



CALL TO ACTION

Denise Glyn Borders

WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, PRIORITIES MATTER

All executives make choices about what to prioritize. Their priorities are evident by where they spend their time, what they say, who they talk with, and where they spend money. I believe that professional learning is most likely to achieve its full power to advance school systems when state superintendents and district CEOs highlight it and invest in it as a driving priority. Those who do put the following responsibilities at the top of their to-do lists.

EMBRACE THE LEARNING SCIENCES.

Those leaders committed to results from professional learning commit to understanding and leveraging what they learn from relevant research literature. Successful superintendents know that leadership now demands becoming more knowledgeable about the learning sciences. Learning sciences is a design science that incorporates research and practice. Redesigning schools based on scientific research on how students and adults learn best requires rethinking how the central office and schools are organized and supported.



DEMAND RESULTS.

While understanding research literature can guide the planning and implementation of professional learning, assessing the impact of learning within a system's context offers data about whether educators' efforts achieved their intended results. Creating a culture that consistently measures impact and assesses progress to document outcomes requires that educators in a system not only understand that outcomes are an expectation but also that they have the resources and skills to analyze and use data to continually inform changes and decisions. Executives establish this culture and provide resources.

ENSURE ALIGNMENT.

The foundation for achieving results for students through professional learning is connecting adult learning to student learning and ensuring that student learning goals align with an overall vision for academic excellence in the district. Superintendents lead the establishment of the vision. The vision drives what students and educators learn as well as the student standards at every level and in each subject area along with the high-quality instructional materials in use to achieve those standards.

Every arm of the organization works and executes in concert when every single district employee commits to a commonly held vision. Superintendents engage a cross-district team of school and system leaders to achieve alignment, from the chief academic officer to the director of curriculum and instruction to the chief learning officer to the human resources officer to the leaders of schools to the board of trustees.

The responsibility for professional learning sits in various offices and departments. Executive leaders reduce fragmentation and silos through the organizational chart and the culture and expectations they uphold for collaboration and results.

Continued on p. 12

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achievement gap for students of color, English learners, and the economically poor since the War on Poverty in the 1960s.

The U.S. has tried many innovations over time, and we are not getting to every student doing well. Not close. Yet in the face of that, to say each and every student is important, and to seek to personalize for them, is a daring move.

It says that we don't know everything but are committing to what's needed. It says we're willing to check our own assumptions and prejudices to understand what we may be doing that holds students back.

It means there's a willingness to draw upon people within and beyond our schools to serve and challenge students. It means there's

an understanding that we can't make headway without family perspectives in the mix.

This combination of intent and humility, of together listening, testing, learning what works, and adapting, is what will allow us to make headway. It says each student deserves to be known and treasured, and there's a demonstrated commitment to learn and do what's needed to make that happen.

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CALL TO ACTION / Denise Glyn Borders

Continued from p. 8

PROVIDE SUFFICIENT RESOURCES.

Superintendents create budgets that establish and sustain effective professional learning. District leaders also work with their teams to manage schedules that provide ample job-embedded learning time. They staff their systems to include instructional

coaches and others with expertise critical to sustaining continuous improvement.

District leaders allocate resources to support the learning of leaders themselves. Principals and district administrators have unique learning needs within an aligned system, as do superintendents and board members.

The superintendent's authority and decisions impact hundreds to thousands of learners along with the communities they serve. While the actions here are certainly not the only responsibilities of a district leader committed to high-quality professional learning, I'd argue they are essential. ■

BEING FORWARD / Monica Martinez

Continued from p. 9

need, either as a whole or for smaller groups, such as new teachers or English language arts teachers. Science Leadership Academy in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, balanced a long-term commitment with diverse voices by establishing a standing committee with various teachers serving annually.

Maintaining a learning culture, for both adults and students, is an important factor in whether these

strategies will be implemented successfully. Personalization is more likely in open, trusting cultures where teachers feel safe to open their doors and invite others to give constructive feedback.

Some schools have the opportunity to build this culture from the ground up, like many that are part of the XQ school network. XQ provides resources and support to help these schools reimagine high school and what

adolescents can achieve. Others have to make intentional efforts to alter their culture.

For students and teachers alike, we need schools to make learning constant, not episodic. If we are going to prioritize equity and assume collective responsibility for all students, we have to do the same for teachers. Each of us is only as good as the whole. ■