



Standards for Professional Learning provide a clear rationale for prioritizing professional learning time, reminding us that educators' learning is directly connected to students' learning.

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CALL TO ACTION

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NEW STANDARDS HELP US MEET TODAY'S CHALLENGES

When we embarked on the process of revising Standards for Professional Learning in 2019, we couldn't have anticipated the challenges that educators, students, and all of us would be facing today. Although the timeliness of the standards is not an accident, the timing is fortuitous. As educators and students struggle to recover from the setbacks of the pandemic, high-quality, standards-aligned professional learning is the best — perhaps the only — way for educators to develop the knowledge and skills to accelerate learning and differentiate support to each student's academic, social, and emotional needs.

Trends that have been exacerbated by the pandemic — including educational inequity, inadequate curriculum, lack of support for leaders and teachers, students' and teachers' stress and social and emotional needs, and racial division — drove every step of the standards' development. We have added new standards to address those realities and challenges.

These new standards include the Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment standard and the Professional Expertise standard, which outline critical knowledge and skills for every educator, and three new equity standards that outline steps to ensuring every child has access to engaging, relevant, grade-level instruction and culturally responsive, trauma-informed practice.

Among the barriers we must overcome today are high levels of teacher attrition and troubling teacher shortages, especially in areas like special education, where students have the most pronounced needs. High-quality professional learning is a tool for retaining teachers because it helps them address their current challenges and demonstrates an investment in their growth and future in the profession. Simultaneously, robust professional learning systems position leaders to support an influx of new and relatively inexperienced teachers, many of whom have emergency certifications and little training.

Those leaders also benefit from their own professional learning. Systems are losing principals, superintendents, and other leaders, in large part because of stress, conflict, and exhaustion. Professional learning is key to addressing those issues, and the standards can serve as a guide. For example, the Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standard reminds us that there is strength in shared learning and mutual support. In our work facilitating professional learning networks, principals often tell us that coming together in community with others in similar roles to share frustrations, explore strategies, and learn best practices buoys them and keeps them moving forward.

Despite all these benefits, many districts are cutting back on professional learning time because of busy schedules or even a belief that they are helping educators by taking one thing off the plate. This is a disservice to educators because it deprives them of vital learning that can help them address urgent problems of practice and ongoing sources of stress and dissatisfaction.

Standards for Professional Learning provide a clear rationale for prioritizing professional learning time, reminding us that educators' learning is directly connected to students' learning. And they encourage us to reflect on how much growth is possible, which we witnessed when the pandemic challenged us to learn new teaching methods with unprecedented speed and urgency.

In this time of intense polarization, when citizens are divided along ideological and political lines, one thing everyone can agree on is that every child deserves the highest-quality teaching. Every child deserves to have teachers who recognize their gifts and assets and how to build on them. Every child deserves teachers who understand their unique needs and how to meet them.

For that to happen, every educator needs the highest-quality professional learning. When implemented fully and well, Standards for Professional Learning build systems that deliver on the promise of growth for every educator and, therefore, every student. Because when teachers and leaders learn, students learn. ■