

# Learning Forward Virginia focuses on educator well-being



BY JUDY NEWHOUSE AND BARBARA PATTERSON ODEN

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Learning Forward Virginia is evolving to meet educators' needs.

Before the pandemic, teachers had a sense of their positive impact on students' learning. But as they grappled with new technology and unfamiliar challenges, many felt disconnected and dispirited, unsure of whether they were making a difference. We realized we needed to attend to the well-being of educators, starting with new ways to rebuild necessary human connections.

We began with a focus on the well-being of our board and membership by hosting webinars on social and emotional learning (SEL), informed by the work of the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning.

After learning with and from other educators, we have integrated SEL strategies into our ongoing work. For

example, every board meeting now begins with a member check-in, such as sharing what we are each grateful for.

We also found that, like students, adults need to learn and celebrate what we are good at. Knowing our strengths increases confidence and allows us to build our competence. Our board used Gallup's StrengthsFinder program with a certified trainer to help us identify our strengths and construct a leadership team whose strengths complement one another. This process has contributed to better communication and collaboration among our board members.

Next, we focused on how to develop effective teams and organizations by working with a coach trained in the Dare to Lead approach, which cultivates courageous leadership. Through activities that encouraged us to examine our core values and reflect, we learned three key lessons: Be brave

enough to be vulnerable, build a culture of trust, and discover your values and take off your armor of perfectionism.

Learning Forward Virginia's next step is a deep dive into the book *Principal Leadership for Racial Equity*, a joint publication from Corwin and Learning Forward. Based on research and insights from practitioners, this book provides practical, realistic, and useful guidance for developing racial consciousness and supporting that work in schools.

These and other learning opportunities moving forward will focus on developing knowledge and applying it to practice.

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