and Learning Resources System to focus on

Tailored assistance to individual districts

Florida's protocol system requires that every district, school, and individual in the state create a professional development plan that meets state standards. Learning Forward has worked in districts throughout the state to implement the standards and improve professional development.

Districts and schools often find it difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of professional development, one of the system's requirements. Learning Forward worked with curriculum, professional development, and federal program specialists in Broward, Miami-Dade, and Palm Beach counties three times a year to help staff learn the principles of evaluating professional development and learn to examine their own data. In addition, Learning Forward staff made follow-up visits to offer additional advice and feedback. The districts changed their professional development and evaluation systems as a result.

Learning Forward also provided an array of professional development and consulting services to Duval County Public Schools.

RESULTS

Florida student achievement and graduation rates have dramatically improved in the past decade. The state also was in the top 10 in the second phase of the U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top competition. Reviewers judged states' applications on multiple criteria, including how they recruit, develop, reward, and retain effective teachers and principals, especially where these teachers and principals are needed most. Florida's protocol system directly addresses these issues.

Improved student achievement and graduation rates

In 1998, Florida students performed at unexceptional levels on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). A decade later, student achievement in math and reading had increased significantly, especially in 4th-grade reading. Reading scores are crucial, because students who do not learn to read early on struggle later and are more likely to drop out of school. In 1998, Florida students scored 206 on the NAEP reading exam. By 2009, Florida students were scoring 226 on average — meaning that *the average 4th-grade student in 2009 was reading an entire grade-level ahead of 1998's average student*. Florida ranked sixth in the nation on the 4th-grade reading measure (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010).

In addition, Hispanics, African-Americans, and low-income students also improved achievement. Florida's Hispanic students now tie or outscore the statewide average for all students in 30 states. Florida's African-American students now tie or outscore the average student in eight states — Alaska, Arizona, California, Hawaii, Louisiana, Mississippi, Nevada, and New Mexico. Florida's low-income students also are performing well, tying or outscoring the average of all students in 14 other states.

Florida's graduation rate also has improved dramatically over the last five years. According to data from the Florida Department of Education (2010a), the state's graduation rate grew by 10.1% (from 68.9% to 79%) during the period from 2005–06 to 2009–10. In that same time frame, the increase for African-Americans was 13.1% (from 55.3% to 68.4%), for Hispanics 13.3% (from 62% to 75.3%), and for whites 8% (from 77.4% to 85.4%).

Dramatic improvements from multiple reforms

How was Florida able to improve student achievement across the board *and* in traditionally underserved communities? Florida has enacted numerous reforms in the last decade in addition to the emphasis on professional learning, including creating the largest virtual-school program in the nation, a system of 350 charter schools, school-choice programs for low-income and special-needs students, and a system for publicly grading schools from A through F. Florida also strengthened curriculum and assessments, banned social promotion out of 3rd grade, and created an *alternative* pathway for adult professionals to become state-certified teachers.

With so many reforms, Florida's efforts to enhance professional development cannot be directly linked to improved student results. An evaluation of the Florida protocol system points to a positive relationship between improved professional development and student achievement gains, however, and state leaders believe professional learning has been a factor in the student gains.

Professional development's relationship to improved student achievement

Evaluation Systems Design evaluated the Florida protocol system and found continued improvement in district professional

development systems and in student achievement since the system's inception. Constance Bergquist, president of Evaluation Systems Design, said that cross-site analyses conducted in 2006–07 and 2008–09 found:

1. School districts showed improvement in meeting professional development standards over time. The average rating across all of the standards for districts reviewed in the first cycle was 2.97; in the second cycle, the average was 3.18 on a four-point scale (1 = unacceptable, 4 = excellent). Comparisons of averages across all four strands and three levels were higher in the second cycle than in the first cycle.

2. By the second cycle, most school districts were implementing standards related to planning and learning at the “good” or “excellent” level. The highest average ratings were from the planning and delivery strands of the standards, which all received average ratings above 3.0. The lowest average ratings were in the implementing (follow-up) and evaluating strands of the standards, although districts improved on these indicators (more than 0.4 points on the scale) from the first cycle to the second cycle of the program.

3. Districts that received “good” or “excellent” ratings on professional development standards tended to have greater increases in student achievement. A correlation analysis demonstrated a moderate positive relationship (0.31 in the first cycle and 0.33 in the second cycle) between the districts' ratings on the professional development standards and increases in student achievement. The correlation was statistically significant. These findings provide evidence of a



relationship between the quality of a district's professional development and rising student achievement.

Bergquist observed that the Florida protocol system has three benefits: It helps districts gain a better understanding of how to design, implement, and maintain quality professional development systems; it encourages districts to examine the quality of their own professional development systems on a regular basis; and it enables the Florida Department of Education to identify and disseminate effective professional development practices that others could adopt or adapt. Learning Forward's theory of action posits that the more educators engage in professional learning, the more they enhance curriculum, assessment, and classroom practice. Improved curriculum, assessment, and classroom practice in turn lead to improved student achievement.



NEW JERSEY

CONTEXT

The 2010 U.S. census shows New Jersey is the 11th most populous state, the most densely populated, and the second wealthiest. These statewide statistics mask dramatic contrasts, however. Although New Jersey has some of America's wealthiest suburbs, it also is home to some of the most struggling urban areas (Newark, Jersey City, Patterson, Elizabeth, Edison, and Trenton) and poor rural communities in the extreme northern and southern parts of the state. This disparity results in tremendous differences in resource allocation. According to a 2008 New Jersey Policy Perspective report, "The top 5% in New Jersey make 14.1 times the bottom fifth — the fifth-highest ratio in the U.S." (Bernstein, McNichol, & Nicholas, 2008).



Twelve years ago, New Jersey did not have a professional development requirement for teachers or a cohesive plan on which schools and districts could base their efforts. In 1998, Commissioner Leo Klagholz met with members of the New Jersey Education Association to map the first steps toward creating a coherent professional development system.

Two main ideas came out of that meeting, which, after stakeholder input, the New Jersey Department of Education made state regulation. First, every teacher is required to participate in 100 hours of approved professional development over a five-year period. Second, state, county, and district boards were created to oversee professional development. Victoria Duff, a New Jersey Department of Education teacher quality coordinator and professional development leader, told Learning Forward these groups were key to creating the grassroots involvement that drew in stakeholders at every level.

New Jersey since has created additional governance structures, standards, and planning and approval tools to guide professional development at all levels, including the school. The state also put in place a multilayered support system that includes intermediary organizations,

consultants, state-supported professional development initiatives, and several networks.

New Jersey transformed its professional development from a traditional system of scattered, one-shot training sessions to collaborative, job-embedded learning.² In fact, New Jersey is one of four states featured in a new technical report published by Learning Forward and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education as part of a multiyear study on the status of professional development in the United States. According to the study, “These states — Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, and Vermont — have made significant gains in student performance on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, scoring above the national average, and showed evidence of high levels of teacher participation in professional development in the 2008 National Schools and Staffing Survey *or* on other indicators of access to professional learning. The states represent pockets of promising practice, having created environments in which innovative approaches to school and instructional improvement have gradually gained a foothold” (emphasis added; Jaquith, Mindich, Wei, & Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. iv).

LEARNING FORWARD’S ROLE

Learning Forward has played a major role in New Jersey’s transformation. Key leaders, including former Executive Director Dennis Sparks, Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh, and Deputy Executive Director Joellen Killion, served as advisers, sharing the latest research and their expertise. Learning Forward worked closely with the New Jersey Department of Education, New Jersey Education Association, various state boards, and others to design and implement the state’s comprehensive and effective professional development system. Learning Forward contributed to

the overall framework for change, supported implementation efforts, and encouraged the evaluation of results.

Standards development

The Professional Teaching Standards Board, comprising 19 members appointed by the state Board of Education, was created in 1999. The board includes 10 teachers and nine stakeholders representing district and school administrators, college representatives, school board members, and the public. Initially set up as an advisory group to make recommendations to the commissioner regarding guidance and implementation on the 100-hour requirement, the standards board has had a strong influence on the state’s professional development policies over the past 12 years.

The board first worked to create professional development standards. The group decided to meet with national experts, including Michael Fullan and Learning Forward’s Hirsh, Sparks, and Killion, who provided information on the latest research and best professional development practices, as well as about models other states used for professional development standards.

According to Duff, head of the standards board at the time, the board looked closely at Learning Forward’s professional development standards but decided to write its own. Board members created 26 standards, then narrowed those to 12. The initial New Jersey professional development standards (New Jersey Department of Education, 2001) incorporated most of the principles embedded in Learning Forward’s standards. Rather than using Learning Forward’s format, however, each of the state’s standards included several key indicators. The initial standards were revised in 2007.

Soon after creating professional development standards, the standards board began to create professional practice standards for teachers and

leaders. In 2003, the state Board of Education officially adopted the Professional Standards for Teachers and School Leaders, which has 11 standards for teacher practice in instruction and planning, assessment, and professional development. The six standards for leaders cover managing a school to ensure effective learning, collaborating with community members, and sustaining a school culture and instructional program conducive to student learning (New Jersey Department of Education, 2004b). Learning Forward provided advice, and many of the organization's professional development standards and core principles are embedded in New Jersey's professional practice standards.

Advice on standards implementation

Based on advice from Learning Forward and other experts, as well as their own expertise, the standards board next discussed ways to promote quality professional learning. The group focused on systemic issues, such as developing governance structures, guidance materials, resources for planning at the local level, and an approval process targeting growth at the county level. A key feature of the early system was that *school districts* were required to have their own professional development plans. District plans were to align with the New Jersey professional development standards, core content standards, and teacher practice standards.

In addition, a series of regulations for professional development for teachers was passed that embedded teachers' required 100 hours of professional learning into their annual professional development plans. The plans had to reflect individual learning goals or the district plan. The regulations also mandated mentoring and induction programs for beginning teachers, and they further defined the governance structures to involve educators

in the professional development process at the state, county, and district levels.

According to Jaquith et al. (2010), with the promulgation of the initial rules, "the process of making teachers more active and responsible for their professional learning and embedding that work within schools" had begun (p. 76). It was the first step in a long process, however. In an interview, Killion said, "The initial rules focused heavily on what counts, rather than what matters. These rules laid out the kinds of professional development that teachers could engage in — completing courses, facilitating trainings, serving as a team leader, reading books, traveling to conferences and so forth. They did not yet encourage collaborative learning aligned with school goals."

From 2003 on, New Jersey pushed for more strategic data-driven, school-based ownership of the professional development process and focused less on seat time for educators.

Tool kit for mentoring

In the New Jersey professional development system adopted in 2003, the state requires that new teachers create a professional development plan within 60 days of beginning their assignment. Their professional development plan is part of an induction and mentoring program required to obtain a standard teaching license. Traditionally prepared teachers must receive 30 weeks of mentoring. Teachers prepared through alternate routes receive 34 weeks. Both mentors and novice teachers can count the hours toward the required 100 hours of professional development.

When Duff moved to the New Jersey Department of Education in 2003, she immediately began to develop a resource guide for implementing the new mentoring regulations using funding from a Teacher

Quality Enhancement grant. The New Jersey Mentoring Task Force, with support from Learning Forward, created *New Jersey Mentoring for Quality Induction: A Toolkit for Program Development* (New Jersey Department of Education, 2004a). In an interview with Learning Forward, Duff said, “The mentoring tool kit did not teach districts how to do mentoring. There are lots of books and other resources on that topic.” Instead, the tool kit guided district committees on developing their own mentoring plans. Duff said the tool kit was so successful that the state decided to develop a second tool kit to help implement its professional development standards and rules.

Tool kit for collaborative professional learning

In 2004–05, the standards board partnered with Learning Forward to develop a tool kit for collaborative professional learning to give schools and teachers resources to identify issues and tailor their professional development to their contexts. The document, *Collaborative Professional Learning in School and Beyond: A Tool Kit for New Jersey Educators* (Killion, 2006), lays out the thinking behind the professional development initiative: “Today’s professional development requires a shift from its more traditional form of adult pullout programs or after-school and summer learning to a form that brings learning into the forefront of what teachers experience each day in school. If teacher learning continues to be separate from the work teachers do each day, most will continue to view it as irrelevant, dissatisfying, and disconnected from what they do in their classrooms. Moving professional development to the school means teachers can lead their own learning and use external learning opportunities to expand and extend their learning” (p. 13).

The tool kit is 300 pages of information and resource materials in 13 chapters with topics ranging from universal issues such as facilitating collaborative teams and using data to more specific sections, such as New Jersey’s standards and the role of the central office. Each chapter introduces the topic and includes a series of tools, activities, and related articles. For example, Chapter 7, “Making Time,” has an article on time and school culture with accompanying discussion questions, forms for analyzing how the school uses time, and examples of schools that found creative ways to make time to collaborate. Jaquith et al. (2010) observed, “With a vast number of handouts and answers to frequently asked questions, the tool kit acts as a resource for schools to prepare for and anticipate challenges with the collaborative learning process and, like a much more expansive version of the document *A Common Language for Professional Learning Communities* (New Jersey Professional Development Partnership, 2008), it creates a common language for the details of collaborative professional learning” (p. 83).

The tool kit was piloted in 31 low-income districts originally cited in *Abbott v. Burke*,³ a New Jersey Supreme Court case that led to court-ordered education programs and reforms for students in poor, urban school districts. In 2006, Killion facilitated a one-day awareness session for more than 450 people, including every principal in these districts, to explain the refined tool kit and how school leaders could use it to improve their work.

Killion said dissemination “exploded.” New Jersey Department of Education staff conducted workshops across the state, and the standards board promoted its use. The Department of Education broadcast e-mails to all district and county leaders about the workshops,

made announcements at leadership meetings, presented at county board meetings, and created a web page. Other professional organizations also made announcements.

Duff has presented many information and training sessions using the tool kit. “People can come into this tool kit during any part of the process,” she said. “I use the tools in many ways — to introduce data analysis, facilitation, design, and so forth.” She said she is proud that the tool kit is the basis for *Becoming a Learning School* (Killion & Roy, 2009), a book she said is essential for those wishing to enhance professional learning in their schools.

Use of the tool kit: The PLC Lab Schools Project

The 31 districts, termed the Abbott districts, have used the tool kit extensively. Following the introductory awareness session for all of the schools, 75 volunteers agreed to a pilot project the state developed, the PLC Lab Schools Project, to ensure that the policies and tools were fully implemented. The New Jersey Department of Education selected 33 schools representing various geographic regions and demographics to participate. The Department of Education and its consultants ran kickoff summer meetings for superintendents and facilitators, then had five themed informational meetings over a year.

Although Learning Forward was not directly involved in convening this network, the tool kit was used in several training sessions. Jerry Woehr, a coach for professional learning community work around the state and a leader in the pilot project, said the tool kit is a “wonderful document. If your teams are fighting, here’s what you do. If your team doesn’t have a good goal or doesn’t know how to evaluate their goal, the tool kit can get you on track. I’ve said to districts, ‘If you really

... the tool kit is a “wonderful document. If your teams are fighting, here’s what you do. If your team doesn’t have a good goal or doesn’t know how to evaluate their goal, the tool kit can get you on track.”

— Jerry Woehr, pilot project leader

had somebody who took this thing, read it, and internalized it, that person could be your facilitator. You wouldn’t need me’ ” (Jaquith et al., 2010, p. 83).

The Standards Assessment Inventory, another Learning Forward resource, also played an important role in the project. The Standards Assessment Inventory examines the fidelity of a school’s professional development to Learning Forward’s standards. The New Jersey Department of Education administered the Standards Assessment Inventory twice to participating lab schools, and many used the data to develop district and school professional development plans.

Rowan University’s Tom Monahan analyzed the project’s administrations of the Standards Assessment Inventory survey and did in-depth qualitative studies of three participating schools. Monahan found that participants overall were very positive about the workshops and showed some constructive changes in areas of the Standards Assessment Inventory related to learning communities, such as using data to drive instruction and collaboration. He

is careful not to claim a causal link between changes and the lab school project, however, because leadership, experience, and capacity led to different implementation levels and styles (Monahan, 2010).

Turnaround School Professional Learning Community Network

The Turnaround School Professional Learning Community Network also used Learning Forward’s resources to try to create sustainable change for chronically low-performing schools and districts.

The network brings together leaders from schools the state has identified as needing improvement, as well as other interested school leaders. The concept of the network was based on research including The Wallace Foundation’s report on leadership and learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004), Learning Forward’s Coaching for Results program, and Michael Fullan’s book, *Turnaround Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 2006). Elaine Davis, who heads the state’s Office of Leadership Development, told Learning Forward in an interview that the network helps “break down some of these false barriers of the wealthy, the poor, the not-so-wealthy, and gets people talking and trusting each other in a way that allows them to share and grow.”

Professional development for school leaders and instructional coaches

Learning Forward conducted two professional development sessions in 2005–06, with funding from the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. The content for these sessions was drawn from Dennis Sparks’ *Leading for Results: Transforming Teaching, Learning, and Relationships in Schools* (NSDC, 2005), which describes how to transform schools by establishing stretch goals and creating a theory of action, strengthening interpersonal relationships, and designing powerful

professional learning for all educators. About 20 leaders were invited to a four-day session. In addition, participants could opt to receive leadership coaching, and about 60% of the leaders took this opportunity.

According to Killion, the coaching was so successful that many school leaders asked to be trained as coaches. In 2006–07, Learning Forward trained about 15 leaders to serve as school coaches using additional funding from the Dodge Foundation. Many of those trained became active coaches, and two published books on coaching.

New Jersey also was one of 15 states to participate in Learning Forward’s Coaches Academy, a program funded by a Wachovia Foundation grant. Ten teachers, a New Jersey Department of Education staff member, and a representative from Learning Forward’s New Jersey affiliate attended the New Jersey Coaches Academy, held in the 2005–06 school year. The goal was to build educators’ capacity as instructional coaches and to promote instructional coaching statewide. The tool kit was the major resource. Because the academy’s goal is to train teachers as on-site instructional coaches, the academy fit well with the learning community initiatives and revision of the New Jersey Professional Development Standards, which happened at around the same time.

Revision of the New Jersey professional development standards

Learning Forward has continued to advise both the New Jersey Department of Education and the standards board. Killion and Hirsh have presented to the standards board many times, advised the group on how to frame and roll out new rules and regulations, and provided tools and resources to support the process. Hirsh also advised the state commissioner on a white paper about professional development.



In 2005, the standards board began considering revisions to its professional development standards for three reasons. First, the School Leader Professional Development Advisory Committee wanted to adopt Learning Forward’s professional development standards to use for the state’s school administrators. Rather than have two sets of professional development standards, the standards board agreed to also adopt Learning Forward’s standards, with minor variations. Second, Duff and other state leaders believed that Learning Forward’s standards provided a clear organizing framework. Duff said the state’s standards had so many indicators that it was hard to explain or implement them. She said Learning Forward’s standards, which are organized into context, process, and content, were easier to understand and use. Finally, each of Learning Forward’s standards has a research-based rationale. “I train heavily on the rationale as well as the standards themselves,” Duff said.

The state adopted revised standards in 2007 based on Learning Forward’s standards, with minor variations to reflect New Jersey’s policy context. For example, the Quality Teaching standard was modified slightly to read, “Professional development that improves the learning of all students deepens educators’ *subject matter and pedagogical*

content knowledge, supports the use of research-based instructional strategies *to assist students to meet and exceed the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards* and prepares them to use *various assessments to modify and improve instruction*” (New Jersey Department of Education, 2007). Italics have been added to indicate the modifications to Learning Forward’s standard.

The New Jersey guidance document for professional development

Influenced by continued work with Learning Forward, New Jersey shifted to embedding professional learning in schools in 2007 and 2008. After revising the standards, developing materials to support collaborative professional learning, and initiating several professional development programs, the state also then created new professional development guidance documents to govern the planning and review process for districts and schools (New Jersey Department of Education, n.d.).

The document has six subsections that address reflection, needs assessment, goals, opportunities, resources, and ongoing assessment and evaluation. Each section begins with critical questions that districts or schools must answer in creating their plans, along with a list of specific tools from the tool kit to aid discussion and analysis.

The New Jersey Department of Education also adopted Learning Forward’s new definition of professional development as part of its policy guidance. Duff noted that the definition “reinforces the notion of school-based professional learning and the cycle of continuous improvement.”

Collective bargaining and policy study

One unintended consequence of its work in New Jersey was that Learning Forward developed an even deeper understanding of the

role that teachers unions can play in facilitating or impeding state and district professional development reform efforts. Early on, many of the conversations among the standards board's diverse members were tense as the state was dramatically changing what teachers were expected to know and be able to do. Joyce Powell, New Jersey Education Association president, was committed to the work Learning Forward was doing. "She believed that collaboration between the teachers association and state leadership is essential to promote reform in education," Learning Forward's Killion said. "Over time, as people came to understand and respect one another, the conversations became more collaborative."

This experience launched an 18-month study project that brought together Learning Forward, the American Federation of Teachers, the National Education Association, and the Council of Chief State School Officers, along with teams from six states — Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Texas — in partnership to identify collective bargaining language and policies that support high-quality professional development.

The investigation, funded by NEA, revealed that "state and collective bargaining policy about professional development is fragmented, inconsistent, and totally insufficient in having professional development serve as a lever for improving schools or student achievement," according to Killion. "Most states mandate a certain amount of credits for certification or licensing, but there is little or no accountability. Taking courses does not necessarily mean learning."

The final report, *Advancing High-Quality Professional Learning Through Collective Bargaining and State Policy* (NSDC, 2010), calls for more collaboration and a common set of standards for developing policy on teacher

professional development. The report contains recommendations for local districts, teacher associations, and states and provides examples of legislation, regulations, administrative guidelines, and collective bargaining language in 12 policy areas. The task force that worked on the report hopes it will be used to guide the development of collective bargaining agreements, memoranda of understanding, and state policies that strengthen professional development in order to improve teaching and learning. Several states and districts, including Michigan and the Boston Public Schools, have studied the report and used it in policy and collective bargaining discussions.

RESULTS

A school-focused, self-reflective professional development system

The state's current professional development system, rolled out in 2009, requires individual school professional development committees, comprising three teachers and an administrator, to create professional development plans (New Jersey Department of Education, 2010). Schools have more responsibility to identify needs and develop action plans. Although learning communities are not required, the standards call for teacher collaboration and the state provides support for collaboration.

A district committee reviews and consolidates the school plans into a district plan, and then a county professional development board of 15 teachers, two college representatives, two district administrators, two school board members, and two members of the public uses a rubric based on Learning Forward's standards to review the district plans in order to approve them or to provide feedback for necessary revisions.

Eileen Aviss-Spedding, New Jersey Department of Education's manager of



On the 2007 NAEP writing test, [New Jersey] had the highest scores in the country overall and for low-income students.

professional standards, said in an interview with Learning Forward that the focus “requires districts to think systemically about student learning needs in the schools and identify what teachers need to know and be able to do to meet those goals as opposed to having us go in and say, ‘You have to have X amount of PD in content or pedagogy.’” All schools use state-supplied forms and templates, as well as state content standards, to document their plans, which they send to their district committees or local professional development committees.

The process creates accountability, but also leads teachers to reflect on and adjust their practices. Duff said, “You begin to see an impact in leadership and the depth of teacher conversation. Once this becomes a routine, you see a change in teacher practices.”

Though the minimum 100 hours for teacher professional development is the same, means for fulfilling the hours has changed. Professional learning is now more embedded in the schools, in keeping with Learning Forward’s definition. Teachers leave school only for specific knowledge that can’t be found

within school walls. Professional development must align with each teacher’s annual plan, which is based on the teacher’s interests and analysis of student needs, must connect to the school and district professional development plans, and must align with state professional development standards, the professional standards for teachers, and the state curriculum standards. All of this professional development planning is overseen through the teachers’ annual evaluations, and districts are responsible for monitoring compliance.

Duff said Learning Forward helped in the transition. “We use their ideas and resources all the time. So does the New Jersey Education Association, which continues to receive assistance from Dennis Sparks (former executive director of Learning Forward). Learning Forward’s work ties all the way through. There is no group in the state that hasn’t heard Joellen Killion or Stephanie Hirsh speak.”

Gains in student achievement over time

New Jersey is in the top five states nationally for reading scores in 4th and 8th grades and has shown statistically significant growth in 8th-grade math from 2003 through 2009. On the 2007 NAEP writing test, the state had the highest scores in the country overall and for low-income students. Scores for low-income students in reading and math, however, are lower in comparison to similar students in

other states and lag far behind those of New Jersey students ineligible for free and reduced-price lunch.

Although this gap is troubling, New Jersey's low-income students have shown strong growth from 2003 to 2009 in 4th- and 8th-grade reading and 8th-grade math. A study by the Education Trust, *Gauging the Gap*, revealed that New Jersey is one of nine states that showed significant improvement in reducing the achievement gap across all age groups in reading and math on NAEP exams between 2003 and 2007 (Rowan, Hall, & Haycock, 2010).

These improvements in student achievement cannot be directly attributed to Learning Forward's work in New Jersey or the state's efforts to strengthen professional development. Many factors — the state's revised academic and teaching standards, the Abbott decision equalizing funding across rich and poor districts, leadership initiatives funded by The Wallace Foundation, and other programs supported by the New Jersey Department of Education, the Professional Teaching Standards Board, and public and private organizations — also changed the state's educational landscape.

Preliminary signs of district and school progress

Preliminary signs of progress include changes in Cherry Hill Public Schools, which has been a lead pilot site for New Jersey Department of Education professional development guidance materials since 2008. The district has witnessed improved test scores since shifting to a more embedded, collaborative focus. For example, the district followed a cohort of middle grades students from fall 2007, when they entered 6th grade, through 8th-grade graduation in spring 2010. Only students who were tested in all three years were included in the study. Over the course of these three years, the percentage of

these students meeting or exceeding the state's proficiency levels increased from 73% to 85% to 93%.

Anecdotal evidence comes from H.W. Mountz Elementary School in Spring Lake Public Schools. Principal Pat Wright, also a standards board member, has become a spokesperson for professional learning communities and shared leadership. Wright said she learned that collaboration cannot be pushed but must be introduced as a tool once teachers collectively set goals for what needs to be done at their school.

“When I came on board, I just asked, ‘What do we need?’ ” Wright said. “And I put out three easels: climate, curriculum, and professional development. I said, ‘What are the current strengths and weaknesses in each of these areas?’ When we got to professional development, I said, ‘What are some of the strengths in professional development?’ After a few moments, one brave person said, ‘Well, we really don't have professional development.’ See, they didn't even see the one-shot workshops they were doing as true professional development. I was glad of that, and then I explained to them what the possibilities were if we became a learning community” (Jaquith et al., 2010, pp. 85–86).

Wright noted that learning communities are not the end goal, but a tool to get educators to address issues around student learning and curriculum. She said building successful learning communities requires the organic process that she and the standards board modeled on the state level.

New Jersey's work on standards, its new system of professional development planning and monitoring, and its continuing efforts to support collaboration all are affecting educators' professional learning.



LEARNING FORWARD'S WORK AT THE DISTRICT LEVEL

Learning Forward has provided a range of contract services to school systems nationwide. Clients include large urban districts, such as Chicago, Memphis, and Dallas; small cities, such as Green Bay, Wis., Erie, Pa., Corning, N.Y., and Fargo, N.D.; and suburban communities, including Fairfax, Va., and Rockwall, Texas. As with its services to states, Learning Forward tailors its assistance to the community's needs, providing advice and consultation, designing and leading professional development, or connecting districts and schools to a larger peer network.

Three communities that have worked closely with Learning Forward over an extended period are Duval County (Fla.) Public Schools, Fort Wayne (Ind.) Community Schools, and Memphis (Tenn.) City Schools. These districts illustrate how a comprehensive, sustained, multilevel approach to professional learning yields results.



DUVAL

COUNTY, FLA.

CONTEXT

Learning Forward has worked for more than a decade to help Florida develop and implement the Florida protocol system to enhance professional development. The state efforts were reinforced at the local level in Duval County Public Schools, where Learning Forward developed a close relationship with district officials. The district encompasses 172 urban and rural schools and 123,000 students in the Jacksonville area. The district is committed to the academic success of its diverse student population and to closing the achievement gap. One of its core beliefs is that “high-quality teachers, supported with high-quality, ongoing professional

development, must drive our rigorous, intellectually and artistically challenging curriculum” (Duval County Public Schools, 2010b).

LEARNING FORWARD'S ROLE

Learning Forward had a direct and indirect influence on professional development in the large, diverse district.

Since 2005, Learning Forward has worked closely with district leaders to implement job-embedded professional development. The organization advised and assisted the district on professional development. Joellen Killion, Learning Forward’s deputy executive director, visited the district several times to consult on ways to evaluate professional development. Learning Forward also designed and led professional development to strengthen the capacity of school leaders, instructional coaches, and other educators to facilitate professional learning.

Dawn Wilson, the district's executive director of professional development, recently graduated from the Learning Forward Academy, an extended learning experience for state, district, and school leaders that models the organization's vision for professional learning and teamwork in schools. Through immersion in inquiry-based and problem-based learning, participants engage in face-to-face sessions and telephone conferences as they construct new knowledge and develop the skills to transform their learning, work, and organizations. Wilson said the academy experience expanded her vision and capacity as a professional development leader.

In an interview with Learning Forward, Wilson said the organization's influence has been "much more powerful than the (Florida) protocols. ... We wouldn't have the same conviction that we need to move forward in certain areas without Learning Forward."

Five-year professional development plan

Recently, Learning Forward worked with the district to develop a five-year professional development plan (Duval County Public Schools, 2010a). The professional development advisory committee, 21 individuals representing administrators, teachers, coaches, and other education organizations, spent two years forming the plan, and the school board approved it in 2010.

The plan follows Learning Forward's guiding principles about effective professional development that is intensive, collaborative, school-based, results-oriented, and aligned with school improvement goals. It also reflects Learning Forward's professional development standards and Florida's professional development protocols. In creating the plan, the committee analyzed data from several sources: 1) the Standards Assessment Inventory, which all

Duval County schools complete each spring; 2) findings and recommendations from the state's protocol review team; and 3) evaluation studies by the Schultz Center for Teaching and Leadership in Jacksonville, Fla.

"Learning Forward experts provided helpful advice to the committee, bringing a national perspective and assistance in analyzing and interpreting the existing audit data," Wilson said. Learning Forward also reviewed the audit and a draft professional development evaluation plan and helped develop the plan's policy section.

Duval County's academy

In 2008–09, Duval County launched an academy for district coaches in literacy, mathematics, science, and new teacher assistance. The local academy was designed to replicate Learning Forward's inquiry-based, problem-solving model. Approximately 52 individuals completed the abbreviated 18-month local program, including 37 professional development coaches and 15 coaches from the district's academic services division.

The academy's purpose was to bring together diverse individuals to develop a common language and shared goals. As Lea Arnau, a Learning Forward co-facilitator, said in an interview, "Prior to the academy, many of these people were working in the same schools, but they didn't know each other. They could pass each other day after day without knowing what was going on. Now, they understand that they're all working toward the same goal." Another valuable lesson for participants, according to Arnau, was "moving beyond the notion of improving teaching and learning for students. They now know that it's equally important to promote effective teaching and learning for adults."

A cycle of learning, action, and reflection, which is one of Learning Forward’s key tenets, permeates the teacher academy programs.

Wilson collaborated with Learning Forward to design the academy. “I wanted the coaches to develop a deep understanding of the national standards underlying effective professional development,” she said. The academy presented content — for example, how to use Learning Forward’s Standards Assessment Inventory, Innovation Configurations (rubrics for measuring professional development at different levels in the system), and protocols for teaching action research. In addition, participants were asked to identify a problem they wanted to solve within 18 months. Then they engaged in discussions, reviewed literature, gathered and triangulated data, wrote up what they did, and assessed the implications for professional development.

“Academy graduates now know how to plan, design, deliver, and evaluate professional development in a thoughtful manner,” Wilson said.

Powerful designs in teacher academies

In addition to the academy for coaches, the district offers academies for teachers in various content areas. For example, elementary reading, mathematics, science, and secondary reading teachers meet for four to six days throughout the year over three years.

Although Learning Forward does not design or deliver these academies, Wilson said they



are deeply influenced by the organization’s principles of effective professional development. A cycle of learning, action, and reflection, which is one of Learning Forward’s key tenets, permeates the teacher academy programs.

Learning Forward presented powerful designs that continue to shape the way that professional development is planned and carried out throughout the district, Wilson said, and professional development coaches design and deliver training that is aligned with Learning Forward’s standards.

Leadership academies

The district also runs academies for prospective and veteran leaders. Although these are locally developed and conducted, they are modeled on the Arkansas and Learning Forward academies. Wilson said the professional development leadership team uses the work of Learning Forward and others to design programs for Duval County leaders.

Participation in the Big 35 Network

The Big 35 is a network of 35 large school systems that Learning Forward created and facilitated to reduce the student achievement gap. Participants met semiannually for four

years in districts across the country to share information about promoting effective professional learning. The venue was chosen based on topic. When the group met in Jacksonville, for example, the discussion focused on how to evaluate professional development and was based on the Duval County district's work. In Chicago, the Big 35 explored the city's data management system for professional development, and in Las Vegas and San Diego, the spotlight was on approaches to teacher induction.

Because many participants found it difficult to travel, Learning Forward scheduled bimonthly webinars. Members met for the first time at Learning Forward's 2010 Annual Conference in Atlanta. Wilson said the network was helpful and regrets that it no longer meets regularly. "You need face-to-face learning to form a bond," she said.

Arnau, who facilitated the Big 35 for Learning Forward and was a member of the network, said the group's relationships are important. "Districts of this size face unique challenges," she said. "The most valuable thing about this network was that I could pick up the phone and get answers to questions like, 'How do I follow up with 11,000 teachers?'"

Japanese lesson study

Japanese lesson study involves a group of teachers working together on a broad goal and developing lesson plans that group members observe, analyze, and revise. Teachers' focus throughout this process is on improving student thinking and making lessons more effective. Duval County began Japanese lesson study several years before the Florida chancellor of education introduced it statewide. Wilson learned about the process when she attended a Learning Forward conference. Wilson invited an expert to the school system who provided a two-day orientation for key staff.

After Florida Department of Education officials saw Japanese lesson study during a trip to China, they decided to learn more about this approach. In July 2009, the department asked Learning Forward to conduct two days of training for key state leaders, regional coordinators, and several district representatives. At the session's conclusion, state and regional leaders decided to promote lesson study statewide and invited districts to apply for assistance to learn the process. Lesson study is now mandated in RTTT and Florida's Differentiated Accountability Model.

Duval County used the assistance to invite Learning Forward to lead five days of professional development in September 2009. The first four days included sessions for different audiences, including all 60 principals, the superintendent's council (20 to 30 experts representing professional development, curriculum and instruction, and various federal programs), coaches and leadership team members from the district's elementary and middle schools, and school teams from 10 targeted high schools. On the fifth day, Learning Forward worked with another 120 people, including school coaches, instructional coaches, district representatives, and academic services professionals, helping them learn about lesson study so that they could promote and facilitate the process in their schools. "The continuous learning cycle that is at the heart of lesson study eventually took root in all the elementary schools and about one-quarter of the high schools," Wilson said.

Standards Assessment Inventory to help monitor results

Duval County administers the Standards Assessment Inventory every spring and uses the results to develop and refine its professional development plans. For example, the teacher academies introduced structured observation

of teacher lessons in direct response to low scores on question 29, which is about observing other classrooms. Schools use the results to develop their own school improvement plans. Learning Forward helped principals and school leadership teams learn to interpret and use the results to strengthen their evaluation of professional development.

RESULTS

It is difficult to measure the impact of professional development in the district because the combination of efforts creates a culture of continuous improvement in which teachers engage in intensive and sustained professional learning inside and outside school. Yet a growing body of evidence shows that the district's commitment to professional development is resulting in enhanced knowledge and practice, greater collaboration among educators, and improved student achievement. The district's efforts also have gained state and national attention.

Teacher Incentive Fund grant

Duval County Public Schools' application for a U.S. Department of Education Teacher Incentive Fund grant ranked in the top 10 of the 62 winning applicants from 27 states. The district received \$9.6 million to develop and implement a comprehensive professional development plan to increase student achievement based on recruiting, developing, and retaining high-quality teachers. Wilson and district leaders said they will design and implement professional development that reflects Learning Forward's definition and principles of effective professional development. The district plans to serve more than 2,600 teachers and principals in 36 of the district's highest-need schools, affecting nearly 30,000 students over the five-year grant period.

Impact of standards-based literacy training on student achievement

Learning Forward encouraged the district to evaluate the effects of its professional development on teacher practice and student achievement, and the district has a growing body of evidence of the impact of its efforts. The school board and the Schultz Center for Teaching and Learning, which is a major service provider of professional development in the district, spent several years evaluating the impact of the district's standards-based literacy training for teachers. The evaluation began as a pilot project in 2004–05, but, by 2007–08, expanded to include 2,300 teachers and 58,000 students. The center used the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test Reading Developmental Scale Scores to document the literacy program's effect on student achievement.

The analyses revealed a clear trend: The more days that teachers participate in professional learning, the greater the gains in student achievement. The study found that each day a teacher spends in literacy training produces discernible results. In 2007–08, the average achievement gain for students whose teachers had less than five days of professional learning was 108.4, five to 15 days of professional learning was 113.2, and more than 15 days was 130.6, statistically significant differences. In addition, literacy training affected teachers at all experience levels, and the relationship between teacher professional development and achievement gains was greater for students from low-income families (Schultz Center, 2008b).

Impact of mathematics professional development

The district's professional development for mathematics teachers incorporated several curricular and instructional strategies that

Learning Forward advocates, including standards-based learning environments, reflective teaching and learning, and Japanese lesson study. In keeping with Learning Forward's professional development standards, teachers have various venues for learning and multiple layers of support, including having instructional coaches to help teachers apply their new knowledge and skills in the classroom.

In spring 2007, the district and the Schultz Center evaluated the first revised mathematics program. Based on a survey of participating teachers, the evaluators found that teachers had gained considerable knowledge and applied it to their classroom instruction. The overall total for teacher responses to knowledge items was 90%, and the increase in the percentage of teachers reporting a high degree of knowledge was 73%. The overall total for teacher responses to implementation items was 87%, and the increase in the percentage reporting a high degree of implementation was 67%. In addition, after training, 86.5% of participants reported using workshop model artifacts in their classrooms, an increase of 21.6% since the beginning of the course. Almost all (96.2%) of the teachers reported using recommended rituals and routines following the training, an increase of 23.2%. Nearly two-thirds of the teachers reported that their school had the positive features of a professional learning environment, a precondition for lesson study.

Two years after the district implemented the revised standards-based mathematics courses, evaluators examined the relationship between teachers' level of professional development and student achievement gains on the state standardized exam. Students of teachers receiving zero to one day, two to 10 days, or 11 to 20 days of professional development gained 107, 117, and 120 points,

respectively. The evaluation found these differences were small, but still statistically significant (Schultz Center, 2008a).

Evaluation of the Continuous Learning Cycle program (2008–09)

The district developed the Continuous Learning Cycle based on nationwide programs showcased by Learning Forward and other organizations, as well as on local research. The program trained school staff to engage in self-directed inquiry with discussion around instructional needs. The program goal was to build schools' capacity for continuous improvement, thereby leveraging limited resources for instructional coaching staff and accelerating the work of professional learning communities in schools.

Teachers were to develop adult learning goals based on identified student learning needs. Then they were to develop a four-to-six-week course of study to review materials and resources about the topic, take turns demonstrating lessons, and try out new and different teaching approaches. Finally, they were to engage in personal reflection and collegial discussions about the work. Teachers also were expected to gather data, develop assessments, examine student work for evidence of learning over time, and evaluate the new approaches by documenting results.

After three years, 83 schools and 906 school-based instructional personnel had engaged in one or more coaching cycles. When teachers were asked what unexpected outcomes they experienced as a result, the most frequent responses were that the work led to:

- Observable changes in student learning (57.1%); and
- Improved teaching strategies and practices (42.9%).

“The whole focus on school-based, job-embedded learning comes from Learning Forward. It encourages me to design, test, revise, and evaluate.”

– Dawn Wilson, Duval County district’s executive director of professional development



Evaluators reported that participants exceeded the 75% standard for quality work in each component of the learning cycle: student learning goals (86%), teacher learning goals (84%), and measurement of learning goals (82%). Although the coaching cycles were brief, students were able to demonstrate increased levels of mastery during this short time frame. For example, in one of the cycles studied, only 145 of the 521 students (27.8%) demonstrated mastery of the skills being taught during the pretest. At the end of the cycle, 320 students (61.4%) demonstrated mastery, more than twice the initial number (Schultz Center, 2009).

Perceived impact

Wilson said Learning Forward has significantly affected the district’s professional learning. She said the district’s continuous learning cycle work grew out of Learning Forward’s approach to professional development. The district’s focus on lesson study initially came about because of Wilson’s

connection with Learning Forward and conference attendance. Learning Forward “permeates everything,” she said.

“The whole focus on school-based, job-embedded learning comes from Learning Forward,” she said. “It encourages me to design, test, revise, and evaluate. Whenever I develop a professional development program, I ask myself, ‘Does it follow the five guiding principles of Learning Forward?’ ... I don’t consider inviting guest speakers to the district’s urban institute for low-performing schools unless I’ve observed them first at Learning Forward’s Annual Conference and know they will do a good job.”

Wilson also credits Learning Forward for her personal growth in advocating for professional learning. She has written letters to the editor and articles that promote professional development, in keeping with Learning Forward’s strategic priority on advocacy.



FORT WAYNE

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

CONTEXT

Fort Wayne is the second-largest city in Indiana, and Fort Wayne Community Schools is the second-largest district in the state. Its diverse student body is made up of nearly 32,000 students. At one time, the community had a strong industrial base with much corporate leadership. In the last few decades, however, many large corporations have moved, and the city is now a major relocation center for immigrants, who speak more than 79 different dialects. The percentage of Fort Wayne students receiving free or reduced-price lunch has increased dramatically — from 40% in 2000, to more than half in 2005, to 68% in September 2010.

Fort Wayne is not the only Indiana city to fall victim to the declining industrial economy. Poverty rates have risen across the state, so the district's Title I resources have been stretched thin. Although a lack of resources has made it challenging to create and sustain school reform, Fort Wayne has worked to improve leadership, teaching, and student achievement.

When Wendy Robinson took over as superintendent in 2003, one of her top priorities was strengthening professional development. With financial support from The Wallace Foundation, a staff position to serve as director of professional development was created. Linda Roman, a former teacher, assistant principal, and principal, was placed in that position. While Roman was not a seasoned professional developer, she had attended many professional development conferences and sessions where she learned about professional learning communities and using data for decision making. The district had decided to focus on learning communities and was assessing students quarterly, and Roman's job was to coordinate the improvement efforts through professional learning.

LEARNING FORWARD'S ROLE

As the FWCS Professional Development Department was in its infancy, Roman looked to others for guidance in establishing such a department. She looked at models in Charlotte-Mecklenburg and Boston, and she contacted Learning Forward for assistance. With Learning Forward's advice and assistance, she created a professional development department within the central office, which grew to include six staff members. Since then, Learning Forward has played a significant role in the district, providing district-level advice and technical assistance, developing instructional coaches, coaching school leaders, and offering other support.

Initial advice and technical assistance

The Wallace Foundation grant allowed the district to contract with Learning Forward to work on a professional development structure. The first step was to connect professional development with student outcomes. Learning Forward helped the district develop a school improvement planning process that involves a continuous learning cycle. Schools looked at student data to identify areas for improvement, develop an action plan, take concrete action steps, gather data, reflect on results, and make corrections as needed. This was a change for FWCS, which, like schools across the country, was curriculum-driven. In the last decade, that has changed significantly within FWCS as instruction has become data-driven and data-informed.

Learning Forward shared professional expertise and helped the district move from large-group, sit-and-get trainings to collaborative, job-embedded learning. Professional development staff learned to question why they were doing what they were doing, how they would identify teacher learning needs, what methods they would use

to engage participants, and how they expected to follow up with training.

Professional development modules

Using a state grant focused on teacher effectiveness and certification, FWCS contracted with Learning Forward to develop a three-year professional development curriculum targeted to eight high-need Title I schools. Participating teachers were expected to graduate with the knowledge and skills to be master teachers.

Learning Forward used a needs assessment to identify which topics to include in the curriculum in order to enhance teacher practice and student achievement. Topics included developing a theory of change, understanding poverty, appreciating diversity, understanding the principles of effective professional learning, and supporting data-based decision making. Each module had five or six learning sessions. The organization designed the curriculum so that participants would complete a module, act on what they had learned, and reflect on the results. They also had to complete a portfolio documenting their learning.

The modules were completed in fall 2008 and tested with 10 teachers. One teacher found them so helpful that she “decided to throw out everything she was doing and start over,” Roman said. The modules provided a much-needed framework for quality, results-oriented instruction. Before, the district had several different initiatives that were not integrated. Teachers were taught to use research-based strategies like chunking, read-alouds, or word walls, but they didn't understand how the strategies fit together or when to use one versus another. They needed a big picture — a framework for instruction.

After the state grant ended, the modules were not fully implemented, but the basic



FWCS worked with Learning Forward and its Coaches Academy model to prepare a cadre of master teachers to become instructional coaches, teaching them how to build relationships, lead professional learning, and coach both individual teachers and teams.

principles, ideas, and tools created for teachers are now embedded in the development of the entire instructional staff, including both teachers and administrators.

Instructional coaching

The district next introduced instructional coaching. FWCS already had instructional facilitators, and 10 years ago they were doing a good job of modeling effective instruction. The missing piece, however, was they didn't know how to coach by encouraging reflection or giving feedback. Coaches were then trained to have the knowledge and skills to substantially improve instruction and student achievement.

FWCS worked with Learning Forward and its Coaches Academy model to prepare a cadre of master teachers to become instructional coaches, teaching them how to build relationships, lead professional learning, and coach both individual teachers and teams. Approximately 50 coaches were trained, along with some school leaders. Instructional coaches

were placed in every building using federal stimulus money, and after two years of seeing the value, the district is making plans to find a way to support the positions long-term.

School-based coaching

At the same time, The Wallace Foundation grant led to the development of a leadership program for school principals. Learning Forward assisted in organizing group-training sessions to develop principals' foundation knowledge. Learning Forward also helped tailor personal coaching sessions to each principal's needs.

Learning Forward worked with 14 Title I elementary schools not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) by providing coaching in five half-day sessions each year for two years. The organization worked with the principals and other school leaders to examine teacher and student data and promote job-embedded professional learning tailored to the needs they identified, taught school leaders to use tuning

protocols and peer observation, and helped schools plan standards-based curriculum units and design common assessments to measure student performance.

While the work focused mainly on principals, Learning Forward also worked with school leadership teams or grade-level teams to model effective coaching, tailoring goals and objectives to the school's needs. "In some schools, teachers were wasting their common planning time because they didn't know how to use it properly," Kay Psencik, Learning Forward senior consultant, said. "Other schools had dysfunctional grade-level or school leadership teams. Virtually all had issues with curriculum and instruction."

Above all, Learning Forward modeled how to engage in a continuous improvement cycle. The organization worked with the school leaders to find out where students were struggling and asked principals to figure out the root cause of the problem, encouraged them to identify evidence-based strategies that might help, and helped schools make a plan, take action, collect and analyze data, reflect on results, and begin the process again. While the district had conducted quarterly assessments of its students for years, not much action had been taken based on the results.

Although the non-Title I elementary schools and the high schools showed little change, eight of the 14 Title I elementary schools made AYP for the first time after just two years of on-site coaching, and three others saw dramatic improvements.

LEAD Schools

In spring 2010, before state standardized test results were in, district leaders restructured five elementary and six secondary schools that had not made AYP for four years. The

district wanted these schools, termed Leading Educational Achievement with Distinction (LEAD) schools, to accelerate their progress. Learning Forward had coached all five of the restructured Title I elementary schools for two years, and four of them achieved AYP status when ISTEP+ (Indiana Statewide Testing for Educational Progress Plus) scores were released in fall 2010.

The district asked Learning Forward to help with the LEAD schools. The organization worked with Get Nichols, Fort Wayne's director of elementary administration, and other central office administrators to define what it would mean to be a school of distinction, a student of distinction, a community of learners with distinction, an administrator of distinction, a teacher of distinction, and what it would mean to have professional development of distinction. Next, Learning Forward facilitated a similar conversation with the five elementary principals.

Learning Forward worked with district staff to develop a six-day summer training program for the faculties of the five elementary LEAD schools. The training was based on the principles outlined by Alan M. Blankstein, founder and president of the HOPE Foundation, in his book, *Failure Is Not an Option: Six Principles That Guide Student Achievement in High-Performing Schools* (Corwin Press, 2004). These principles closely align with Learning Forward's own principles, as well as with the district's mission.

As part of Learning Forward's ongoing assistance to the district, the organization continues to provide limited on-site coaching within budget constraints to three LEAD principals and two other principals whom the district identified as needing support.

Leading Forward

The district's dwindling resources have made continuing its leadership program a challenge, but FWCS is committed to building a sustainable training program for principals. Learning Forward has proposed working with both the central office and the schools to strengthen leadership capacity through services such as leadership institutes, on-site coaching, webinars, networking, and other learning strategies. The district is seeking financing for this comprehensive leadership program.

Learning School Alliance

Although most of Learning Forward's work in Fort Wayne has been at the district level or across multiple schools, one school, Study Elementary, also has been a member of Learning Forward's national Learning School Alliance. Study Elementary serves 330 students in pre-K through 5th grades and has a diverse population. Nearly 93% of its students qualify for free or reduced-price lunches, making it a Title I school. The school was chosen for the Learning School Alliance because it exemplifies Learning Forward's professional development standards, which undergird all of the organization's initiatives.

The Learning School Alliance facilitates collaboration within and among schools across the country, helping them to share and implement the best professional development methods. As members of the alliance, administrators and teachers at Study Elementary participate in Learning Forward conferences and monthly webinars to discuss education issues and the challenges schools face.

RESULTS

Because so many changes have taken place during Superintendent Robinson's tenure, it is difficult to pinpoint cause and effect. Yet the

“Through Learning Forward, we have learned about standards-based professional development; the idea of continuous learning and improvement; the importance of job-embedded, authentic work; and how to follow up, follow up, follow up.”

—Linda Roman, formerly director of professional development, Fort Wayne Community Schools

district clearly benefited from the assistance of Learning Forward and The Wallace Foundation in bringing about improvements in leadership, teaching, and learning.

Roman, who recently retired from FWCS, credits Learning Forward with much of the change that has permeated the district. “Through Learning Forward, we have learned about standards-based professional development; the idea of continuous learning and improvement; the importance of job-embedded, authentic work; and how to follow up, follow up, follow up. In the beginning, the notion of a standards-based, data-driven, results-based system lived primarily within the central office's professional development department. Then certain people, especially at the elementary level, caught on. They now understand that collaboration and looking at data involve real learning. They no longer view what they do as following Learning Forward's standards, but rather, it is what we do here.”

District officials know there is more work to be done. For example, making sure the changes that have come about in the last decade are embedded. The district has come a long way, but the question is, can it be sustained? As district leaders retire, the culture change must be far enough along that it can sustain itself.

Changes in Title I elementary schools

Change has been especially dramatic within the 14 Title I elementary schools that participated in the coaching program Learning Forward facilitated. After two years of personalized coaching, eight of these schools achieved AYP in 2010, meaning all groups, including traditionally underserved students, made progress. Another three schools missed AYP by not raising achievement in only two categories, and one missed by just three out of 19 categories. Thirteen of the 14 schools met the standard set by the state's own accountability system. Of these 13, nine received an "academic" rating, one received a "commendable" rating, and three achieved "exemplary" status — the highest rating possible on the state's five-point scale.

Three of the 14 schools are worthy of special note.

- **Abbett Elementary** had been among the lowest-performing schools in the district. After Learning Forward's coaching, teachers understood that all students were expected to reach all of the standards and that the teachers were responsible for their students' success. Math problem solving was one of the school's most problematic areas, so the principal asked faculty members to stop whatever they were doing for a time every day — whether they were in the math classroom, the language arts classroom, or the gym — to work on math problems. As a result of these

and other changes, Abbett Elementary made AYP for the first time based on spring 2010 test scores. In 2009, only 38% of the students passed the English/language arts portion of the ISTEP⁺, but in 2010, 54% met the standard. In math, the difference was equally dramatic — only 31% met the standard in 2009 compared with 48% in 2010.

- **Adams Elementary** also participated in Learning Forward's coaching. The new Indiana growth model allows Indiana to recognize more than just high test scores. The state now measures how much students learn in each content area over the course of a year compared with other students in their peer group — that is, students who achieved the same scale score on the previous year's ISTEP⁺. The growth model projects a student growth percentile, which is labeled as low, typical, or high growth. Based on the spring 2010 data, Adams Elementary had the second-highest growth rate in mathematics in the state for students who originally scored below the 25th percentile. Nearly two out of three Adams students (65.9%) made high growth.
- **Study Elementary** participated in both the Learning School Alliance and Learning Forward's leadership coaching program. As a result of these and related efforts, scores have risen, changing the school from failing to exemplary status. From 2009 to 2010, the percentage of students passing the English/language arts portion of the ISTEP⁺ rose from 56% to 74%, the percentage passing mathematics increased from 68% to 81%, and the percentage passing both tests rose from 49% to 71%. These dramatic changes in student achievement

demonstrate the power of collaborative professional learning in which teachers use data to inform decisions and focus on results. Study Elementary has become a model school where educators come to see what teachers have done to improve student achievement.

Abbett and Adams are among the LEAD Schools and eventually will serve as models within the district and elsewhere. Study Elementary leaders recently presented at Learning Forward's 2010 Annual Conference in Atlanta, where Principal Trudy Grafton said, "Everything we do is related to student achievement. Teachers collaborate formally at least weekly, but in actuality almost daily in either grade-level teams or across grade levels. In collaboration they examine data, determining areas of strength and those needing improvement. Daily instruction and interventions are data driven, based on student's instructional needs. All Study staff work together as an instructional team, problem solving and supporting one another within the building toward the goal of 'success for all.' Where we are today is the result of five years of work. When I came here, I was working 80 hours a week because it was just me. Now, it's everybody."

Perceptions of overall success

Dan Bickel, Fort Wayne's elementary area administrator, said the district's 14 Title I elementary schools that participated in the Learning Forward coaching program now have more active professional learning communities than exist in some other district schools, largely because of Learning Forward's efforts. Bickel said coaching is critical to the success of low-performing schools.

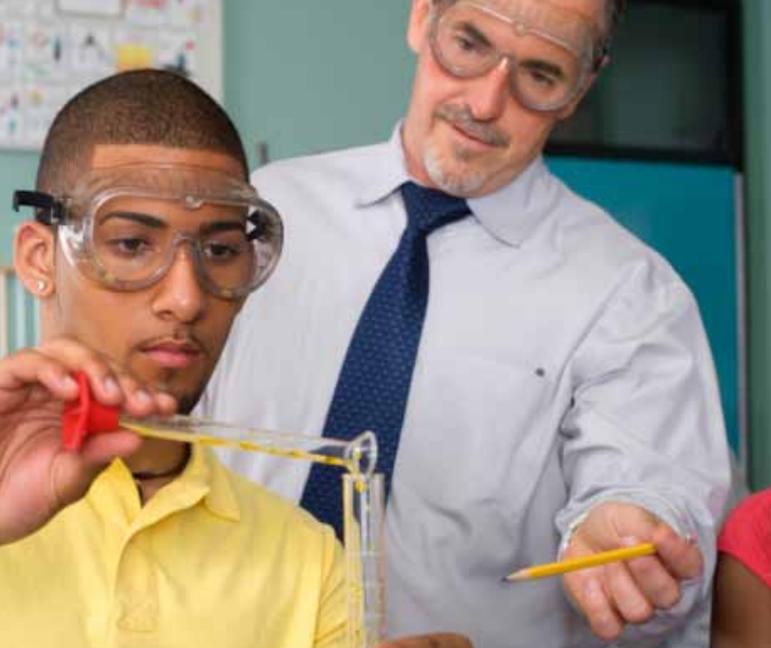
Nichols said Learning Forward has helped transform these 14 schools. "While we had

introduced professional learning communities into these schools, Learning Forward helped embed them into practice," Nichols said. The organization's work "tightened up what the schools were doing and helped them understand that they couldn't just teach out of a textbook. They learned the meaning of explicit, standards-driven instruction, what to look for when they observe classrooms, how to engage in purposeful collaboration, how to use tuning protocols, and how to identify students' strengths and weaknesses. As a result of coaching, they also learned how to look for solutions and how to commit to action.

"Learning Forward also helped principals learn the meaning of shared leadership," Nichols continued. "They modeled how principals should work with their quality improvement teams to help them function more effectively. As a result, these leadership teams work better with the rest of the faculty and play a major role in bringing about change. Principals began to dialogue about their concerns without fear of evaluation from their supervisor. Learning Forward brought them a fresh, national, and innovative perspective."

Nichols said the organization exemplified the principles already adopted by the district and encouraged leaders to be inquisitive and think deeply. "By observing, I have learned to be far less directive and more facilitating," she said.

The district has improved student achievement, particularly in its low-performing Title I elementary schools. Although the professional development office has been restructured, administrators have internalized Learning Forward's principles of effective professional development and are enhancing leadership, teaching, and learning.



MEMPHIS

CITY SCHOOLS

CONTEXT

Memphis City Schools is the 23rd-largest district in the nation, with a total of 200 schools, 7,000 full-time teachers, and approximately 105,000 students in pre-K through 12th grade. The district's student population is 86% African-American, 8% white, and 6% other races and nationalities. Its child poverty rate is among the highest in the nation. Most reforms the district has attempted have not had a lasting impact.

Since 2006, however, the district has invested heavily in improving teacher quality as a means to accelerate student performance. In 2006, a districtwide plan for professional development didn't exist, and activities were fragmented and hastily put together with little attention to planning, goals, or results. Learning Forward helped to change that, and Memphis has had a paradigm shift in how teachers and administrators approach professional development.

The district's efforts to enhance quality teaching have gained momentum under Superintendent Kriner Cash, who was hired in June 2008. Cash's comprehensive reform agenda is showing early results in improved student achievement, Advanced Placement results, dual high school and college enrollment rates, graduation rates, school safety, and other priority areas. And in November 2009, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation announced a \$90 million grant to help the district ensure that all students have access to effective teachers in every classroom. The district raised \$20 million in matching funds to meet the grant requirements.

LEARNING FORWARD'S ROLE

In December 2006, Learning Forward held its annual conference in Nashville, Tenn. At that time, Myra Whitney oversaw 37 schools, planning principals' meetings and conducting summer institutes. The former superintendent asked Whitney to represent Memphis on the conference planning committee, which met for 18 months to prepare the conference. Whitney said the experience helped her move from her academic position to her current role as associate superintendent of professional development and staff inservice.

"Memphis City Schools had never had such a position," she said in an interview with Learning Forward, "so my professional team and I built the hub for professional development from scratch." Over the next four years, Learning Forward helped Whitney and her team transform the district's approach to professional learning, beginning with a districtwide audit that led to a comprehensive, needs-based professional development plan. Learning Forward provided professional development for district administrators, school leaders, instructional facilitators, and teachers in all 200 schools to help implement the plan. "They now understand that professional learning is not a one-time workshop, but must be ongoing, with follow-up," Whitney said.

Districtwide audit

When she became associate superintendent, Whitney immediately contracted with Learning Forward to conduct a districtwide audit. The audit was designed to 1) provide baseline data on professional development in the district; 2) assess the alignment of the existing professional development with Learning Forward's professional development standards, the Tennessee Professional Development Policy, and the No Child Left Behind Act requirements for professional

development; and 3) target areas for professional development improvement and provide recommendations (Memphis City Schools, 2009a).

The audit consisted of a series of focused interviews, examination of three years of archived district professional development documentation, and administration of the Standards Assessment Inventory to nearly 7,000 educators. Whitney said, "I was surprised at how comprehensive the audit was, and it was right on target. Learning Forward spotted areas that really needed refinement. It focused on the right things and was true."

Among the strengths the audit identified were the district's revised organizational structure, which reflected its commitment to strengthening district- and school-based professional development, the introduction of professional learning communities as a key element of professional development, the district's Teaching and Learning Academy, and the availability of necessary resources. The audit also noted several weaknesses, including too many efforts and initiatives, too many one-shot workshops with conflicting messages, and a lack of focused, sustained, and high-quality professional development at the school level. Based on these findings, Learning Forward made nine recommendations to improve the context, process, and content of professional learning.

Professional development plan

The district formed the Professional Development Advisory Council to develop a comprehensive professional development plan. The council, a cross-functional group of teachers, school administrators, central office staff, academic superintendents, and the associate superintendent, met several times to discuss the audit's recommendations, create a plan, and develop action steps. Learning

Forward facilitated the group's work. The council eventually created a five-year professional development plan for 2007–12 (Memphis City Schools, 2007). The plan was revised in 2009 (Memphis City Schools, 2009a).

The district's Five-Year Comprehensive Professional Development Plan provided a framework for a coherent, districtwide system of professional learning. The district's goals were: to promote a culture of excellence; to align professional development practices to national and state standards in order to raise the rigor of curriculum; to change instructional practices; to improve student achievement; and to provide an operational framework for sustained, job-embedded professional development driven by student performance. The district plan, which reflects both Learning Forward's and Tennessee's professional development standards, requires districts and schools to use student performance to measure the success of professional development. The plan also is systemic; it acknowledges that all parts of the system affect the whole and provides multiple opportunities for practice, reflection, and follow-up at ever higher levels of development. Finally, it incorporates constructivist thinking — the idea that learners build their own understanding through experience rather than gaining knowledge from an outside speaker or expert.

To support the plan, Learning Forward helped guide the district in writing a professional learning policy for all staff. The board of Education approved the policy in June 2010. The policy requires the district's 7,000 teachers to participate in 57 hours of professional learning annually. The policy, developed in collaboration with the Memphis Education Association, includes a Memorandum of Understanding to support its implementation.

“The professional development is more sustained and more rigorous, with built-in assessments and homework assignments that must be executed in school. It thoroughly supports teacher quality and effectiveness.”

—Myra Whitney, associate superintendent of professional development and staff inservice

Whitney said the plan led to “cross-pollination of ideas across cross-functional teams.” For the first time, curriculum and professional development specialists, principals, teachers, researchers, and special educators worked together. The plan has helped change professional development in the district, according to Whitney. “Now all schools offer professional development,” she said. “The professional development is more sustained and more rigorous, with built-in assessments and homework assignments that must be executed in school. It thoroughly supports teacher quality and effectiveness.”

Coaches Academy

Whitney next worked to provide district and school-based coaches with “common tools, a common language, and common training.” She wanted everyone to learn effective coaching strategies based on sound adult-learning principles. Learning Forward began a series of Coaches Academies for district and school instructional facilitators in 2006, starting with central office staff, including literacy coaches,

graduation coaches, and administrators responsible for training others.

In 2007–08, Learning Forward prepared groups of teacher leaders to serve as their schools’ instructional coaches. By the end of the two years, at least one or two people from each of the district’s 200 schools had participated, 300 to 400 people in all.

The Coaches Academy ran for five consecutive weekdays. Participants learned to serve in a variety of roles, including as resource providers, data coaches, curriculum specialists, instructional specialists, mentors, classroom supporters, learning facilitators, school leaders, and catalysts for change. Heather Clifton, a Learning Forward senior consultant, said in an interview, “We taught them the different roles coaches play and asked them to figure out the best kind of work to influence teacher practice and improve student achievement. . . . We teach them to be a collaborator, to ask questions, and to encourage teachers to become reflective practitioners by asking reflective questions. We teach them that professional development is not just a workshop or institute. Job-embedded, standards-based professional development can be gratifying work. Now the focus is on professional learning instead.”

Working with a district the size of Memphis is challenging because of its many schools. Nevertheless, the Learning Forward Coaches Academy had several benefits. At least one person in every school now shares a common understanding of how to manage change, how to develop trusting relationships, and how to get into a classroom to demonstrate, observe, and give feedback. The training also has helped staff see its implications for their own work.”

Although the Coaches Academy has not been evaluated, anecdotal evidence suggests

it made a difference for many participants. Several have presented at Learning Forward conferences, gone to graduate school for additional work in coaching, or attended the Learning Forward Academy, a 2½-year intensive learning experience for educational leaders. Whitney observed, “Most are still working as coaches, understand the role of the coach, continue to upgrade their knowledge and skills through regularly scheduled networking meetings, and prepare monthly logs as a way of tracking their progress.”

One drawback of this early-stage Coaches Academy was too few opportunities for participants to follow up. Although some groups had additional days of professional learning, most coaches’ involvement with the district academy ended after the week-long experience. Learning Forward now designs the Coaches Academy to be carried out in several sessions so that instructional coaches can learn new ideas and skills for two or three days, try out what they’ve learned, and then participate in follow-up sessions where they reflect on their practice and work to deepen and expand their skills.

Leadership development for principals

Instructional coaches reported they were frustrated that their principals didn’t share their vision, which made it difficult for the coaches to apply what they had learned back in their schools. To remedy this problem, Learning Forward visited the district twice to help principals learn how to foster professional learning and to help them understand what was expected of the coaches and the principal’s role as instructional leader. The organization worked with the principals and instructional facilitators as a team so they could learn to support one another’s efforts. In the end, all 200 district schools participated in this leadership development effort.

In addition, the district's Urban Education Center developed a comprehensive Executive Leadership Program for teachers aspiring to be assistant principals and assistant principals seeking the principalship. The program has four phases:

1. A six-week summer intensive program that involves a problem-based, action-learning curriculum that simulates the challenges of an urban principalship.
2. A 10-month school-based residency with an experienced principal acting as mentor. During this time, participants also complete the center's curriculum modules.
3. A planning summer that helps participants make a smooth transition to leadership by helping them understand how to apply their learning to their own school culture.
4. A three-year mentoring program that provides extensive and ongoing support for the first three years of school leadership (Urban Education Center, 2010).

Whitney said the leadership program was influenced by Learning Forward's professional development standards, as well as Learning Forward's tools, resources, and designs for professional development. For example, Executive Leadership Program participants study Learning Forward's 12 standards, and the program itself models a continuous learning cycle that includes "problem analysis, knowledge application, diagnosis, strategy development, treatment, and outcome analysis" (Memphis City Schools, 2010). Facilitators guide each cohort during the program, lead instruction, and conduct site visits to monitor progress. Each participant also has a mentor principal who guides his or her development, beginning with the school residency experience and continuing through the first three years of leadership. Finally, the program uses Learning Forward's *Taking the Lead: New Roles for*

Teachers and School-Based Coaches (Killion & Harrison, 2006).

Learning Forward Academy

Whitney attended the Learning Forward Academy from 2007 to 2009, along with four other district staff members. As she was simultaneously working on the district's professional development plan, she said she decided to address the question: "How do you move from a fragmented to a centralized model of professional learning?" At first, she didn't see how she could affect such a large system. Just 2½ years later, however, she observed, "You can actually see the progress." She said about the academy, "It was extremely collegial, and we still send e-mails to each other asking for assistance and support. I am continually using all the strategies that I learned. Recently, in a deputy superintendent staff meeting, I found myself talking about the theory of change, sharing what I'd learned at the academy with my colleagues. It brings a sense of pride — I have gained so many skills and have a deeper understanding of professional development."

Big 35 Network

Whitney developed her own understanding of effective professional learning by participating in Learning Forward's Big 35 Network. She said, "Everyone is doing the same kind of work. They're willing to share their experiences and be vulnerable. New learning always takes place."

Whitney learned how to make mentoring more rigorous and how to improve mentor selection, which led to a new district mentoring initiative. The Big 35 network also provided information on using technology and online learning for professional development.

Teacher Leadership Academy

In 2006, the district established a Teacher Leadership Academy to strengthen teachers' leadership capacity. The district academy seeks

master teachers who are “effective and resilient instructional leaders; committed to student development, achievement, and imagination; facilitators of learning environments that maximize positive instructional outcomes; and who are willing to embrace parent and community engagement” (Memphis City Schools, n.d.). After a lengthy selection process, each cohort of teacher leaders participates in monthly professional learning sessions and attends Learning Forward’s Summer Conference. During these experiences, teachers learn content and presentation formats that include curriculum integration, concept-based unit development, technology integration, action research, constructivist teaching, and project-based learning and quality work.

Mentoring program

In 2010, Memphis launched a districtwide mentoring program with assistance from Learning Forward. Mentor teachers receive a stipend to spend two to three days in professional development. Learning Forward led sessions for three groups each with 50 people, all of whom are newly assigned mentors or teachers who have not received any mentoring. “This is really great training,” Whitney said. “It’s intensive, highly interactive, uses a lot of role playing, and provides great resources.”

RESULTS

Although causality cannot be demonstrated, the district is improving on a variety of measures of intermediate and ultimate outcome.

The Standards Assessment Inventory

Memphis City Schools administered Learning Forward’s Standards Assessment Inventory for three consecutive years to determine how well schools are implementing Learning Forward’s professional development

standards. According to Whitney, it’s “one of the best tools you can use to get a good clear picture of what’s going on in the schools and what the professional development department needs to do to support the schools.” She also noted that the data show “a lot of progress.”

Average scores from 2006–07, 2007–08, and 2008–09 show small but steady improvement across all schools on virtually every standard the Standards Assessment Inventory measures (Memphis City Schools, 2009b), with the greatest improvement on data-driven decision making. The highest-ranked scores in 2008–09 are in the areas of leadership, data-driven decision making, and equity. The five areas needing the most improvement are learning communities, resources, evaluation, learning, and family involvement.

Improvements in student performance

In January 2011, the Tennessee Department of Education released its annual comprehensive report card on pre-K–12 education for the 2009–10 school year, including state, district, and school-level information on achievement, demographics, discipline, and Adequate Yearly Progress data under the federal No Child Left Behind Act guidelines (Memphis City Schools, 2011). The 2010–2011 school year was one of transition in which the Tennessee Board of Education set new academic proficiency levels. At the same time, the board voted to reset the state’s academic benchmarks under No Child Left Behind, requiring the U.S. Department of Education’s approval. Districts and schools statewide were challenged by the increased standards and assessments. Even with higher benchmarks, however, Memphis was one of many Tennessee districts that showed substantial progress. Although it still has some areas in need of improvement, the school system achieved a number of milestones:

- **A record graduation rate.** On the state report card, the district’s cohort graduation rate (the percentage of 9th graders graduating in four years) rose from 62% in 2009 to 71% in 2010, the highest graduation rate it recorded since NCLB required tracking these data. The rate compares favorably with the graduation rates of other metropolitan school districts, including New York City (59%), Chicago (41%), Philadelphia (48%), Dallas (43%), Baltimore (43%), San Diego (60%), Los Angeles (41%), and Atlanta (69%).
- **The lowest single-year dropout rate ever recorded for the district.** The single-year dropout rate declined from 17% in 2007–08 to 10% in 2008–09 to 1% in 2009–10.
- **All A’s in writing for the district.** Students in grades 5, 8, and 11 all scored A’s on the state’s writing exam.
- **Value-added gains.** Booker T. Washington High School, Hamilton Elementary, and Shannon Elementary made substantial value-added gains at a time when the state had an overall downturn.
- **Straight A’s.** Five schools (Campus School, Cordova Elementary, John P. Freeman Optional School, Richland Elementary, and White Station Middle) scored straight A’s on academic achievement in each subject area: math, reading, social studies, and science.
- **Exceeding the Annual Measurable Objective (AMO) for both high school math and English language arts.** The AMO is a measurement used to determine compliance with NCLB. States must develop AMOs that will determine if a school is making AYP toward the goal of having all students proficient in

English language arts and mathematics by 2013–14.

Whitney said student performance also improved, as evidenced in the district’s annual “Think Show,” the result of an effort to promote critical thinking and project-based learning, where 105,000 students have the opportunity to exhibit artifacts from their capstone projects. These exhibits show “how smart and creative our students can be,” Whitney said.

Perceived impact

Overall, Whitney said that Learning Forward made a difference in how professional development is conceptualized and carried out in this school system. “My time as associate superintendent for professional development would not have been fruitful at this point had I not been part of Learning Forward,” she said.

She said Learning Forward’s network helps make it effective. “It’s such a large organization, but it feels like a small organization,” she said. “The Coaches Academy, the peer network, and the Big 35 network all help you grow. You wouldn’t think this would happen in a national organization, but when you need someone, you can just send an e-mail or make a phone call. The availability and commitment to be responsive to your learning and growth are amazing. You feel like you are part of a tight group despite its size.”

Whitney acknowledged that many factors contributed to improved student learning. She and her team continue to carry out the superintendent’s reform agenda. “We are making strides in the area of professional development, and the better we get, the more we can support the district’s overall efforts,” she said. The district now is compiling data to track the impact of professional development on student achievement in Memphis.



SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

These six cases illustrate the intensive, sustained, results-oriented assistance that Learning Forward provides to states and districts. The organization strives to model in its policy and advocacy work the professional development standards that it promotes. Although it is difficult to attribute improvements in achievement directly to Learning Forward’s work and to professional learning in the absence of rigorous experimental research, a cumulative body of evidence suggests that Learning Forward is making a difference in state and district policy regarding professional development — and that these policies are beginning to affect school and classroom practice. In addition, data suggest that the more professional learning teachers have and the more that professional learning aligns with Learning Forward’s professional development standards as measured by the Standards Assessment Inventory, the better students perform on statewide achievement measures.

Each case is different, but all share common themes that reflect Learning Forward's basic principles and theory of action:

1. Coherence. All of Learning Forward's services are guided by the organizations's standards for professional learning, its new definition of professional development, and its core beliefs. Each state, district, and school described here is promoting collaborative, school-based professional learning that is aligned with student needs and stated goals, is using a continuous improvement cycle, and is focusing on results. Also, because all of Learning Forward's staff and senior consultants are highly trained and experienced, they speak with one voice and model Learning Forward's principles in all of their technical assistance and professional development efforts.

2. Personalization. Learning Forward customizes the nature and intensity of its services based on identified needs. To assess needs, Learning Forward may audit a client's professional development system. In other cases, the organization responds to the client's perceived needs. Whatever the starting point, Learning Forward encourages state and district leaders to use whatever data are available (teacher surveys, climate surveys, student achievement scores, and other measures) to identify areas that need improvement. Depending on the needs, Learning Forward targets the highest-priority areas to achieve maximum benefit and uses a variety of strategies, including institutes and seminars for professional learning, academies, tools and resources, on-site coaching, social networking, and webinars to produce results.

3. A systemic approach. Learning Forward recognizes that for its services to be

effective, it must promote change at all levels in the educational system. Its contract services operate top-down, bottom-up, and sideways. The organization sometimes begins by helping state policy makers create new standards, rules, protocols, tools, and programs that support changes in professional learning at the district and school levels. At other times, Learning Forward begins at the district or the school level with the goal of demonstrating success and expanding its work. Wherever possible, Learning Forward helps to create social networks so that like-minded individuals can share the latest research, engage in reflective practice, discuss lessons learned, collaboratively solve problems, and work together to accelerate results.

4. Focus on results. All of Learning Forward's services are designed to provide its clients with the knowledge and skills they need to foster school-based professional learning where educators are responsible for their own continuous improvement. The organization does not promote professional learning for its own sake, however, but as a means for improving classroom practice and student achievement. The cases described here reveal the organization's emphasis on evaluating changes in school culture; curriculum, assessment, and classroom practice; and student achievement. Learning Forward has occasionally carried out its own evaluations, but more often advises and assists in program evaluation, encouraging the use of its Standards Assessment Inventory to monitor progress, and fostering the use of data for decision making at all levels.

5. Continuity. In each of the cases described here, state and district leaders worked with

Learning Forward for at least five years or, in several cases, for more than a decade. The presence of an internal leader who serves as a “champion of change” is key to these long-term relationships. Many of these individuals participated in Learning Forward’s 2½ -year academy program and other intensive Learning Forward experiences where they internalized the organization’s beliefs about professional learning. In addition, Learning Forward’s senior staff has been consistent over time, and all of its contract services have been designed, coordinated, and supervised by Deputy Executive Director Joellen Killion or Learning Forward executive directors Dennis Sparks or Stephanie Hirsh.

6. Capacity building/sustainability.

All of Learning Forward’s efforts have focused on creating capacity at the state, province, district, school, and/or classroom levels. In many cases, this has led states, including Arkansas and New Jersey, and districts, including Duval County (Fla.), to design and carry out their own professional development or contract with local service providers using Learning Forward’s professional development standards and core principles to guide effective professional learning. In other cases, state and local leaders have increased their understanding of the power of professional learning and analyzed Standards Assessment Inventory, student achievement, and other data, and then identified specific areas of concern that can best be addressed by Learning Forward.

As these states and districts continue to move forward despite turnover in leadership and resource constraints, others can learn from their comprehensive and pioneering efforts to change the fundamental nature of professional learning, as well as from their promising results in improved student achievement.

ENDNOTES

¹ School, district, and state-level scores are available at ArkansasEd.org, as is a PowerPoint containing charts illustrating improvements in achievement test scores and reductions in the achievement gap over time.

² Much of the New Jersey case is drawn from the report, *Teacher Professional Learning in the United States: Case Studies of State Policies and Strategies*. See the full report at www.learningforward.org/news/2010Phase3TechnicalReport.pdf.

³ In *Abbott v. Burke* (1985), the New Jersey Supreme Court ruled that to satisfy the Constitution, the state must ensure that urban children receive an education that enables them to compete with their suburban peers. Since then, the state Supreme Court has issued several follow-up rulings. In 1997 and 1998, the court ordered state officials to immediately increase funding for the 31 poorest districts to an amount equal to that of the richest to create a set of far-reaching education programs and reforms. Recently, under Gov. Jon Corzine, the Abbott decision has been widened to include districts beyond the original 31 but does not extend to all of the state’s 605 districts.

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ABOUT LEARNING FORWARD

(formerly National Staff Development Council)

Learning Forward's purpose is ensuring that every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves. Learning Forward is an international association of learning educators focused on increasing student achievement through more effective professional development. To learn more about the impact of high-quality professional learning, visit www.learningforward.org.



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