



WHAT I'VE LEARNED

Erin Ashcraft

ACADEMY PROJECT STRENGTHENS TEACHER PIPELINE PROGRAMS

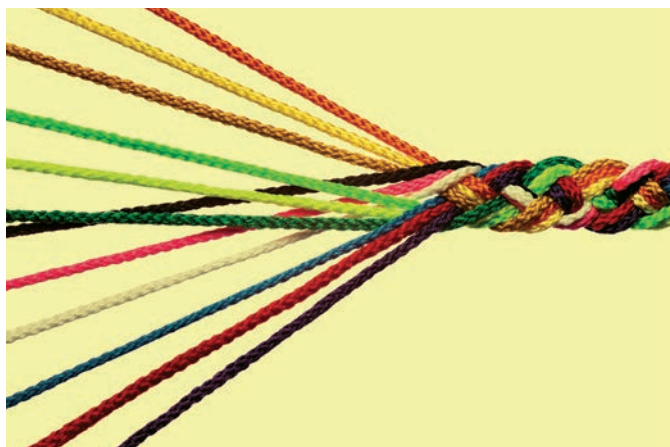
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Ensuring all students have access to effective educators is a critical part of equity. But teacher shortages and attrition are an ongoing problem, especially in the highest-needs, lowest-resourced schools. Through the Learning Forward Academy, I have spent 2½ years examining the issues of teacher recruitment and retention to understand how the Kentucky Department of Education, where I work, can support efforts to improve them.

My work has focused on grow-your-own programs for high school students, an innovative approach to bolstering the teacher pipeline. Kentucky high schools can establish a local teacher candidate pool from their own student body through programs like the Teaching and Learning Career and Technical Education pathway. These programs offer high school students dual-credit opportunities, including educator preparation coursework and co-curricular activities. This paves a clear path for entry to an educator preparation program and, ultimately, teacher certification.

Establishing these grow-your-own programs requires securing appropriate partnerships, especially among state and local education agencies and higher education institutions. Although most educators recognize the value of collaboration, too often in education we miss the critical step of clearly defining the roles of each partner. As a result, there is increased potential for redundancy, irrelevant or conflicting



advice, and ultimately, a loss of confidence among partners and the schools they aim to support.

Each member of the Learning Forward Academy identifies a problem of practice and conducts a project to address it, informed and supported by the rich learning we engage in with Academy coaches, classmates, and resources. I focused my Academy project on clearly defining partnership roles in grow-your-own programs, to ensure the services each partner provides are relevant and helpful.

The Learning Forward Academy experience provided rich professional learning that helped me think about and navigate collaboration between organizations. I established a goal statement grounded in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) and a theory of change. With the support of my coaches, learning team, and Academy classmates, I then created and implemented a program and evaluation plan.

To help build role clarity and effective partnerships, I drew on the role-specific Innovation Configuration (IC) Maps for the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2014). During a weekend Academy session, I learned about these powerful tools, which allow for examining the specific ways various groups can be expected to contribute to district professional learning efforts and making distinct action steps for each group based on the strengths and limitations of each partner.

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What she's working on now:

We've been modifying our professional learning because so much is remote now. We've been working on redesigning our learning walks to be virtual. We're also moving our teacher leader academy online and gamifying the professional learning experience, in partnership with iSchool. We have designed a honeycomb-shaped game

board online, and teacher leaders will have to click on each tile to engage in work.

The work includes content-area learning, 10 roles for school-based teacher and leaders based on [Learning Forward's book] *Taking the Lead*, and a culminating legacy project to work on throughout the school year. Our two-day districtwide professional learning is also moving online.

Why she uses social media for professional learning: I wanted to find a way to elevate the professional learning department and share effective practices. I also set a professional goal for myself of becoming more active on social media. Now, twice a week, I take some time to review new resources and tweet them out. It's always a good learning experience for me. ■

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While each provider can play a part in teacher recruitment and development structures and systems, each must work within its own space and means in order to be effective. Applying this knowledge has led to the development of clearly articulated guidance for local education agencies and higher education institutions and to stronger cross-agency collaboration.

Going forward, I hope to continue seeing more grow-your-own

partnerships established, filling local pipelines of effective educators being prepared as early as high school to be a future Kentucky teacher. We are continuing to expand state-level educator recruitment and development efforts in a number of innovative and exciting ways, like GoTeachKY (goteachky.com), striving toward equitable access to effective educators for students across the Commonwealth.

The learning, resources, and network of support I gained through

the Learning Forward Academy will be instrumental in this work, as well as in my professional and personal growth. Their influence will continue to be felt in grow-your-own programs and beyond.

REFERENCES

Learning Forward. (2014, June). IC maps for external roles. *JSD*, 35(3), 52-56.

Learning Forward. (2011). *Standards for Professional Learning*. Author. ■