



HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

WHAT DOES REAL COLLABORATION LOOK LIKE? WE'VE GOT STORIES

Have you ever been part of a team that doesn't do any actual teamwork? I can recall plenty of examples from my professional and personal lives, like a staff team whose meetings were canceled too often to make progress and a dance company that was so riddled with competition members wouldn't help one another. (I left both long ago.)

Education teams, too, can suffer from a lack of true collaboration. Many teachers have little opportunity to collaborate within and across schools, nonteaching staff have few chances to connect in meaningful ways with teachers, and administrators don't always get as much time to connect directly with staff as they wish.

Yet we know that collaboration is essential for effective professional learning and great teaching. That's why Learning Forward advocated for its inclusion as a core principle in the definition of professional development within the Every Student Succeeds Act in the United States, and why Learning Communities is one of the Standards for Professional Learning.

So what does *real* collaboration look like? How do we get beyond surface-level attempts at collaboration so that education professionals are truly learning from and supporting one another? How do we achieve the more critical aspects of the Learning Communities standard to foster collective responsibility?

This issue is dedicated to answering those questions. Authors write about overcoming common challenges to PLCs, nurturing teacher leadership, developing authentic partnerships between school districts and universities, bringing school counselors into the fold of professional learning, and more.

Learning Forward members have an inspiring diversity of roles and responsibilities, so they are poised to engage in real collaboration and make high-quality professional learning a priority throughout their districts, schools, and organizations. To illustrate this potential, this issue's "At a Glance" feature (p. 80) highlights the many different professional titles held by Learning Forward members. A quick look at the word cloud we created shows that professional learning crosses departmental boundaries. Our members include directors, chiefs, deputies, leaders, teachers, coaches, department chairs, board members, and many others. Imagine the learning and teaching accomplished when these learning professionals work together.

Relationships are, of course, a central part of collaboration. Throughout this issue, you'll read about stories of life-changing relationships within and across districts. These include a Member Spotlight feature (p. 14) about two Learning Forward Academy members who became vital career resources for one another and lifelong friends. We have been inspired by their story, and we know many of you have your own influential collaboration stories. We invite you to share them with us on social media and by email so we can learn from you.

This issue introduces a new feature. In celebration of Learning Forward's 50th anniversary year, we're including classic articles from our archives (see p. 70). With these articles, we revisit timeless advice and lasting wisdom from Learning Forward leaders and authors, along with commentary from current staff about how those articles shaped their work and the field. Whether you read "The Final 2%" by Dennis Sparks when it was first published in 2005 or are reading it here for the first time, we want to know how these words influence you. Share your thoughts with us on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn. ■



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