

OUR TAKE

Stephanie Hirsh



Frederick Brown



Equity drives Learning Forward's vision

At Learning Forward, we fundamentally believe every child deserves access to excellent teaching and learning every day, regardless of his or her ZIP code or family income. Socioeconomic conditions, race, gender, ethnic background, and other factors should not be predictors for educational attainment.

We believe school systems and other learning environments have to be relentless in addressing the issue of expanding learning opportunities for each and every student while building on the strengths all children bring to the classroom.

These beliefs are fundamental to our approaches to achieving equity. They underlie the decision the board of trustees made earlier this year to explicitly include equity in Learning Forward's vision statement: **Equity and excellence in teaching and learning.**

We recognize that districts and schools have many tools to address their equity challenges, and we believe effective professional learning can play a crucial role. How a district defines equity will determine the role professional learning can play in helping the system achieve its goals.

For example, if a district has a goal



focused on closing achievement gaps for populations that haven't performed as well as others, the professional learning strategy might include a focus on helping teachers try different approaches, differentiate to meet learning needs, and find ways to build on the strengths of all students.

Another equity goal for a district could be increasing the diversity of its teaching force to more closely align to its student demographics. In this case, the professional learning strategy could include supporting principals and central office staff in strategies to attract, seek out, and support teacher candidates. Such a strategy would include developing an induction process that values culture, embraces diversity in the teaching force, and builds the efficacy of new teachers.

A district's equity strategies connect directly to the attitudes and beliefs of its workforce. The professional learning strategy can help central office and

building staff engage in deep exploration of their values, beliefs, and assumptions about children who have life experiences different from their own.

This professional learning approach is not something a district or school accomplishes in a two-hour sit-and-get session or a professional development day for all staff at the beginning of the year. Instead, it requires an ongoing commitment to understanding the core issues and creating ways of working that allow educators to return to the topic, practice strategies, receive feedback, and assess their new practices and behaviors.

This professional learning strategy also requires a firm commitment from district leaders to stay engaged until new behaviors are sustained and equity goals are met.

As we consider and clarify our own approaches to equity, we see that some students have not been served by education. While we recognize that professional learning is essential for all educators to improve, we changed our vision to include equity because we recognize that educators and the students they serve are in vastly different contexts and situations.

We are making a commitment to explore pathways that support those

Continued on p. 10

results expected to occur as a result.

A building analogy helps explain the function of theory of change and logic models. Think of your initiative as a house being designed and built. The theory of change is what architects call the schematic design, which gives a general picture of what the house will look like, including the major components, structure, and look, and how all the pieces fit together. This is the part of the design that is used to work out the “big picture” and that is shown to clients to get their buy-in and input in the design process.

The logic model is a process that architects call design development, in which all the details are laid out, like where the mechanicals will go, what hardware will be used. It can be tweaked as necessary when unanticipated needs arise. In

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

For more information about logic models and theory of change, including examples, check out these resources.

- *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Professional Learning* (3rd edition) by Joellen Killion. Available at the Learning Forward bookstore, learningforward.org/store or 800-727-7288.
- *Logic Models for Selecting, Designing, and Implementing Evidence-Based School Leadership Interventions*, published by the RAND Corporation. Available at www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Logic-Model-Evidence-Based-School-Leadership-Interventions.pdf.

professional learning, as in architecture, design is an iterative process.

As you consider how to use these two tools to complement one another in your professional learning initiatives, don't get hung up on the terminology. The important thing is to develop an intentional process to guide design, implementation, and evaluation to ensure progress toward your final outcome goals.

•
Joe McFarland (joe.mcfarland@learningforward.org) is superintendent of schools in Derry Township School District in Hershey, Pennsylvania. **Nikki Mouton** (nikki.mouton@learningforward.org) is deputy chief academic officer in the Dallas (Texas) ISD. They are coaches for the Learning Forward Academy Class of 2020. ■

OUR TAKE / Stephanie Hirsh and Frederick Brown

Continued from p. 8

educators, children, and schools that have traditionally been underserved and those that have the greatest needs. Our commitment to equity is a significant driver in our recent shift to explore in depth the intersection of curriculum and professional learning.

Our commitment to equity also undergirds Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. When we revised the standards in 2011, we embedded the concept of equity throughout. We believed then, as we do now, that when a district aligns its practices to the standards, each and every child will experience excellent teaching and learning every day.

However, we know that we must do more. While our new vision statement is an important step for our organization, it isn't the only step to take. Going forward, we will view all of our strategies through an equity lens

with the goal of making sure our efforts will help districts and schools ensure each and every child exceeds provincial, state, and local standards.

We also commit to reflect on our own assumptions, beliefs, and practices and how they can evolve. This is also a central task of high-quality professional learning. In that spirit, we are reflecting on these questions and issues:

- In what other ways should we define equity? In what other ways might districts and schools define it?
- What strategies and drivers have demonstrated success in ensuring that underserved students achieve high standards?
- Where do the biggest gaps lie for students? How can we influence policies and practices related to professional learning to address those gaps?
- How can the Standards for

Professional Learning be more explicit in addressing issues of equity?

- What types of learning might we craft that help systems address their equity challenges and opportunities?

As we continue to grapple with our equity questions, we ask you to send us yours. What questions and issues are you reflecting on? What new ideas or reflections does reading this issue of *The Learning Professional* bring up for you? Please share them with us.

•
Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org) is executive director and **Frederick Brown** (frederick.brown@learningforward.org) is deputy executive director of Learning Forward. ■