



BEING FORWARD

Leigh Wall

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING CAN CHART A COURSE FOR EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

As I reflect on the past year of serving the Learning Forward community as president of the board of trustees, I am encouraged and inspired by all we are doing together to build strong schools and systems. I am proud of how our members and staff are sharing our collective stories of evidence and impact and how we can change the course of equity and excellence through high-quality, job-embedded professional learning.

Nowhere has this message been clearer than at the recent event Learning Forward hosted on Capitol Hill to raise awareness about the importance of Title IIA funds. A panel of educators from across the country representing school districts in Norman, Oklahoma, South Brunswick, New Jersey, and Suffolk, Virginia, as well as the state of Missouri, shared powerful stories of professional learning impact that appeared to resonate with the members of the policy and education communities in attendance.

These personal stories of accomplishment, supported by data outlining evidence of impact, exemplify that professional learning is not a one-size-fits-all model. It is a universal strength that all of us can use to address our specific goals and problems of practice.

The stories the panelists shared reflect challenges educators struggle with in several contexts. Examples include the impact of professional learning on improved teacher retention, improving organizational culture, leadership development, and the power of effective professional learning communities. Stories and examples similar to these are likely to resonate with individuals and organizations nationwide.

In sharing the experience of my district in Santa Fe, Texas, I emphasized the valuable role of coaching, which can be supported by Title IIA funds and is the theme of this issue of *The Learning Professional*. Coaching exemplifies the ongoing, embedded type of professional learning recommended in the Standards for Professional Learning and makes a real difference for educators and students. Strong coaches combine knowledge of core content with practical teaching strategies, actionable feedback, and modeling tools.

Coaching can be beneficial in assisting all of us in teaching and leadership roles to understand content and pedagogy at deeper levels to make a meaningful impact on teaching and learning. In fact, in some districts, a coaching model is blended into all aspects of the organization, including operations, technology, and school safety, to realize continuous improvements in all areas that support student learning.

Districts and organizations all over the U.S. and the world can share their own stories of impact about coaching and other types of high-quality professional learning. Policymakers need to hear more of these real-life stories of evidence directly from educators about how professional learning systems can shape excellence and equity in teaching and learning. Learning Forward plays a key role in supporting educators in developing capacity, from students to teachers to everyone throughout the system.

Learning Forward will continue to build the evidence base for professional learning, prioritize illuminating research, and provide the information and support that educators need at all levels. I am excited about the evolution of Learning Forward, including a revision of the Standards for Professional Learning that is on the horizon.

Together, our work can build capacity and the awareness that professional learning is the most important factor in our quest for continued improvement for every student and staff in our schools. ■



Policymakers need to hear more of these real-life stories of evidence directly from educators about how professional learning systems can shape excellence and equity in teaching and learning.

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