



“The coaching work I continue to build with Learning Forward has resulted in increased support on the ground to respond to the challenges of COVID.”

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Julie Donahue-Kpolugbo

COACHING SUPPORT CONNECTS EDUCATORS IN ISOLATED COMMUNITIES

Julie Donahue-Kpolugbo is district literacy consultant and instructional coach coordinator for the Beaufort Delta Divisional Education Council (BDDEC) in Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada.

Her role in professional learning: I support literacy programming and instructional coaches in nine schools in eight small, isolated communities, some of which are fly-in only. Our schools are in the Beaufort Delta region on the homelands of the Gwich'in, Inuvialuit and Metis people. In Canada, Indigenous populations have been chronically underserved and experience a tremendous amount of intergenerational trauma stemming from egregious historical treatment. Through the local government and Indigenous governing bodies, educators are engaged in ongoing learning about equity informed by the work of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

How Learning Forward supports her work: I have been collaborating with Learning Forward since 2019 to support our instructional coaching program in BDDEC. In the 2021-22 school year, we are working with a Learning Forward facilitator and resources, meeting quarterly, sometimes in person and sometimes virtually.

Given the number of new coaches this year, we started with coaching fundamentals, including elements of understanding the roles of a coach, coaching conversations, listening skills, relationship development, observations, and how to advocate for professional learning in the local school.

I also meet once a month or as needed with literacy coaches, other literacy leaders, and my colleague, Shawn Feener, math and science consultant, does the same with math coaches and leaders. Because the coaches and communities are so isolated, connecting them as a network in an ongoing way is vitally important to our ongoing improvement and impact efforts.

How she first got involved with Learning Forward: A colleague of mine, Adam Wright, went to the Learning Forward Annual Conference in Vancouver in 2016 and came back inspired and enthusiastic about the potential Learning Forward could bring to our work.

Through the conference, we found out about the Learning Forward Academy. Adam and I were both accepted to the Academy Class of 2019. It took a lot of lobbying to our senior administration and government to allow us to travel out of the country for intensive professional learning, but it was worth it.

Why she found the Learning Forward Academy valuable: The Academy grounded us in theory and expertise that allowed me to plan for transformative change in literacy in my district. It taught me about how to better collect and use data and apply change theory to make my work more strategic and sustainable.

Up here in the North, transience of the workforce is such a struggle and has a direct impact on our students. If we can help educators feel more supported and improve the working environment for them, they are going to feel more joy and engagement; they will stay longer and provide much better-quality, consistent learning environments for students.

In addition, because the Academy and Annual Conference connected me with experts in the field who would speak with me about our district's specific program implementation challenges and our vision for transformative change, that allowed me to bring more credibility to the work I try to do and convince leaders in my district and communities of its value. ■