



**We have to take a critical look at ourselves and the systems we support to challenge the status quo, ask uncomfortable questions that surface problematic frames of reference, and act on that learning in service to students.**

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## **DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE**

Nader I. Twal

# **STANDARDS HELP EDUCATORS REACH EACH AND EVERY CHILD**

**A**s a reflective practitioner, I have often found it helpful to consider the history of the traditions and practices that we hold dear in education — including those that might be rooted in troubling histories. As calls for social justice grow louder and the imperative of equity grows more urgent, the traditions that may have sowed inequity are those we most need to examine.

As a member of the Learning Forward Standards Advisory Council, which has helped to shape and shepherd the newly revised Standards for Professional Learning, I believe it is prudent to pause and reflect on the history of educational standards. Doing so highlights why thoughtfully designed professional learning standards are so urgent and how the latest revision explicitly addresses equity.



Early versions of the professional standards that governed educational leadership at the turn of the 20th century, and professional learning by extension, drew on a history that valued organizational order and operational coherence over justice, equity, or community. The authors of these standards relied on industrial business models of efficiency and hierarchy as exemplars, which translated into standardized, regimented, and managerial models of education, education leadership, and professional learning.

Ellwood P. Cubberley, often considered one of the founders of traditional educational leadership, relied heavily on the tenets of social Darwinism to frame his explanations for the racial disparities and “enabled schoolmen and commentators alike to ignore or even to bemoan and denounce the increasing diversity in American public schools as a looming threat to the larger polity” (Karpinski & Lugg, 2006, p. 280). Given the pervasiveness of his texts and influence in the first half of the 20th century, the result of Cubberley’s thinking was that “generations of mainstream educational administrators were simply not interested in broadly defined discussions of individualism, democracy, and community” (p. 281).

Today, as equity-minded leaders focus on the needs of the marginalized, build our critical consciousness, and not only name inequity but also aim to redress it, these old standards can impede rather than accelerate progress. That’s why I jumped at the opportunity to serve on the Standards Advisory Council. Learning Forward has a strong history of centering the right work at the right time in service to all students, so engaging with and learning from thought leaders from all over the world about supporting educators to reach each and every child felt like an opportunity that I could not pass up.

During the revision process, we learned from and built on the previous iteration of Standards for Professional Learning as we crafted updated ones responsive to our times and our learning over the past 11 years. What stood out to me in the process was the intentional, thoughtful, and bold way that the advisory group, subgroups, and Learning Forward leaders centered equity

in all 11 standards, while amplifying its importance in three dedicated standards: Equity Practices, Equity Drivers, and Equity Foundations. Each of the three equity standards has clear indicators to ensure that the work transcends tokenism and demonstrates that “equity is both an outcome and aspect of professional learning” (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 8).

The standards acknowledge and celebrate multiple dimensions of identity and equity. In today’s climate, it’s worth addressing why it is important to talk explicitly about race in standards. Davis et al. (2015) did so in a succinct and profound way when writing about leadership standards, and their sentiments are applicable to professional learning as well: “If standards imply that race does not matter, then our education system will continue down a path in which many leaders continue to be trained and hired despite being ill-equipped to recognize and counteract the negative ways in which racism affects educational practices and outcomes.” Davis and colleagues went on to explain the need for “particular knowledge and skills” that “must be clearly articulated in the standards that guide the practice, preparation, development, and

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evaluation of school leaders” (p. 358).

In other words, we cannot afford to be color-blind when it comes to the standards that shape our profession and our professional learning because the inequities and disparities in our system often fall along racial lines. In response, we have to take a critical look at ourselves and the systems we support to challenge the status quo, ask uncomfortable questions that surface problematic frames of reference, and act on that learning in service to students. The revised Standards for Professional Learning give us a way to do that so that we calibrate our efforts, challenge our assumptions, and correct our course as we guide the learning of educators at all levels of the education system.

I am proud of and grateful for the bold and significant revisions that amplify the focus on equity in

the revised Standards for Professional Learning. As the introduction to the standards states, “The evolution of evidence and insights about educator and student learning requires periodic updates to Standards for Professional Learning” (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 7). At this time, in the current context, these standards make great strides in naming and dismantling barriers to equity and replace them with actionable indicators that advance inclusion and justice for all. Now the real work begins.

## REFERENCES

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## About the **Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI)**

Learning Forward’s Standard Assessment Inventory (SAI) is a 50-item survey that measures the alignment of a school’s professional learning to the Standards for Professional Learning. The SAI also measures teachers’ perceptions to provide important data on the quality of professional learning.

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