THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDE FOR DISTRICT TEAMS

PERSONALIZING LEARNING

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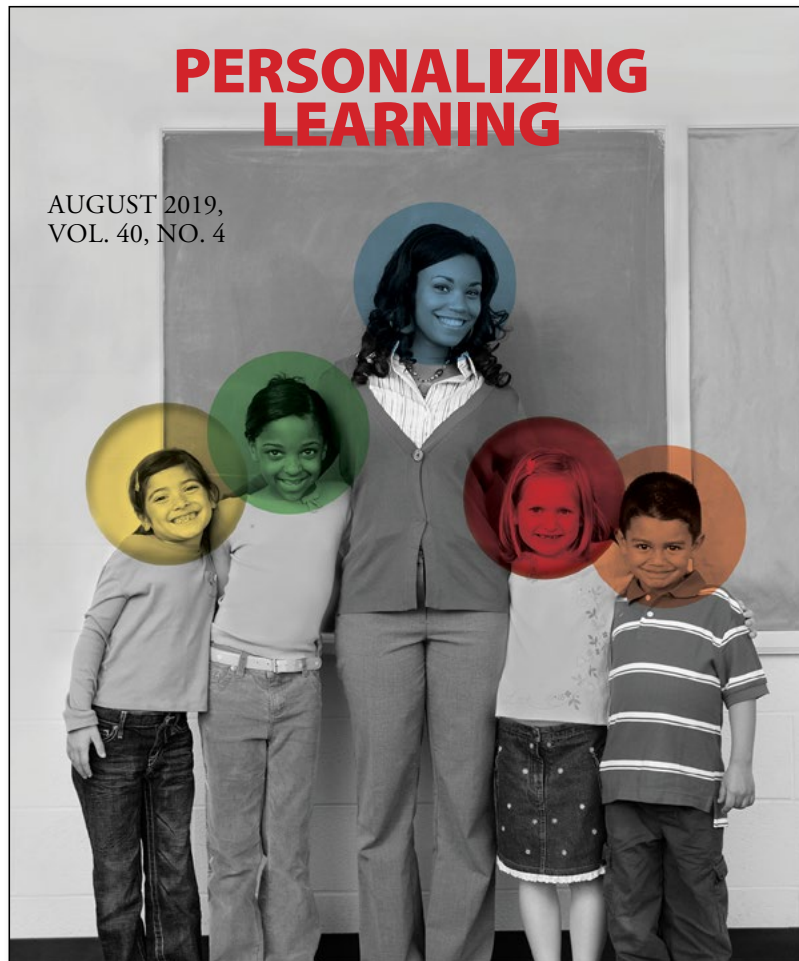
Thank you for being a district member with Learning Forward. To help you spread the learning and engagement with your colleagues, we have designed this supplemental guide exclusively for district members.

This guide will help you take your teams through a deep dive into the latest issue of *The Learning Professional.* By reading the issue and using this guide, teams will:

- Consider how well professional learning is meeting educators' specific needs;

- Strategize about how to balance educators' individual needs with collective goals; and
- Reflect on current use of technology and how it can be more strategic.

We invite you to share this guide with building leaders and members of your learning teams. Be sure to give us feedback about whether you found this useful, and if you post on social media, tag us **#LearnFwdTLP @LearningForward** so we can share your good work!

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THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Are your teachers getting what they need?

In the August 2019 issue of *The Learning Professional,* Monica Martinez writes, "Teachers are at different points on a continuum from beginning to proficient, yet many districts do one giant training for teachers in different content areas and grade levels who have different educational backgrounds and levels of experience."

Is your district doing all you can to ensure that professional learning is useful for all educators and therefore beneficial for all students?

ACTIONS

1. In pairs, ask team members to share a time when professional learning met their specific needs very well.

2. Ask the pairs to share a time when professional learning did not meet their specific needs.

3. Provide time for your team to read Martinez's article **"Personalization turns learning into a journey."**

4. Read aloud this quote from the article: "Schools are moving away from one-size-fits-all learning experiences for students. Why wouldn't we do the same for teachers? Excellent teaching is a long-term journey, and we have to start looking at teachers' overall development as professionals. They won't all learn the same things in the same way at the same time."

5. Ask the group to reflect on how well the district tailors professional learning to educators' specific needs. Then have them stand up and line up on a continuum from "very well" to "not at all."

6. Lead a group discussion about why team members feel the way they do. Questions can include:

   - Put yourself in the shoes of the teachers and other staff you supervise. Where would they place themselves on the continuum?

   - Which groups of educators (e.g. new teachers, science teachers, career-change teachers) are most likely to feel that professional learning is not meeting their needs?

   - What are the major barriers to ensuring that professional learning is relevant and useful for everyone?

7. Make a plan to follow up on this conversation. Action steps might include:

   - Survey teachers and leaders about their perceptions.

   - Schedule a meeting to brainstorm ways to make professional learning more personalized.

   - Plan a time to engage in the next activity in this guide.

Personalizing learning for teachers.

High-quality professional learning is job-embedded and relevant to educators' specific needs. To ensure that it meets those standards, districts are experimenting with ways to personalize teacher learning, such as microcredentials and real-time coaching. And as the movement for personalizing learning to students' individual needs grows, experts point out that teachers must experience personalization themselves if they are going to implement it successfully with their students.

But how do we make sure staff are working toward common goals and equity for students?

ACTIONS

1. Ask team members to read **"One vision, many paths"** by Paul Emerich France. The article describes the need for a balance between collective goals and tailored pathways to reaching them.

2. As a group, discuss and write a list of your district's or school's common goals. Refer to your district's strategic plan and other documentation as appropriate. If you generate a long list, note which ones are the top priorities.

3. Divide team members into role-alike or grade-level groups. (Alternatively, if you are meeting with school leaders, you can ask them to divide into groups focusing on specific areas or grade levels.) Ask each group to create a two-column table to list the group's professional learning needs for accomplishing these priority goals. In one column, list the needs that are specific to this group's role or grade level. In the other column, list the needs that are common across roles and grade levels. Place a star next to all professional learning needs that are not yet being met.

4. In these groups, brainstorm ways to meet these needs, either for individual staff or in role groups. In this discussion, consider how staff will demonstrate evidence of learning that supports the organizational goals. (For inspiration on documentation strategies, see **"Want to personalize learning for students?"**)

Tech and teachers can complement one another.

Technology should be a teaching tool, not a teacher replacement, writes Thomas Arnett of the Christensen Institute. "With a boost from education technology, teachers can use their time, attention, and energy in new ways to make a bigger difference for their students," he explains. But he also cautions that technology can't and shouldn't try to replace essential aspects of teaching and learning, such as developing relationships and providing higher-order feedback.

We need to be intentional and thoughtful about how we do and don't use technology in the classroom. What is the role of technology in your district, and is it as strategic as it could be?

ACTIONS

1. Ask team members to read Arnett's article **"Tech unlocks teachers' capacity."**

2. As a group, make a list on flip chart paper (or a whiteboard) of the primary tasks for which your teachers use technology.

3. After completing this list, place a star next to the items that can only be achieved with technology or that are greatly enhanced or improved by technology. There is likely to be debate about this question; encourage that debate and discuss differeing views.

4. For the items that do NOT have stars, discuss how and why technology is used and what benefits it is accomplishing or failing to accomplish. Is this a function that should be performed by teachers or enhanced by teacher-student interaction? (If you have a large group or a long list of items, divide into smaller groups and assign each group to a few items for discussion.)

5. Complete a start/stop/continue protocol for practices related to technology. Ask each participant to write down one thing they will start doing as a result of this discussion, stop doing, and continue doing.

6. Group participants according to grade levels, content areas, or other functional teams. Ask them to share their start/stop/continue protocols with one another, and identify one support they need from their colleagues or administrators to enable those changes.

7. Continuing in these groups, ask each group to complete a start/stop/continue protocol for their department, grade level, or other relevant functional area.

8. Make a plan for next steps (e.g. follow-up meetings, technology training, peer check-ins).

Was this guide helpful? Share your feedback with **suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org** so we can best meet your needs. Tweet or post pictures of your team, and we'll share your good work.