



Professional learning “has evolved from a very technical approach to training teachers for an explicit set of tasks to co-leading learning systems in ways that teachers can own.”

Segun Eubanks is a member of the Learning Forward board of trustees.

BEING FORWARD

Segun Eubanks

TO PROFESSIONALIZE TEACHING, PRIORITIZE LEARNING

Segun Eubanks is director of the Center for Education Innovation and Improvement and professor of practice at the University of Maryland, College Park. He joined the Learning Forward board of trustees in December 2019.

What role has Learning Forward played in your career?

I first got involved with Learning Forward in the early 1990s while I was working on teacher recruitment and retention. When I became director of teacher quality at the National Education Association (NEA) in 2002, I worked closely with Learning Forward on developing standards and promoting them through policy, advocating for professional learning through Title II, coauthoring reports on collective bargaining, and more.

I then had the great joy of being part of the Redesign PD Network, one of my favorite projects. Because of Learning Forward’s high regard in the education community, we were able to bring together a dynamic, smart, and ambitious group of people to think about how to impact change at a very practical level. We helped superintendents and other leaders reimagine how to structure their professional learning experiences. I think that project’s impact is still being felt in the field today.

How did your work at the National Education Association shape your thinking about professional learning?

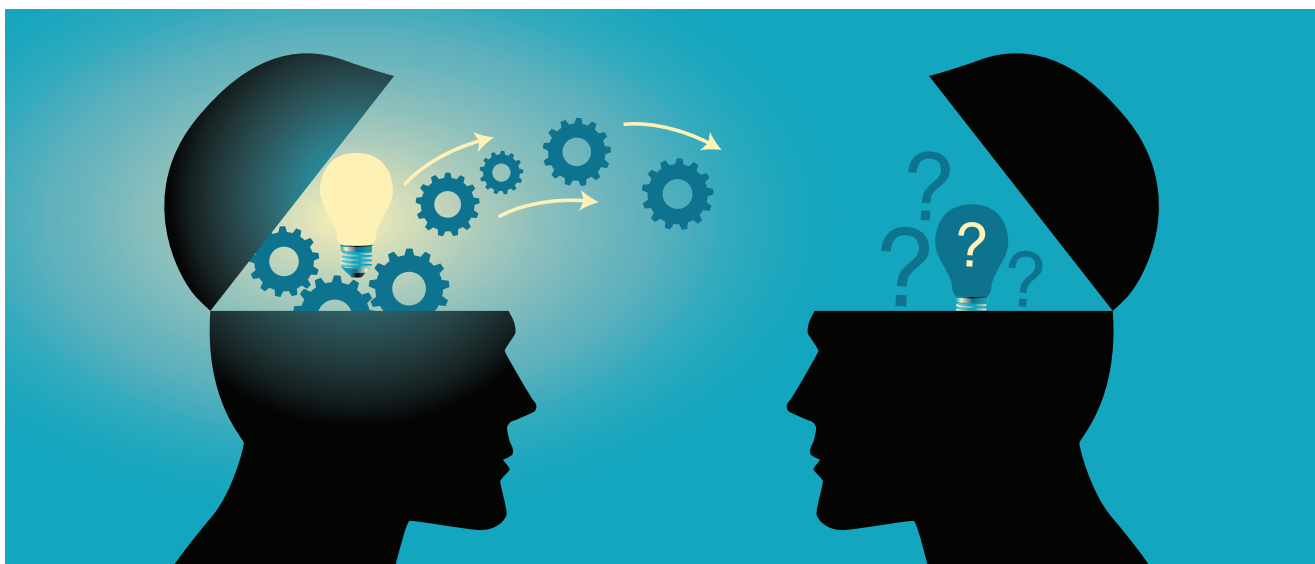
Our struggle, along with a lot of other people and organizations, was about making teaching recognized as a real profession. In fact, there probably isn’t a single NGO [nongovernmental organization] that has done more than NEA to build the profession. It cofounded the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (which later became the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation), and the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future. We also were an essential partner in the founding of the National Staff Development Council, Learning Forward’s predecessor.

Professional learning has been one of the key elements of the movement to professionalize teaching. The professional learning field has impacted how we think about teacher growth structures, compensation, and teacher leadership. It has shifted the thinking about career development to focus on what skills, knowledge, and capacity teachers need to keep learning and developing.

You were chair of the board of education for Prince George’s County Public Schools (Maryland) from 2013 to 2018. How has that role informed your work in professional learning?

The work I did on the board of education was the hardest and most rewarding work I’ve done in education. I took on that role because I wanted to be connected to the everyday hard work of making change happen in school districts and seeing ideas transformed into action.

School board members are not traditionally asked to solve teaching and learning problems, even though ultimately the work is about improving student learning. But when the district got interested in National Board for Professional Teaching Standards certification, I got involved because I had a lot of knowledge about the program from my time working at NEA when the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards was being developed. We also did a lot of work to support new teachers, like a peer assistance and review program because our district had relatively high teacher turnover and attrition.



[Looking outside of that district], I get a sense that the value of professional learning is not nearly as high as it needs to be on most school boards' agendas. School board members have a tremendous respect for teachers, and everyone wants to be able to increase teacher salaries — even if reality keeps them from voting for that. But I don't think they know enough about other ways of supporting teachers. And, of course, school boards have a huge slate of responsibilities, from setting policies to choosing contractors for food services and buses.

How have you seen the field of professional learning change over time?

Almost everything has changed! When I started, it was called staff development and then professional development, and now we call it professional learning. It has evolved from a very technical approach to training teachers for an explicit set of

tasks to co-leading learning systems in ways that teachers can own.

[For example], we've seen almost a full circle of the professional learning communities (PLC) process. After Shirley Hord and Rebecca DuFour and Richard DuFour began developing this work, PLCs took hold everywhere. Then they began to falter and became PLCs in name only. Now they're starting to turn the corner and become teacher-owned and job-embedded, as intended.

What are you excited about or inspired by in Learning Forward's current work?

I'm excited about the redesign of the Standards for Professional Learning, but especially what we do once we have the new standards in place — that is the most important part of the work. [In the past], we have been successful in getting states to embrace the standards and understand what high-quality professional learning is.

But unlike a lot of the other

educational standards, they don't tend to have the same level of urgency as, say, principal standards, around which university departments shape administrator certification programs. Education leaders live and breathe inside those standards, and that's the level we need to get to with professional learning standards. Now, states tell the districts that they believe in the standards and districts commit to adopting them, but there's not enough structure [to carry them out].

I also see a lot of potential in the partnership and engagement work Learning Forward is doing with districts and schools and states. The most exciting thing is going to be sharing these as exemplar experiences that can spread and go to scale.

I'm honored to be serving on the Learning Forward board. My job is to be a voice of many accomplished people who are doing great work in professional learning. ■