



CALL TO ACTION

Denise Glyn Borders

ASSESS AND DOCUMENT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING'S IMPACT

As I write this, we're all digesting the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) results, and they are a disappointment.

An assessment of 4th- and 8th-grade reading and mathematics across the U.S., NAEP is administered biannually. Since 2017, most states have seen declines in students' reading performance and a mixed picture in math, with 4th graders showing a slight increase and 8th graders a slight decrease.

Perhaps most troubling, the lowest-achieving students showed the largest declines in performance. Although patterns vary by state, only one — Mississippi — gained ground at the 4th-grade level and only Washington, D.C., improved at the 8th-grade level (NAEP, 2019).

It is notable that Mississippi State Superintendent Carey Wright attributed that state's growth to a sharp focus on literacy, including increased professional learning for teachers (Jacobson, 2019).

For Learning Forward, such results underscore the importance of ongoing, sustained investment in high-quality professional learning to advance teaching and leadership in schools. We can't provide all students with rich opportunities to learn and thrive without doing all we can to strengthen teaching and leadership.

Interestingly, a report published the same week as the NAEP results found that districts that invest in proven professional learning, such as the New Teacher Center induction model, reap benefits in higher teacher retention rates and increased student learning and earning potential (New Teacher Center, 2019).

As champions for professional learning, Learning Forward urges readers to take several critical lessons from the latest news.

First and foremost, assess and document the impact of the professional learning your educators experience. When professional learning has an impact, tell your stakeholders what works and how students benefit.

When professional learning doesn't achieve its goals, investigate why and make changes. Investment in ineffective professional learning is doubly harmful. Educators and communities suffer from a waste of resources and opportunity to improve, and the field is again placed in a position to justify why professional learning matters.

Second, keep in mind that documenting professional learning's impact happens as part of an ongoing process of careful research, planning, data collection, and implementation. Help your peers and educators stay abreast of the latest information about professional learning, and use the Standards for Professional Learning consistently to guide your learning system and processes.

Finally, keep the big picture in mind as you strategize how building educators' capacity fits into your district's overall vision for teaching and learning. Professional learning is not optional or an add-on. It will always be a foundational pillar to schooling and must be treated as such.

Our colleagues internationally take these lessons to heart. As an OECD report on teacher policies found, professional learning is a "fundamental element for the success of any major educational reform" and professional learning strategies are a "key attribute of high-achieving

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BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT: Reporting to principal; determining teacher is uncoachable; pointing out teacher's weaknesses as evidence that they need coaching.

6 ASK: What would you do if a teacher had a different approach to instruction or a different class management style than you?

LISTEN FOR: Listen to understand; recognize there is more than one approach; accept teacher where he or she is; collaborate for growth.

BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT: Desire to get teacher to see things the coach's way; avoid working with the teacher; get into the classroom and fix things.

7 ASK: What would you do if a teacher told you she wanted you to come into her classroom and work with a small group of students?

LISTEN FOR: Graceful explanation of why that is not the coach's role; coach's inquiry into why additional

help is requested; listening to teacher's needs; distinction between coaching role and other duties, such as intervention, during which small-group instruction would be appropriate.

BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT: Eager acceptance of daily duties that involve teaching a small group.

8 ASK: Tell me about your own professional learning. How do you learn best? What have you learned recently? What would you like to learn about as a coach?

LISTEN FOR: Understanding of self as learner; eagerness to continue learning; learning related to coaching — e.g. adult learning theory, coaching practice, collaboration, professional teaming — and not just related to teaching.

BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT: Focus on teaching rather than coaching; inability to describe self as learner; lack of understanding of areas for future learning.

9 ASK: How would you know you are effective as a coach?

LISTEN FOR: Inquiring of colleagues and principal; collecting evidence based upon clear outcomes; observable (looks like/sounds like) evidence.

BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT: Formal teacher evaluation; "I just know"; vague feelings of success.

10 ASK: How would you advocate for equity as a coach?

LISTEN FOR: Collaborative inquiry; working toward school vision/mission; demonstrating own practices; looking closely at student data/evidence; creating possibility — visits to other schools, viewing video, etc.; creating equitable learning environment; tools/resources such as Teaching Tolerance, Rethinking Schools.

BE CAUTIOUS ABOUT: Assuming that equitable beliefs/practices can be demanded by coach; seeking superficial changes; statement that the school "has no diversity." ■

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systems" across the globe (OECD, 2019, p. 153).

As your champion, Learning Forward commits to deepen its engagement in research and evidence so we all become stronger partners in professional learning. I welcome your input and feedback.

REFERENCES

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WHAT I'VE LEARNED / Elena Aguilar

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mutuality, appreciation, and learner orientation. Regular and intentional practice strengthens these dispositions.

To do this essential work of coaching for equity, we all have a great deal to learn. These aren't skills most

of us have acquired yet, but we can develop them. In schools where coaches work effectively within an equity lens, children and adults thrive and inequities decrease. This is perhaps what we need to know most: We *can* coach for equity and create equitable schools.

REFERENCE

Aguilar, E. (in press). *Coaching for equity*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass. ■