



**We recognized that we needed a stronger, bolder statement that articulates how professional learning is a critical lever for changing educator practices and achieving equity for all.**

**Frederick Brown, top, is chief learning officer/deputy and Paul Fleming is senior vice president, standards, states, & equity at Learning Forward.**

## CALL TO ACTION

Frederick Brown and Paul Fleming

# LEARNING FORWARD PUTS EQUITY FRONT AND CENTER

In the October 2018 issue of *The Learning Professional*, Courageous Conversation founder Glenn Singleton reminded us not to engage in “random acts of equity.” Consistent with that message, Learning Forward aspires to develop a comprehensive approach to equity. In recent months, Learning Forward has developed an equity position statement to guide that approach and our specific work within it.

At the heart of the position statement is our definition of equity: Equity is the outcome of educator practices that respect and nurture all aspects of student identity rather than treat them as barriers to learning. But a stand-alone definition of equity is insufficient to advocate for and make change. We recognized that we needed a stronger, bolder statement that articulates how professional learning is a critical lever for changing educator practices and achieving equity for all.

We believe the equity position statement provides a powerful opportunity for us to learn as well as lead. We recognize that we, as an organization, have much to learn. We will work to embody this statement with openness and humility as we summon the collective courage to make equity a reality in our nation and world and work to ensure each student experiences relevant, culturally responsive, rigorous learning.

## EQUITY IN THE STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

For decades, the Standards for Professional Learning have been the backbone of our work at Learning Forward and a guiding force in the field. Equity has always been a priority in the standards, but it has been framed differently at different points in our organization’s history.

In 2001, the second edition of the standards included a specific equity standard. In the next edition of the standards, which has been in place since 2011, we made the decision that equity should not be separated from other elements of professional learning and rather should be integrated throughout the standards.

Our understanding is evolving. Learning Forward is now working with a team of education leaders from around the world to revise the standards. Together, we have realized the need to once again make equity explicit, this time not in one stand-alone standard, but in multiple standards. These new standards will urge professional learning leaders to dismantle structural inequities, engage in inclusive practices for the support and development of diverse staff, consider bias and privilege, and understand how race, gender, ability, language, and other factors impact teaching and learning.

## OTHER EQUITY-FOCUSED EFFORTS

Equity is also taking center stage in other Learning Forward work, including:

- Publications: We are placing an increased emphasis on content about culturally sustaining practices and dismantling racism, including but not limited to an upcoming issue of *The Learning Professional* on actions for equity.
- Networks and learning experiences: The learning communities we facilitate and support are an important platform for conversations about structural racism and for co-developing strategies to scale equitable instruction and access.
- Virtual conference: Nine concurrent sessions, a thought leader lecture, and a keynote presentation have a focus on bias, race, or culturally responsive practices.
- Professional services to school districts: We are building awareness that it is each leader’s responsibility to advocate for and build systems that dismantle institutional racism and remove barriers to equitable student learning.

# Equity position statement

Learning Forward believes schools **achieve their utmost potential** when:

- **Each student** experiences relevant, culturally responsive, rigorous learning and benefits from the collective guidance and care of exceptional teachers and leaders;
- Each educator has access to **high-quality professional learning** to cultivate the strengths and address the needs of each student; and
- Each leader **advocates for and builds an education system that dismantles institutional racism** and removes other barriers to students' equitable access to learning.

This vision for equity in schools requires transformation at every level of the education system.

Learning Forward defines **equity as the outcome of educator practices that respect and nurture all aspects of student identity** rather than treat them as barriers to learning. Professional learning is a critical lever to achieve equity.

Educators experience and drive change when they address their own biases and reflect on how their beliefs impact students. They build equitable schools when they increase their capacity to differentiate instruction and assessment to meet students' needs. They contribute to an equitable system when they denounce injustices and inequitable practices. Educators cultivate equity when they leverage the cultural and linguistic assets that students bring and ensure that each learner engages in rigorous learning. This requires the use of high-quality and culturally responsive curriculum and instructional materials.

Professional learning aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning **disrupts and dismantles causal inequities by:**

- Eliminating gaps in access and opportunities by ensuring high-quality teaching, leading, and learning;
- Equipping educators with knowledge and strategies specifically designed to recognize and eliminate bias in the classroom and in their own instructional practices;
- Strengthening self-examination practices and collective responsibility of all educators in the system;
- Providing evidence and data about strategies or designs that support equitable learning;
- Prioritizing coherent and aligned systems that provide academic rigor, high-quality curriculum and culturally relevant instructional materials, educator quality, and resources to support each student; and
- Transforming policies at all levels that shape anti-racist learning systems for adults and students alike.

Effective professional learning removes inequities in students' access to meaningful learning, ensuring a pathway to success for each student. When all educators engage in high-quality professional learning, **all students experience equity and excellence in teaching and learning.**

## THE WORK WE NEED TO DO

We hope that the equity position statement will also help us tackle one of the most significant challenges we see today: Many educators don't recognize that the teaching and learning problems in their schools are driven and sustained by inequitable policies and practices and therefore don't recognize the need to address these problems with equity-centered professional learning.

The current global COVID pandemic lays bare the long-standing structural and societal inequities that are barriers to high-quality teaching and learning for all children. Simultaneously, the racial justice movement is shining a brighter spotlight on these issues than ever before. There has never been a time when the work has felt more urgent.

Are we as an organization where we

want to be with regard to equity? Not quite. We recognize we still have much work to do to avoid Glenn Singleton's warning about random acts of equity. As we continue to grapple with these very important issues, we invite you to continue to share with us your equity challenges and solutions. Together, we can ensure that each and every child experiences equity and excellence in teaching and learning. ■