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CALL TO ACTION

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LEADERS PLAY KEY ROLES IN IMPLEMENTING STANDARDS

As Learning Forward continues the process of revising the Standards for Professional Learning, an enduring focus of our conversations is the roles and responsibilities of leaders in using the standards.

At all levels — in schools, districts, states, provinces, and charter management organizations — leaders who embrace high-quality professional learning enable teachers and students to fully experience its benefits.

Although we believe that all educators, no matter their job title or role, are responsible for applying the standards to plan, implement, facilitate, experience, and evaluate professional learning, we recognize that leaders play a special part.

Leadership for professional learning is multifaceted. Leaders prioritize, enable, support, model, and uphold expectations for high-quality professional learning. Therefore, while both current and revised Standards for Professional Learning include a dedicated leadership standard, multiple standards are inclusive of and directly relevant to leaders.

Below are several key areas where leaders take actions to implement standards.

Establish expectations

School and system leaders establish a vision for teaching and learning, in collaboration with educators, students, and community members. They make explicit the role of professional learning in achieving that vision and connect professional learning to strategic priorities and initiatives.

They articulate the expectation that achieving excellence and equity for each student is the purpose of professional learning. Through their decisions, actions, and relationships, leaders create cultures that center continuous high-quality learning for educators.

Engage as learners

Leaders apply the Standards for Professional Learning for themselves as learners as well as for other educators they serve to build the knowledge, skills, and practices that are responsive to their contexts. For example, school leaders emphasize instructional leadership along with deepening their expertise in leading learning for the educators in their buildings.

Across levels, leaders identify networks and learning teams with role-alike colleagues within and beyond their systems. They communicate about the purpose of their learning and its results and articulate their expectations for other educators to do the same. In continually and visibly engaging as learners, school and system leaders model the importance of job-embedded collaborative learning.

Provide resources

Leaders prioritize and secure resources for professional learning, including money, time, personnel, technology, and materials. For example, they make decisions about the curriculum and

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they recognize the importance of vertical alignment, making the work at one level contribute to and set up the conditions for the work at the next level.

Although the work of central office is ultimately in support of students, teachers often say they don't see the district's work as relevant to their classrooms — or they believe it is actually causing more problems and stress for them. Connections among the levels must be clear and consistent. That kind of alignment is the glue that holds a districtwide professional learning approach together.

We are seeing this approach in Arlington, Virginia, where the district has identified leadership competencies for the entire organization and is considering working toward them in communities of practice designed for everyone from bus drivers to teachers to central office staff.

Thoughtful problems of practice create cohesion across levels. Problems of practice focus educators' attention on specific needs and goals and drive the collaborative identification of strategic

steps to improvement. Engaging staff from all levels in identifying common or connected problems of practice is the glue that brings all of the professional learning work into alignment and turns organizations from a series of silos into learning systems.

Although specific problems of practice may look somewhat different for district leaders and teachers' PLCs, they should be aligned and focused on common goals to ensure success for all students.

These elements put districts on the path to a systemic approach to professional learning and therefore improving all educators' practice to meet students' evolving needs. Recovery and reinvestment funds can be a major asset for these efforts, but only if they are invested strategically and systemically.

The Council of the Great City Schools (2021) created a tool kit to help districts make those decisions wisely. It includes six questions that start with how the investments you're considering address current and long-term student needs and how they advance the

strategic plan, instructional priorities, vision, mission, and goals of the district.

We encourage you to engage in this kind of strategic thinking across your entire system, with professional learning as the backbone that builds capacity to address your goals and the initiatives that support them.

REFERENCES

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instructional materials educators use with students and dedicate time and funding to ensuring that professional learning aligns with and supports implementation of high-quality instructional materials.

System-level leaders hold primary responsibility for resource allocation and coordination (in collaboration with policymakers and leaders at other levels), while school leaders often make decisions about their schools' use of those resources.

Address learning systemically

Leaders, particularly at the system or district level, create coherence by ensuring that professional learning aligns with priorities and strategic plans. This involves making connections and encouraging alignment across initiatives

and departments so that all educators are building their capacity to meet the vision and goals for every student.

When all educators are focused on continual learning, for themselves as well as their students, leaders succeed in creating a true learning system — that is, a system that learns and evolves to serve the needs of learners and a system where ambitious learning thrives.

Learning Forward is committed to building leaders' knowledge about and capacity for professional learning. Research continues to affirm the vital role of leaders for student success. A recent research synthesis commissioned by The Wallace Foundation found that the impact of principals in schools is greater than previously reported (Grissom et al., 2021).

Recognizing leaders' central role in professional learning is therefore

essential for fulfilling the aspirations of the Standards for Professional Learning — and the goals of educators, families, and communities more broadly. When we release revised Standards for Professional Learning in spring 2022, we will also publish several role-specific resources for putting the standards into practice. Look for our action guides for leaders and our ongoing investment in and supports for leaders.

REFERENCE

- Grissom, J.A., Egalite, A.J., & Lindsay, C.A. (2021, February).** *How principals affect students and schools: A systematic synthesis of two decades of research.* The Wallace Foundation. www.wallacefoundation.org/principalsynthesis ■