



A new network for a changed world

BY NICK MORGAN, ELIZABETH FOSTER, AND MELINDA GEORGE

Among the things we'll remember about the year 2020 are phrases like "You're still on mute" and "Can I share my screen?" They are emblematic of how educators have been challenged to navigate uncharted waters of remote

learning and overnight technological adaptation. To quote another phrase that we'll remember as a cliché, "These are unprecedented times."

Learning Forward's newest network, Design Professional Learning for a Virtual World (DPLV), is designed to meet educators' pressing needs in this

unusual moment by supporting districts and states with proactive planning tools and processes. Learning Forward and DPLV's first cohort of nine district and state education agency members are collaborating on how to stay strategic through the compounding challenges of responding to COVID-19, a national

reckoning with racial injustice, and growing fiscal uncertainty caused by a mix of public health and public policy developments.

The convergence of these realities is forcing a strategic reflection on our use of virtual platforms and tools to optimize radically different learning environments in equitable ways.

As schools face new and changing conditions, educators are responsible for ensuring that student learning continues as they themselves adapt to online, remote, or hybrid learning, synchronous and asynchronous. Professional learning has never been more important as schools and districts design and implement, in real time, new models for learning during and after this pandemic.

DEVELOPING A STRATEGY

Teams in the DPLV network engage in a planning process with customized coaching tailored to their local contexts and needs during and beyond the pandemic. They will ultimately produce a strategic plan that articulates clear goals and processes for a one- to two-year timeline. Learning Forward facilitators also support the group with new content and coaching related to common professional learning challenges among the network members.

The members of each DPLV team develop a shared vision and then compare the current state of their professional learning with that vision. Facilitators help them apply

four lenses to this work: coherence and relevance, which together help participants question the purpose and focus of their professional learning efforts, and measurement and impact, which together force teams to consider the effectiveness of professional learning initiatives and how to manage them over time for maximum effect.

LEVERAGING INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL EXPERTISE

Our work is guided by the belief that highly effective professional learning is best achieved through a combination of internal wisdom and external knowledge.

DPLV facilitators are attuned to the needs and strengths of member teams. We host district spotlights intended to showcase efforts that member districts are already doing to address ongoing professional learning. For example, member district Frederick, Virginia, recently shared an online tool that it has created to both capture educators' professional learning goals as well as to take that input and use it to create a logic map that educators can refer to throughout the year.

At the same time, we bring resources, strategies, and expert perspectives to support members' work. We believe that districts' internal expertise can be complemented by collaboration with outside professionals to address the system's immediate and long-term challenges because it expands members' professional learning networks and helps ensure that limited

COHORT 1 PARTICIPANTS IN THE DESIGN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR A VIRTUAL WORLD NETWORK

- Alaska Department of Education, Alaska
- Fort Sam Houston ISD, Texas
- Fort Wayne Community Schools, Indiana
- Broward County Public Schools, Florida
- Miami Dade County Public Schools, Florida
- Tulsa Public Schools, Oklahoma
- Stafford County Public Schools, Virginia
- Frederick County Public Schools, Virginia
- Learning Forward Affiliate leaders: Alaska, Florida, Oklahoma, Texas, Virginia

time and money have the biggest impact possible.

For example, as many DPLV members incorporate equity and inclusion into their visions for professional learning success, we showcased the Liberatory Design Process and Mindsets in a guest webinar by Tom Malarkey, director of the National Equity Project. The Liberatory Design tools are evolutions of design

DESIGN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR A VIRTUAL WORLD PLAN COMPONENTS			
	WHAT IT IS	WHY IT'S USEFUL	
FOUNDATIONS	Problem statement & vision	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two short written statements that succinctly define the scope of work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides communication for varied audiences over time.
	Team structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A list of core and expanded team members that have a direct role in plan creation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ensures diverse input and inclusion. Proactively manages stakeholder groups.
	Current state assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Brief narrative that summarizes the data describing the current status of professional learning. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes the gap between the present state and the future vision.
MAJOR GOALS	Key goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three to five goals that highlight the top priorities for professional learning in the chosen time frame. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishes what successful change looks like and gives a priority ranking. "If we accomplish these goals, we will happy with the status of professional learning."
	Major milestones	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaks down major goals into milestones through backward mapping. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Creates a trajectory for directional progress. "We will know we're on track if ..."
OPERATIONS	Short-term activity planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Breaks down most immediate milestone only into activity plans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limits detail planning to only most immediate time frame.
	Responsibility mapping	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allocates staff and other key stakeholders discrete roles in strategy execution. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clarifies roles and responsibilities beyond direct staff.
	Process details	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Narrative for additional operations and process as necessary (e.g. measurement protocols or decision rights). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Operations guidance.

tools from Stanford’s d.school, enhanced for leaders to develop and use equity-centered design and activities to address their own problems in community with others.

Ensuring direct connections from the external to the internal is a design principle and a commitment of the network. Therefore, participating districts discuss the implications or applications of the guest webinar in their teams and with each other. For instance, one network member, Tulsa Public Schools, which had already begun learning about the Liberatory Design process, talked about how they are using it to foster a culturally responsive and inclusive system.

Jamie Lomax, who is the director of organizational learning and equity for Tulsa Public Schools, shared this work on a network webinar and demonstrated how it is incorporated

at multiple levels, from high-level strategy to daily operations. The conversation that grew out of this offers a good example of how cross-network collaboration enhances members’ learning.

PRIORITIZING KEY GOALS

The DPLV network encourages members to focus on a limited number of key goals. Traditional school district strategic planning often results in long lists of activity-based goals, whereas the DPLV approach seeks a limited number of performance-oriented goals that will signal success or substantial progress toward each team’s stated vision.

This process forces deep conversations about prioritization — a critical effort with limited resources in the pandemic response. The DPLV process moves teams from aspirational to tactical, with each phase of the work

serving as scaffolding for the next to ensure consistency and coherence.

To determine priorities for goal setting, teams have collaboratively filled out an assessment of their professional learning challenges and strengths and noted where they have resources and momentum. This assessment helps teams examine where they are in their vision for professional learning during the pandemic and how to move ahead. The teams also created initial stakeholder engagement plans and are establishing goals and major milestones. See the table above.

As the teams continue their work, Learning Forward will focus on tools and resources aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning. The launch of a second cohort in February will also help increase the collaboration and critical-friend relationships with leaders from like-minded systems.

To connect the dots between their priorities, plans, and outcomes, DPLV members used a system of metrics to review summative performance as well as leading indicators to guide formative intervention and planning to meet evolving needs. Both the strategic considerations and the practical implementation details spur further dialogue and reflection about priorities and planning.

Measurement was the focus of a recent network workshop showcasing the work of the Long Beach Unified School District in California, which has made significant strides in developing systems for measuring and managing metrics around the impact of professional learning since its membership in the Redesign PD Community, which began in the 2015-16 school year. The district's work is based on Thomas R. Guskey's five-

level framework for measuring impact (Guskey, 2002). As with Tulsa and Frederick, the Long Beach district's insights about its own path have been helpful for other network members.

BUILDING EQUITY AND EXCELLENCE

Moving forward, DPLV members will continue to develop sustainable and equitable solutions for immediate challenges and for a professional learning infrastructure that transcends the pandemic response. No matter our scenario moving forward, virtual environments are likely to remain central to fulfilling our missions for educators and students.

The potential is great. In many instances, we have seen that the virtual professional learning option offers benefits that we had not yet appreciated, such as saving time and

bridging geographic distances. Learning Forward believes that by capturing lessons learned from the pandemic, we can make lasting improvements in professional learning in the service of excellent, equitable education for each and every student.

REFERENCE

Guskey, T.R. (2002, March).

Does it make a difference? Evaluating professional development. *Educational Leadership*, 59(6), 45-51.

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Nick Morgan (nick.morgan@learningforward.org) is senior consultant, Elizabeth Foster (elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org) is vice president, research & standards, and Melinda George (melinda.george@learningforward.org) is chief policy officer at Learning Forward. ■