



CALL TO ACTION

Denise Glyn Borders

BUILD BRIDGES, PUSH BOUNDARIES, AND MAKE CONNECTIONS

When I had my first teaching experiences many years ago during my undergraduate education in Minnesota, I had no sense yet of the kinds of support an educator deserves and requires. From where I sit today, I'm proud to lead an organization dedicated to ensuring every educator has access to the most effective support possible. As I start my tenure as Learning Forward's executive director, I want to share a bit about who I am as an educator.

My varied career started with teaching and always kept me learning.

Something I share with many Learning Forward members is a career pathway that explores education from many seats, from teacher to district leader to positions in research, government, for-profit, and nonprofit organizations.

I have taught at every grade level, from prekindergarten through graduate-level university. Beginning as a college student and through graduate school, I was eager to take everything I was learning and see it in practice. Thus began my compulsion to see research find its way into practice to have a real impact in schools.

After undergrad, I taught in Ithaca, New York — not in the schools serving Cornell University but in downtown Ithaca and rural Appalachia. I saw as a teacher what kids and families really need beyond education, though I had learned that lesson at home as child.

Growing up, I watched my parents in Omaha, Nebraska, do whatever it took so my sister and I could attend decent schools, moving us across town and working nonstop to make a good education possible. I also saw how communities contribute to education, with families such as the Buffetts investing in children's futures, so that students from poor families — students like me — could receive scholarships to go to college. From my earliest days as a student, I knew how fortunate I was to have the opportunity to learn, and I've never wanted to stop.

I believe in giving educators what they need to do their jobs well.

At the same time I was in graduate school at Teachers College at Columbia, I was working in schools in New York City — in Harlem, in the Bronx, at the Manhattan Country Day School — broadening my understanding of the diversity of children's learning needs and experiences. I moved to a business environment for 10 years at CTB/McGraw-Hill, and I loved helping district leaders implement resources well and use data to inform improvements.

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Denise Glyn Borders is executive director of Learning Forward.



us and our partners at The Wallace Foundation. And we hope you'll join us in our appreciation for the districts, foundation staff, and others who have committed to long-term learning about strengthening school leadership and student learning.

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A beloved mentor, Floretta Dukes McKenzie, then the superintendent of DC Public Schools, urged me to get back into a school system. I spent several years in the central office of Baltimore City Public Schools in Maryland as an assistant, then associate, then chief superintendent, where I covered research, evaluation, assessment, accountability, and planning.

I saw then how few resources teachers had available to support their professional learning. But not until I moved to overseeing those same areas for the Department of Defense Education Activity schools around the world in 35 countries did I realize how it is possible to invest meaningfully in educators.

This system invested so much more in professional learning than I had seen before — 10% of the budget compared to 1% to 3% in domestic systems. The Department of Defense knows not only how to create a continuous improvement environment for young people and officers alike, but also how

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I believe in building bridges, pushing boundaries, making strategic connections.

Part of what has driven me to work in different kinds of education organizations is my early recognition of the importance of understanding multiple disciplines if our hope is to transform education.

In college, my degree was interdisciplinary, covering cognitive psychology and education. As a graduate student, I explored the role of sociology, anthropology, socio- and psycho-linguistics, business, and more. The learning sciences is different disciplines coming together to deeply understand how people learn and what teaching must look like to lead to

learning, and that's just what we need — we all get too siloed, boxed in our own worlds.

In my more recent jobs applying research and working in multiple centers, I saw the bigger picture more clearly. All learning flows from previous learning, and this has implications for how schools and districts align their professional learning with district priorities and how they make connections from grade to grade, building to building.

I'm thrilled to be in a position to make more connections — between research and practice, with funders and partners, from district to district. And I know my next learning experience will be with you. I look forward to hearing about your journey and what Learning Forward can do to support you along the way. ■