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CALL TO ACTION

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REACH ACROSS THE DIVIDE FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

One recent early morning, I walked from my home near Washington, D.C., to the National Mall to see the U.S. Capitol. After such a tumultuous year, when divisive politics was at its worst, I was surprised at the sense of quiet in the air — almost somber. In that quiet space, I took a few moments to reflect on what has happened in the past few years and focus on what I hope will be different in the coming year.

More than anything, I hope we can leave behind the fighting, anger, and resulting stagnation and instead forge a shared path toward progress. Despite the U.S.’s recent history of making every issue a battleground, I believe there must be some places where we can all agree.

Support for educators, including high-quality professional learning, can be one of those issues. Every parent, grandparent, aunt, uncle, friend, and good citizen wants children to succeed, and we can all agree that for this to happen, every child must have access to an excellent education led by strong educators.

With that commitment as a starting place, we all need to be on Team Education — one where winning means that all students are successful — and, therefore, on Team Educators. Of course, “team” is the operative word, and the most effective teams are built with intentionality and support.

We need to first identify as many allies as we can, not just among our education colleagues but also among parents, businesses, health care professionals, civil rights leaders, and other communities and sectors that value a highly skilled workforce and an informed citizenry. Then we need to make the value proposition simple and clear and make it easy for our allies to share those messages in their advocacy.

We also need to focus on data, data, data. It is hard to garner support for a team that can’t show that it is banking some wins, or at least improving toward its goals. Educators know that what they are doing makes a difference, but knowing is not the same as showing. Data is what can win supporters from across the arena. Now is the time to gather baseline measures and build measurement instruments that track progress over time.

With that data in hand, we can build and tell stories that compel action. Storytelling is crucial, because professional learning that aligns with the definition of quality in the Every Student Succeeds Act can be hard to explain.

We need the public and policymakers to understand that high-quality professional learning is not about quick and easy workshops and courses. It’s about coaching and mentoring and collaboration — approaches that take more investments of time and resource but result in better outcomes.

For noneducators to understand that, we need to use storytelling skills to paint pictures of our effective professional learning experiences, the problems they are helping to solve, and how we know they are making an impact.

Learning Forward is ready to support you in these efforts. You can find ways to get involved in advocacy and tips for getting started by visiting the new Powered by Title II website (poweredbytitleII.com). And you can dive right in by inviting your policymakers to your classroom or school building, calling, emailing, or visiting your legislators locally or in D.C., speaking to your local PTA or school board, or reaching out to businesses in your community.

Join us on Team Education. Together, we can do this. ■

