



BEING FORWARD

Leigh Wall

COLLABORATION IS THE CENTERPIECE OF ALL LEARNING

We are troubled by the proposal to turn federal professional learning funding into a voucher system in which teachers would select individual workshops or courses.

At Learning Forward, collaboration is considered the centerpiece of all learning and essential to our practice as educators. We learn better when we learn together. For this reason, we are committed to fostering learning communities within and outside our systems. This professional collaboration occurs in our schools, districts, and organizations, as well as through networks such as the Learning Forward Academy.

Learning communities provide powerful opportunities to gain insight from others' expertise and inquiry. The chance to meet regularly with colleagues allows for the ongoing reflection, feedback, and growth necessary for real professional growth and significant changes in educator practice.

In addition, learning networks, such as Learning Forward's Redesign PD Community and the Student Success Learning Network, help members make connections outside their districts so they can discuss challenges, brainstorm ideas, and share advice. These relationships often become long-lasting, enlightening, and highly influential for practice.

Learning Forward also offers tools and processes that allow network members to step outside of their daily responsibilities and work together to shape and implement a strategic plan for professional learning. By engaging in a collaborative learning community, members also experience firsthand the kind of learning they should facilitate and nurture among the educators with whom they work.

In the Learning Forward Academy, each member identifies a problem of practice and works with coaches and peers from other districts to understand and address it. That is a valuable collaborative opportunity that educators' urgent daily responsibilities rarely allow.

Learning Forward's focus on collaboration is not limited to these formal networks. It drives the structure of our conferences and institutes, infuses the content of our publications, and shapes our consulting services.

The focus on collaboration in the Standards for Professional Learning and in the federal definition of high-quality professional learning that we assisted in shaping is based on research and decades of collective experience. The value of internal and external collaboration within a learning system is instrumental in continuous improvement for the system, as well as the individual educators and their impact on students.

We are troubled, therefore, by the U.S. Secretary of Education's recent proposal to turn federal professional learning funding into a voucher system in which teachers would select individual workshops or courses. This proposal does not encourage the kind of team-based, collaborative learning that is most effective for teachers and students.

We support teachers having the opportunity to inform their professional learning, but selecting a one-time workshop will not allow for the kind of systemic transformation that schools and students require. Real engagement comes from being an active member of a sustained community that values educators' voices, knowledge, and growth.

Regardless of your role, we encourage you to seek out and advocate for collaborative professional learning. We value your membership in the Learning Forward community and encourage you to take advantage of all this community has to offer in developing and extending your learning communities and collaborative learning networks. ■



Leigh Wall is president of Learning Forward.