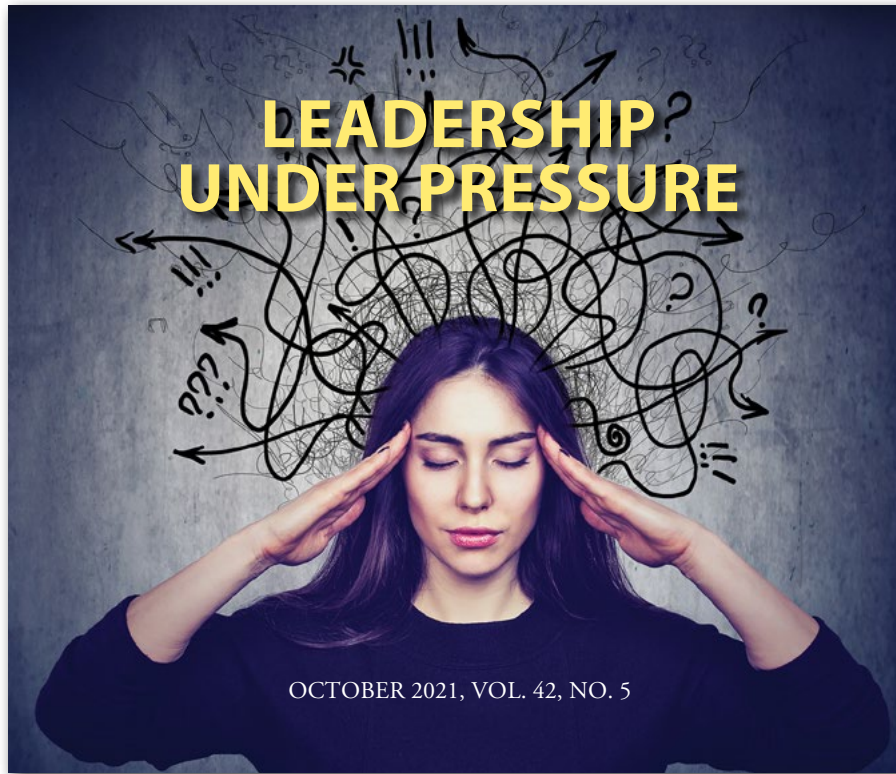


# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDE FOR DISTRICT TEAMS



**T**hank you for being a district member with Learning Forward. To help you spread the learning and engagement with your colleagues, we have designed this supplemental guide exclusively for district members. This guide will help you take your teams through a deep dive into [the latest issue of \*The Learning Professional\*](#), which focuses on how leaders can thrive in stressful times. With a broad focus on leaders, including superintendents, principals, coaches, teacher leaders, and others, the issue examines how professional learning can provide support and inspiration when we all need it most. By reading the issue and using this guide, teams will:

- Explore compassionate leadership and how to build it;
- Discover how to thrive, not just survive, under stress;

and

- Reflect on how to cultivate an ecosystem of professional support.

You may wish to send this guide, or portions of it, to your team members to help everyone engage in the activities. Alternatively, you may wish to use it as a facilitation guide and walk your team through the activities yourself. We invite you to share the learning opportunities however they work best for you.

Be sure to give us feedback about whether you found this useful, and, if you post on social media, tag us [#TheLearningPro](#) [@LearningForward](#) so we can share your good work.

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**NEED HELP LOGGING IN?** If you or your colleagues have questions about logging in with your district membership to access the articles, call **800-727-7288** or email [christy.colclasure@learningforward.org](mailto:christy.colclasure@learningforward.org).

# GET STARTED

## Lead with compassion

In stressful times like those we are facing now, leaders often encourage their colleagues to give each other grace and space. That doesn't mean just stepping back from responsibilities, but finding meaningful ways to support one another to fulfill them.

In their [article about compassionate leadership](#), Wendy Baron, Arthur Costa, and Robert Garmston describe steps leaders at all levels can take to lead with humanity, empathy, and responsiveness. Ask your team members to read the article and then, as a team, dedicate time to the following reflection exercises.

### ACTIONS:

1. Set aside time for all team members to engage in reflective journaling about the article. Follow these prompts or create your own.

- The authors write that “compassionate leadership is a mindset and set of behaviors that anyone and everyone can embody.” According to this definition, whom do you consider to be a compassionate leader in your personal or professional life? How do they express compassion that resonates with you?
- Look at the image labeled “The journey of compassionate leadership” and reread the sections of the article that describe the stages in that journey. Where are you on your own compassionate leadership journey? What steps can you take to get to the next stage?
- What parts of compassionate leadership are most challenging, or most scary, for you? (For example, the authors write that compassionate cultures “encourage people to expose their confusion, doubts, worries, and failings,” which can be difficult for many people.) Why do you find this aspect of compassionate leadership challenging?

2. As a team, explore your school culture and how you can progress on a collective journey of compassionate leadership. Focus on the school culture as a whole, not on specific staff members or teams. You may wish to use the following discussion prompts for a facilitated conversation.

- Brainstorm what a compassionate culture would look, sound, and feel like. You may wish to use a popcorn discussion technique, write on sticky notes and post them on a wall, or another brainstorming method.
- Ask everyone to reflect on which of those elements they currently see in the school or district. This might be silent reflection or journaling. In a group that has high levels of trust and collaboration, you might facilitate a conversation about these elements, but be sure that the conversation does not focus on specific leaders or take on a tone of blame.
- Identify what steps you can take in the next week, month, and year to cultivate more compassionate leadership.

3. Reinforce and reciprocate compassion by expressing gratitude to one or more colleagues who have extended grace, patience, support, or kindness to you recently. You may choose to write a simple thank-you note, stop by their office, or make another gesture.



# NEXT STEPS



## Thrive, don't just survive

All good leaders aim to be the best they can be, for themselves and their teams, even in the most stressful of times. In their article, [“From survival to opportunity,”](#) Jennifer Ahn and Elizabeth Shafer describe how leaders can accomplish this by maintaining focus on embodying three roles: learner, partner, and visionary.

Ask your team members to read the article and step back from their day-to-day responsibilities and stresses to reflect on how they are showing up for one another and for students.

### ACTIONS:

1. Ask team members to self-assess their progress on embodying the three roles and then identify steps they will take to grow into the roles further.

Most of the time	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
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<b>ARE YOU A LEARNER?</b> <i>How often do you ...</i>				
Publicly model a learning stance				
Use data to make adult and student learning visible				
Adapt and improve by deepening self-awareness				
Lead collaborative learning by experiencing and reflecting on conditions that have supported your own learning				
<b>ARE YOU A PARTNER?</b> <i>How often do you ...</i>				
Value multiple perspectives and seek thought partnership				
Listen deeply with empathy and care				
Build relationships that cultivate a culture of respect, trust, agency, and distributed leadership				
Support rigorous learning steeped in social and emotional learning				
<b>ARE YOU A VISIONARY?</b> <i>How often do you ...</i>				
Put students at the center of learning by identifying and returning to high-leverage goals that target students' needs				
Communicate purpose and progress in humanizing, authentic ways				
Create space to move beyond transactional compliance to curiosity and collective efficacy				
Identify and lead with a moral imperative				

2. Consider the following questions individually or as part of a team or group to reflect and plan next steps.

- Which of the three roles is most important for you to develop now, and why?
- What skills or assets do you have in that area now?
- What skills or assets do you want to develop over the next three months?
- What supports or resources do you need to develop them?
- How will this professional learning and development benefit your school, district, or organization?

## Cultivate the professional learning ecosystem

Professional learning is essential for navigating unprecedented challenges and uncertain times. But just when educators most need professional learning, they often struggle to dedicate the time and resources to it. Leaders must make professional learning a priority, especially when they and their colleagues are most stressed.

In **“Leaders play key roles in the professional learning ecosystem,”** Sarah Woulfin identifies steps leaders should take so that continuous learning can “take root and grow.” Ask your leadership team to read the article, paying attention to the components of the ecosystems (such as people, resources, and goals) and processes for cultivating them.



### ACTIONS:

1. Draw your ecosystem.
  - a. Make a diagram of your district or school’s professional learning ecosystem. You may wish to use the metaphor of a garden or forest (soil, seeds, water, etc.), drawing on the nature themes in Woulfin’s article, or another visual. Include the key elements, supportive structures, and enabling factors.
  - b. Using the article as a reference, identify the elements that are missing and draw those in a different color.
  - c. Discuss why those elements are missing and how you will work to add them to your ecosystem.
  
2. Consider the following questions about the three main steps Woulfin identifies for prioritizing and tending to the professional learning ecosystem in your school, district, or organization. (You may choose to use your diagram as a tool to facilitate reflection.)

EXPECTATIONS	MODELING	CARE AND COMPASSION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Do we set clear expectations for professional learning for <i>all</i> staff? If not, who are we missing?</li> <li>• How do we communicate those expectations and hold people accountable to them?</li> <li>• What roles and resources are in place to support staff learning? Who/ what are we missing or do we need more of for all staff to learn?</li> <li>• How do we celebrate staff members’ learning and growth?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How do we, as leaders, engage in our own professional learning?</li> <li>• How is our learning tied to key goals such as culturally responsive pedagogy, remote learning, and family engagement?</li> <li>• How and why do we communicate our learning to colleagues and staff?</li> <li>• How can committing to our own professional learning affect the professional learning ecosystem?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is professional learning part of caring for and about staff?</li> <li>• What types of professional learning and what topics do staff want and express a need for right now?</li> <li>• What other aspects of the professional learning ecosystem do we need to tend for staff to learn and grow in their roles for the ultimate benefit of students?</li> </ul>