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BEING FORWARD

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'WE MUST NEVER STOP LEARNING FROM EACH OTHER'

Steve Cardwell is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees and vice president of students at Kwantlen Polytechnic University in British Columbia.

Q: How did you first become involved with Learning Forward?

A: I have been an educator for 40 years and have been associated with Learning Forward for much of that time.

My mum was a teacher and encouraged me to accept that calling. As a young teacher, I joined Learning Forward's predecessor, the National Staff Development Council, because of the excellent journal publications. As I moved into university teaching and then a district staff development role, I benefited from the other resources as well, including learning tools, insights from educational leaders, and network connections, both locally through the British Columbia affiliate and nationally and internationally.

I continued my involvement as I completed my doctorate and took on leadership roles, eventually becoming superintendent in Vancouver. I was then able to use what I had learned from Learning Forward to influence and support the practices and professional learning of others.

Q: Why have you made professional learning a priority in your career?

A: Throughout my career, I have tried to improve my own practice and, at the same time, encourage others to constantly learn and lead. We know that the people who make the greatest difference in the school life of students are teachers, and school principals are not far behind. They need support in order to support students. We must never stop learning from each other, teaching each other, and seeking improvement.

We also need to provide evidence to decision-makers about why professional learning is important so that this work can continue and grow. I have always made this a priority at many levels of the system.

Q: What are some professional learning experiences that have had an impact on you?

A: I have served on three Annual Conference host committees and, in 2016, was program chair. I also served on the board of the British Columbia affiliate for several years and helped plan its conferences. Throughout, I have fostered relationships with many leaders from British Columbia and across the U.S. and Canada, and I continue learning from them.

Perhaps the most influential opportunity for me of recent times is learning from Indigenous educator Denise Augustine and her colleague Rod Allen, previous assistant deputy minister and current superintendent. Denise and Rod are helping us to understand teaching and learning from an Indigenous perspective and transform our education system in British Columbia.

As a superintendent and now vice president of students at a university, my professional learning needs have changed. I find myself needing to know more about the big picture that shapes us as educational leaders. For this reason, I am drawn to content about leadership. The keynote speakers at the 2018 conference had a big impact on me.

Q: What are you looking forward to in your work with Learning Forward over the next year?

A: Education is very different from when I first started many years ago. Schools are more complex — life is more complex. But despite the challenges educators face, I have great hope for the future. As president of Learning Forward, I am honored to be a part of this family that works hard to build the capacity of leaders to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning. ■