



**This crisis has laid bare the longstanding structural and societal inequities that are barriers to high-quality teaching and learning for all children.**

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## CALL TO ACTION

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# INVESTING IN EDUCATORS IS NOT A LUXURY

**A**long with educators everywhere, Learning Forward is adjusting to the current reality and looking ahead to what the future may hold. While we can't yet document our lessons learned, we know we owe a huge debt of gratitude to educators.

We're witnessing educators committed to ensuring their students are fed, safe, and healthy. Participants in Learning Forward webinars in response to the current crisis tell us how educators are transforming the ways they reach and teach students. The commitment educators are making to continue student learning through changing circumstances reveals their professionalism, passion, and expertise.

We're also seeing that educators are hungry for relevant support. Our webinars stress the importance of learning and community — or, more appropriately, learning *IN* community — and educators are signing up by the thousands for each topic we cover.

As leaders in your districts and schools, you've experienced or perhaps led the push to ensure you and your colleagues have the knowledge and skills you need to serve students and communities in new teaching environments. Whether this push helps educators navigate a technology platform or adapt instructional materials for a distance learning plan, professional learning plays an essential part.

With educators' persistence and professionalism at such high levels of visibility, the necessity for ongoing support is clear. Society is witnessing both the critical need to ensure educators are prepared to navigate new territory and the importance of a rigorously educated workforce ready to tackle the next global challenge.

This crisis has also laid bare the longstanding structural and societal inequities that are barriers to high-quality teaching and learning for all children. Sadly, such disparities echo the inequities we're witnessing on every front in this crisis, from health care to job loss.

A recent *Education Week* survey, for example, revealed the inequity in students' initial access to remote teaching, with fewer teachers actively teaching in high-poverty districts than in districts with lower percentages of high-poverty students. Reasons cited included disparities in access to technology and delaying teaching because of equity concerns — lack of devices across systems, for example (Herold, 2020). We know also that consistent access to broadband internet for educators and students is not guaranteed, particularly in rural areas (Jung, 2020).

Learning Forward believes that high-quality professional learning grounded in the Standards

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these diverse perspectives can support educator learning through this organization.

**What do you think will be the most pressing professional learning needs in the coming year or two?**

So many things have changed and will continue to change due to COVID-19. I see it as an opportunity to personalize adult learning and meet teachers' needs based on their students' needs. In my district and at Learning Forward Virginia, we've been tossing around ideas about virtual conferences, online fireside chats for small groups to connect, virtual coaching conversations, and brainstorming structures and processes to make learning accessible for all staff.

**You were an instructional technology leader for many years. Can you share some wisdom about how to make virtual learning and**

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**teaching high quality?**

I could talk about this all day because it's something I really care about. Online learning is vastly different than in-person instruction, but some of the key ideas hold true for both. That's the case whether we're talking about student learning or professional learning for educators.

Online learning should be purposeful and meaningful (for example, focused on "power standards" or the most important things for students to know and be able to do). It should provide structured opportunities for peer collaboration and sharing of materials, just like in-person learning. It should also take into consideration

the varied range of learner experiences, incorporate feedback, and have varied ways to demonstrate mastery.

In addition, online learning should have visuals and audio options for accessing the content, be organized in small chunks of information, and have clear communication of expectations and directions.

It's important to be kind to yourself and each other in the online learning environment. Online learning can be exhausting. I just read an article that explained that one of the reasons is that we are so used to the physical context that without the usual nonverbal cues, we have to interpret a lot more and fill in lots of information.

Despite these challenges, it is our job as learning professionals to take learners from where they are to where we need them to go. That's what really inspires me to do what I do and to contribute to what Learning Forward does. ■

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for Professional Learning is the strategy to address these challenges. Such professional learning is an equity strategy and an improvement strategy.

When educators have access to professional learning aligned to students' most pressing learning needs, they are better equipped to ensure that *all* of their students experience meaningful learning. High-quality professional learning can help educators use technology to engage students and deliver on the promise of the student standards-aligned materials many systems use. High-quality professional learning also helps educators understand how to support students with diverse needs and backgrounds and how remote learning situations impact those with special needs.

Sustained, collaborative professional

learning isn't just for teachers. As school and district leaders build long-term plans around multiple scenarios for schooling in the coming months, their learning needs are also intense. They must be in a position to not only support their teachers through new environments but also to create new systems to support students, communities, and colleagues.

Our investment in the professionals who make teaching and learning possible has never been more important. Unfortunately, we know that professional learning is often on the chopping block when the economy experiences a downturn. Making such cuts when the need for professional learning remains so high would be disastrous for students.

We owe so much to educators. Let's continue to strengthen the learning

systems that support them and speak up for the investment they deserve. The structural inequities will only deepen and the academic gaps widen if we fail to sufficiently prepare and sustain continuous high-quality learning for educators.

**REFERENCES**

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