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CALL TO ACTION

Frederick Brown and Tracy Crow

EQUITY IS FRONT AND CENTER IN REVISED STANDARDS

At Learning Forward, we believe that all educators and education sectors must commit to doing their part to build equity and dismantle racism, classism, homophobia, misogyny, and other forms of prejudice. As an organization focused on professional learning as a key lever for school improvement, we have a clear role to play in building educators' capacity to recognize and realize the imperative of equity.

Professional learning can equip educators with knowledge and strategies to engage in self-examination, recognize and eliminate bias in instructional practices and interactions, implement rigorous and culturally relevant instructional materials for all students, and differentiate instruction to ensure every student's success.

Through these and other pathways, professional learning can ensure high-quality teaching for every student, thereby eliminating gaps in access and opportunity. It can also equip educators to transform policies at all levels to shape antiracist learning systems for adults and students alike.

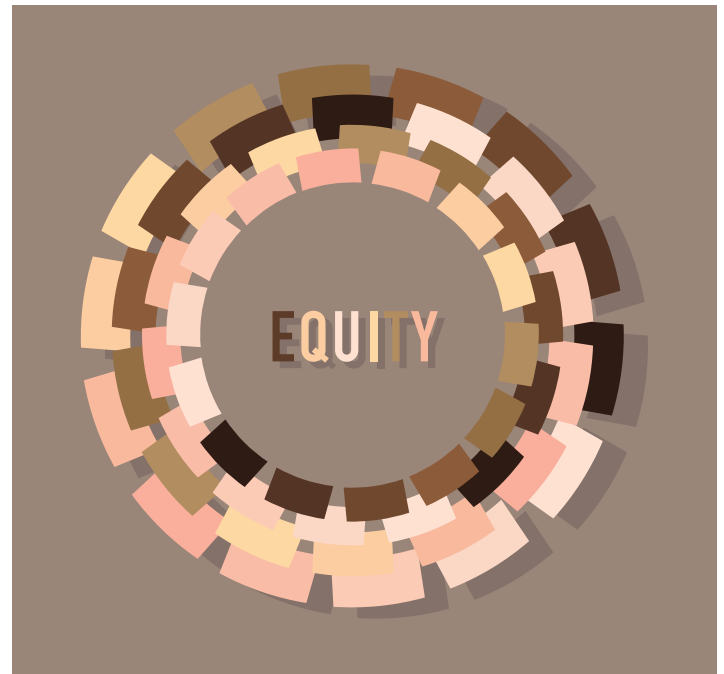
To fulfill its potential and achieve equity, we believe that professional learning must be guided by key principles grounded in research and informed by practice. We embody these principles through the Standards for Professional Learning. The standards, first introduced in 1995, have evolved over time in response to field needs and new research.

We are committed to and intentional about revising the standards on an ongoing basis. Our current revision process will result in a fourth edition of the standards to be released in 2022. As Learning Forward revises the Standards for Professional Learning, ensuring professional learning builds and achieves equity is an essential goal.

Equity has always been embedded in the very notion of Standards for Professional Learning and in the standards themselves. In the 2001 edition, Learning Forward (then called NSDC) included a specific standard for equity:

Staff development that improves the learning of all students prepares educators to understand and appreciate all students, create safe, orderly, and supportive learning environments, and hold high expectations for their academic achievement.

In our rationale for this Equity standard, we wrote that professional learning related to establishing safe classroom environments and holding high expectations is particularly important



when educators are teaching students whose backgrounds are different from their own.

In the 2011 revision of the Standards for Professional Learning, we took a different approach to equity. In the introduction, we argued that the new common stem for each standard confirms the link between educator practice and results for students. Every standard begins with the phrase *“Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students”*

The use of “all” was intentional to elevate the significance of ensuring the success of every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, exceptionality, language, socioeconomic condition, culture, or sexual orientation. We hoped to convey that equity must pervade each and every standard, and we feared that creating a separate equity standard would signify that equity is a consideration apart from, rather than central to, all other aspects of professional learning.

We learned, however, that by removing the equity standard, many educators did not see equity represented with enough specificity. In the intervening years, we’ve recognized the need for more explicit conversations about equity, especially but not limited to race, throughout the conceptualization, design, implementation, and evaluation of effective professional learning systems.

In the revision of Standards for Professional Learning currently in process, equity is front and center. There are now three equity standards, one in each of three sections that guide the content or substance of professional learning, the process for how

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professional learning is designed and sustained for impact, and the context or conditions for effective professional learning.

The Equity Practices standard outlines what educators need to know and be able to do to achieve equity outcomes with students. This standard encompasses the learning educators embrace to fully understand their students’ backgrounds, identities, and experiences, and the impact of those factors on their learning.

The Equity Practices standard also covers culturally relevant education practices and embracing aspects of student identity to make learning relevant for each student. Finally, this standard explores the importance of educators learning to deepen their relationships with students, families, communities, and community partners.

The Equity Drivers standard supports embedding equity in the design and process of all professional learning experiences. It specifies that learning experiences should be designed to encourage educators’ reflection on race, class, and other identity markers and stimulate shifts in assumptions, beliefs, and practices. The standard

also emphasizes the importance of building educators’ capacity to work productively with colleagues with different backgrounds, viewpoints, and experiences.

The Equity Foundations standard focuses on how educators create the soil in which an equitable system can grow. Professional learning should address how to establish a vision for rigorous and inclusive learning for all, create structures to sustain equitable access and opportunities for each learner, and sustain a culture that prioritizes high expectations, continuous engagement, and successful outcomes for adult and student learning.

Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning are just one aspect of how we elevate professional learning as a means to advance equitable outcomes. But because they are threaded through everything we do, they play a powerful role in all of our work. As we continue on our journey to equity and antiracism, we remember — and we encourage other organizations to remember — that this work is complex and never-ending.

We all have blind spots when it comes to this work. Even when we think we’re addressing all the critical factors of equity, we know we will uncover blind spots that keep us from fully addressing racism and other barriers to equity that educators, students, and communities face daily.

As a learning organization, we are always in a cycle of continuous learning, and we are committed to addressing those blind spots with humility and transparency. We encourage others to do the same. ■