



## BEING FORWARD

Leigh Wall

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**Leigh Wall is president of the Learning Forward board of trustees.**

## GO DEEPER, REACH HIGHER

**T**he term resilience is generally accepted as our capacity to recover from adversity, difficulties, or trauma. But in schools, resilience must be about rising above where we are and excelling to new heights — about thriving, not just surviving.

Over the past year, this has been a theme of my work as superintendent in Santa Fe, Texas. As our community recovers from a school shooting in 2018, our resilience goes beyond coping with the tragedy. Throughout our recovery, we have maintained a focus on rebuilding a stronger school system in every way. Focusing on students' learning is our core mission and one of the primary anchors we have used in building resilience in students, staff, and leaders.

The work of building trust and improving teaching and learning are not mutually exclusive. In our district, school leaders and teachers have engaged in a daily balancing act of leading the core work of instruction while overseeing enhanced security measures and procedures to ensure students' safety, health, and wellness.

All of our schools, for example, had to learn how to implement and manage metal detectors and alarms. Staff responded admirably and with incredible strength. But, impressively, they also were driven by a compelling purpose to achieve higher student outcomes than ever before.

Over the past year, we deepened our use of frameworks for learning designs, strengthened professional learning communities (PLCs) around core content, and focused on student performance data. We strengthened classroom support and used instructional coaching models. As a result, achievement has increased districtwide by 15 percentile points, and 17 points at the high school — a striking improvement in any context. That is resilience.



Professional learning is key to this kind of resilience. Our staff have spent a great deal of time over the past year refining their work in PLCs, collaboratively planning, and focusing on our collective determination to improve learning and achievement.

Those efforts have built relationships and trust among our learning community. Relationships, commitment, student well-being, and academic learning are all connected and critical to our successes.

Of course, for school and district leaders, there are many daily stresses that we all experience. Being a resilient educator and leader takes 100% commitment and a unique skill set that includes working well with others, focusing on continuous improvement, and managing daily challenges and opportunities.

With ongoing support and development, successful leaders navigate those challenges and opportunities without losing focus on instructional leadership and student success. The key lies within the strength of professional learning systems. Providing resources, tools, and embedded instructional support ensures the resilience needed for the important work of all educators in all communities. ■