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THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

Teaching in turbulent times

October 2022, Vol. 43, No. 5

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REIMAGINE

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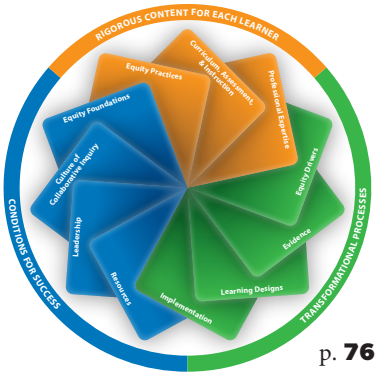

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ONLINE EXCLUSIVE learningforward.org/the-learning-professional

- **How a Florida district evaluates professional learning.**
  By Dorina Popa Varsamis

I SAY

Ishmael Tabales

Principal, Union Hill School, Worcester, Massachusetts

"Here's how we create a sense of productive urgency without burning our teachers out. 1) Jump in with your teachers. 2) When everything is in crisis, focus on progress. 3) Focus on professional learning and support. For our school, everything came together and lined up when we talked about urgency. It just became clear what we had to do. But urgency is not about driving teachers or learners with fear or anxiety. It's about focusing on what's important and keeping it centered through community, collaboration, and communication."

— Excerpted and adapted from "3 ways to highlight productive urgency while avoiding teacher burnout," eschoolnews.com, August 5, 2022, **www.eschoolnews.com/2022/08/05/productive-urgency-avoiding-teacher-burnout/2/**

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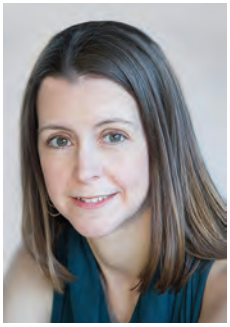
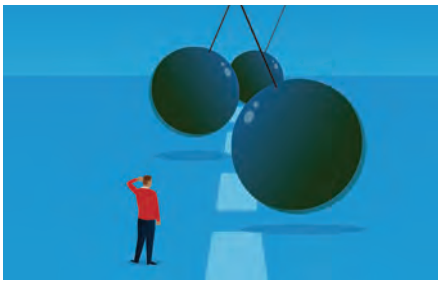
Selecting learning designs



HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

CHARTING A COURSE THROUGH TURBULENCE



Educators often feel pulled in multiple directions, but for many, that feeling is especially acute right now. Navigating schools' competing priorities, students' increasing needs, and intense public pressures can feel like trying to travel across the cover of this issue — on winding roads, with confusing signs and no clear path.

In times like these, we need guides who have encountered similar obstacles before or who have specialized knowledge about the terrain. That's why, for this issue of *The Learning Professional*, we have invited some expert guides to help us journey along the path of uncertainty. Some of them are blazing new trails, while others are bringing attention to well-established practices that can be applied to the challenges we're facing today.

Talking, reading, exploring, and reflecting on challenging topics are essential to understanding our knowledge and beliefs and making decisions about how to proceed in the best interest of students.

This issue's authors don't have all the answers, and they are grappling with confusion and controversy, just like the rest of us. But they have learned how to approach some of schools' biggest challenges and developed strategies that are helping educators and students succeed, even in the face of difficulty.

At Learning Forward, we often talk about openness and vulnerability as key conditions for effective professional learning. Learning something new takes a willingness to admit what we don't already know, and trying something new requires that we take risks — risks supported by evidence and expert guidance, but risks nonetheless.

Sometimes, talking about controversial topics is a risk in itself. But talking, reading, exploring, and reflecting on challenging topics are essential to understanding our knowledge and beliefs and making decisions about how to proceed in the best interest of students. This issue is designed to provide food for thought, with new perspectives to consider and new strategies to try, not a set of definitive answers.

This issue also includes a section focused on continuous improvement processes. The principles of improvement science and related approaches can help educators at all levels and in all roles address, intentionally and systematically, pressing problems of practice. They provide tools and processes to examine the problems' underlying causes, design change ideas, monitor progress, assess outcomes, and make adaptations as needed. These processes can help us make sense out of confusing challenges in turbulent times and make sure that we're on the right track.

In this issue, we also continue our focus on supporting your implementation of the recently revised Standards for Professional Learning. In the Voices section, you'll find the first installment of a new column, Networks at Work, that illustrates how Learning Forward's networks are applying the standards and supporting network members to implement them in their own contexts. The Tools section features a resource that outlines how educators in multiple roles share responsibility for implementing the standards and highlights what you need to know and where you can start. Elizabeth Foster's research column explains how the standards are visible in the latest professional learning research, and Through the Lens helps you consider how to apply standards-aligned strategies and lessons from this issue in your own work.

As you navigate your own challenges, we invite you to read archived issues of *The Learning Professional*, search professional learning tools, and access other Learning Forward resources at **learningforward.org**. If you have a question or a need that isn't addressed there, let us know what you'd like to see in future issues, webinars, and courses. We're all in these turbulent times together. ■

Suzanne Bouffard (suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org) is editor of *The Learning Professional*.

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HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

The Learning Professional is published six times a year to promote improvement in the quality of professional learning as a means to improve student learning in K-12 schools. Contributions from members and nonmembers of Learning Forward are welcome.

Manuscripts: Manuscripts and editorial mail should be sent to Christy Colclasure (christy.colclasure@learningforward.org). Learning Forward prefers to receive manuscripts by email. Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are provided at learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/write-for-us. Themes for upcoming issues of *The Learning Professional* are available at learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/write-for-us.

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Fax: 513-523-0638
email: office@learningforward.org
url: www.learningforward.org

THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL
ISSN 2476-194X

The Learning Professional is a benefit of membership in Learning Forward. $89 of annual membership covers a year's subscription to *The Learning Professional*. *The Learning Professional* is published bimonthly at the known office of publication at Learning Forward, 800 E. Campbell Road, Suite 224, Richardson, TX 75081. Periodicals postage paid at Dallas, TX 75260 and additional offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Learning Professional*, 800 E. Campbell Road, Suite 224, Richardson, TX 75081.

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The Learning Professional follows the guidelines set forth in the AP Stylebook. However, we defer to authors' preferences for terminology and capitalization with regard to race. We reserve the right to exclude any terms we consider to convey insult or harm.

INSPIRE. EXPRESS. ADVOCATE.

VOICES

WE'RE HERE FOR THE KIDS

Learning Forward is a proud supporter of the Here for the Kids campaign, which brings together families, educators, and community members to shine a light on how public schools are building bright futures for children. The past three years have demonstrated educators' commitment to helping children thrive despite unprecedented challenges, and this campaign encourages everyone to come together to support educators and schools.

The Learning First Alliance launched the campaign in October at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C. Elizabeth Foster, Learning Forward's vice president for research and standards, and Nader I. Twal, a columnist for *The Learning Professional*, spoke on behalf of Learning Forward and the field of professional learning.

To learn more about Here for the Kids and how you can get involved, visit **www.learningfirst.org/hereforthekids/**

#HerefortheKids

Frederick Brown

INVESTMENTS IN PRINCIPALS ARE INVESTMENTS IN TEACHERS

Strengthening school leaders to be supportive and highly effective is an important strategy for keeping strong teachers in our classrooms.

There's no doubt about it — this is a challenging time to be an educator. With the disruption of the pandemic, school safety concerns, political tensions about what teachers should teach, student trauma, and more, it's no wonder that teachers are reporting high levels of stress, burnout, and thoughts about leaving the profession.

Recent reports have presented contradictory conclusions about whether "teacher shortage" is the right phrase to describe what's happening in the teaching profession today. But what's clear is that our schools have an acute need to identify, hire, support, and retain more qualified teachers — especially teachers of color, whose numbers are far from representative of the students they serve.

More than half of schools in a recent nationally representative study reported that they are understaffed (Institute of Education Sciences, 2022). And while some studies suggest that large percentages of teachers did not follow through with their reported plans to leave the profession over the last year (Bleiberg & Kraft, 2022), we shouldn't assume those teachers are staying for long. Too many studies are finding that teachers are unhappy and overwhelmed (e.g. Hart Research, 2022; Steiner et al., 2022) — a fact that isn't good for anyone in schools, least of all for students.

The truth is that the teacher crisis is very real, but it's not new. We've known for many years that a crisis was looming, as fewer people have chosen the profession and enrolled in teacher education programs (McMurdock, 2022), likely for reasons such as low pay, stressful working conditions, and little public support, even before the pandemic. We can look back to previous research — as well as forward to emerging research — about the factors causing the crisis and how to address it.

In a prepandemic report, Learning Policy Institute researchers concluded that nearly two-thirds of the existing teacher shortage challenge could be attributed to attrition, driven by teachers' dissatisfaction with working conditions (Sutcher et al., 2019). Conversely, another study by that institute found that teachers are much more likely to stay in their schools when they feel supported (Podolsky et al., 2016).

In light of these findings, there are a number of factors we, as a field, need to address. But one stands out to me, because it is a necessary condition for all others: school leadership.

Logic suggests, and research confirms, that strengthening school leaders to be supportive and highly effective is an important strategy for keeping strong teachers in our classrooms. Leaders shape teachers' working conditions through the policies, structures, schedules, and other elements that they design and oversee. They set the tone and expectations for school climate and culture, which influence how adults and students interact and feel at school. They establish the conditions for high-quality professional learning and other forms of support that determine whether teachers' questions and needs are addressed and whether they have opportunities to keep learning and developing as professionals.

Likely for all these reasons, the Learning Policy Institute study mentioned earlier found that teachers value the support of a school leader even more than salary considerations. Teachers

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also stated that the opportunity to collaborate with colleagues and have input on decisions in their environments — factors that are strongly influenced by school leaders — were also very important.

HOW TO SUPPORT PRINCIPALS

Effective leaders who nurture and bring out the best in teachers are made, not born. The good news is we now know a great deal about how to develop and support effective school leaders.

Thanks to a major effort supported initially by The Wallace Foundation and researched extensively by RAND and Policy Studies Associates, we know that "principal pipelines" — systemic approaches to developing school leaders' knowledge and skills — are a comprehensive, feasible, and affordable way to develop and support effective principals (Gates et al., 2019).

The research finds that effective principal pipelines include the following elements (Aladjem et al., 2021):

- Rigorous job standards that specify what a principal needs to know and do, which inform not only job descriptions and expectations but the design of preparation programs that train and place principals;
- High-quality preservice training;
- Selective procedures for hiring principals and matching them to schools;
- Aligned on-the-job support and evaluation, especially for those new to the job;
- Leader tracking systems that provide accessible data and information to be used for matching principals to vacancies, considering the representation of leaders from different backgrounds, identifying priorities for professional learning and support, and more;
- A principal supervisor role refocused from administration to honing principals' instructional support skills; and
- Systems and capacity to support and sustain principal pipelines.

While we need a comprehensive approach to the entire pipeline, I want to call attention to a crucial part of the pipeline that is often overlooked: aligned on-the-job support and evaluation. These last few years have left building leaders feeling more isolated than ever, and principals need support in how to navigate all the challenges they're facing. As the Implementation standard of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning reminds us, that support for principals should include mentoring and ongoing coaching (Learning Forward, 2022). It should also include opportunities to be part of a learning community of principals sharing best practices and strategies, as the Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standard reminds us.

When school systems invest in professional learning and support for principals, as well as the other elements of principal pipelines, they are also investing in teachers. That's because well-prepared principals create solid foundations of support for the entire staff and school community. They also model the kind of resources and strategies that principals should implement for teachers.

Of course, principal pipelines should not and cannot be the only investments we make in addressing teachers' working conditions and promoting teacher retention. But they are an important part of a systemic approach to the teacher crisis facing our schools.

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SPEAKER SPOTLIGHT

Karen Pittman

SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY PROGRAMS ARE STRONGER TOGETHER

Collaboration can help us understand different strategies for helping students with learning, connecting, leading, and thriving.

Karen Pittman, renowned expert on youth development, will be a featured speaker at the 2022 Learning Forward Annual Conference on Dec. 6 in Nashville, Tennessee. Her Thought Leader session, "Learning is Social and Emotional and Inequitable," will address how alignment between schools and out-of-school time providers can reduce inequity and optimize learning and the role professional learning can play in strengthening those linkages.

Pittman co-founded the Forum for Youth Investment, where she was president and CEO until February 2021. She has held leadership positions at many youth development organizations and was a member of President Clinton's Crime Prevention Council. She has written three books, dozens of articles, and a longstanding column for the youth development publication *Youth Today*. She is currently a partner at Knowledge to Power Catalysts.

The Learning Professional asked Pittman to preview the themes of her Thought Leader session and share some insights about why and how professional learning leaders should leverage collaboration between school and out-of-school time settings. Questions and responses have been edited for publication.

Pre-K-12 schools and community-based youth programs have developed stronger relationships over the past few decades. Why is that, and why does it matter?

The walls between schools and community programs have been softening steadily over the last few years, fueled by three things: increased parental demand for extracurricular programming, increased local infrastructure and capacity for out-of-school time, and increased emphasis on social and emotional learning in schools, which is an area in which community programs have always excelled.

The pandemic created the potential for turning that evolution into a revolution. During COVID-related closures of school buildings, out-of-school-time became all the time (Pittman, 2020), and community-based programs responded in ways that demonstrated their real value in the broader learning and development ecosystem. Parents and educators got an opportunity to see that these programs are intentionally designed places, staffed with people who are trained and empowered to create relationships and interest-driven learning possibilities. That opens up more possibilities for school and out-of-school educators to collaborate and learn from one another.

How can educators in school and out-of-school time settings learn from one another?

Schools and out-of-school time settings can do much more to design authentic opportunities

for their staffs to not only see each other in action but sit together to deconstruct and reflect on what they have seen. This can help them understand different strategies for helping students with learning, connecting, leading, and thriving and open them up to new paths for optimizing learning. It can be challenging to find the time for this collaboration, but schools and community organizations should look for opportunities whenever they can. For example, summer is a natural time for shared programming that brings staff from these two worlds together.

Why is social and emotional learning one of the areas in which you recommend school and out-of-school time educators collaborate?

SEL is the bridge between "taught" and "caught" approaches to learning that epitomize the difference between schools and community youth programs (Pittman, 2022a).

SEL was originally introduced into schools through structured curricula to be taught by teachers at designated times and in explicit ways, where the end goal was to get SEL embedded fully in the school day and school culture. Youth programs, in contrast, focus on building the broader culture and embedded experiences. Students get naturally "caught" in the positive processes of social and emotional growth.

But these approaches aren't mutually exclusive, and they have gradually come to inform one another. The opportunity for alignment increased when community-based organizations began to introduce training and practices to make their natural learning opportunities more explicit. And conversely, school staff had to prioritize embedding SEL in everyday ways during the pandemic, focusing especially on building relationships, creating space for discussing feelings, and helping students manage emotions and behaviors.

Despite the growth of collaboration between schools and out-of-school time programs, challenges remain. What are some of the collaboration challenges you'll be discussing at the conference?

Collaboration is always challenging when there is a power imbalance, and the power imbalances between schools and community-based organizations are huge. Equally important, there are power struggles between and within local school systems, which makes it complicated for community organizations that are trying to partner with multiple schools.

Because schools have a lot of power — they have attendance requirements and traditional schedules, large budgets and staff, and defined academic priorities — we have a powerful public idea that associates learning with schooling. But learning is actually a much broader concept, and it occurs in many places outside of school buildings. Decades of research on the science of learning and development challenges the utility of our long-held assumptions that learning only happens at school.

When we consider this research, it should theoretically tip the scales toward the types of learning approaches used by many community programs. These approaches are relationship-based, interest-driven, personalized to young peoples' needs, and responsive to community needs.

But we have not yet reached the tipping point where schools realize the value of the more flexible community-based learning system and commit to strengthening it and learning from it. It will take public demand to reach the tipping point. Recognition from school-based educators is an important factor.

How can we improve professional learning to address the collaboration challenges?

The Harvard Business School has a formula for predicting the depth and durability of change an organization or system can support: C=DxVxP. **Change** is equal to the intensity of **demand** times the clarity of the **vision** times the specificity of the **plan**. Too often, professional learning focuses only on the plan, bringing in specific training, curricula, and practices for educators without first engaging them in deep discussions about the vision. We must rethink professional learning to make the changes that honor what we now know about learning and development, thriving, and structural inequalities.

Most importantly, professional learning needs to acknowledge the complexity of the jobs school and community educators have. Educators in all settings need to have foundational knowledge of child and youth development, a deep understanding of the essential elements needed to motivate authentic learning, and an awareness of how they can optimize these elements in the contexts where they work using proven practices. Engagement and achievement go together, regardless of the type of learning content and the setting (Pittman, 2022b). When educators understand how to bring those pieces together, it is possible for all students to thrive.

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Michelle Bowman

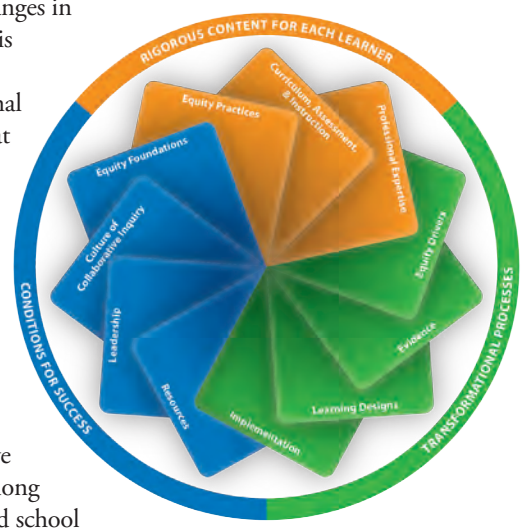
NETWORKS USE STANDARDS TO DRIVE CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Learning Forward networks exemplify continuous improvement as a necessary, systemic process that leads to changes in practice and organizational improvement.

Michelle Bowman (michelle.bowman@learningforward.org) is vice president, networks & continuous improvement at Learning Forward. This column highlights examples of how Learning Forward networks apply Standards for Professional Learning and offers lessons educators can apply in their own professional learning work.

Professional learning is all about continuous improvement. That's one of the reasons the latest iteration of Standards for Professional Learning is depicted in a circle: The visual reflects the cycles of continuous improvement embedded in many of the standards and essential for effective implementation (Learning Forward, 2022a).

Similarly, the professional learning networks that we lead exemplify continuous improvement as a necessary, systemic process that leads to changes in practice and organizational improvement. This is not a coincidence. Our network structures and processes are guided by Standards for Professional Learning and the research and best practices that informed them.



As part of our ongoing commitment to modeling and explaining the use of the standards, this column in *The Learning Professional* will highlight how Learning Forward networks embody and enact Standards for Professional Learning.

LEARNING THROUGH NETWORKS

Learning Forward networks are collaborative structures that build capacity and leadership among educators working at state/province, system, and school levels to create policies and practices for effective professional learning. Networks employ equity-centered improvement theories and practices. We leverage learning teams to design and implement professional learning interventions using disciplined inquiry and problem-solving that lead to improved practice through continuous improvement.

Network teams use processes that include:

- Understanding the context, including the system that produces inequitable outcomes and the opportunities and assets of the community to which the system belongs, and identifying problems of practice to target;
- Developing hypotheses for addressing the problems of practice, based on an equity-centered working theory of improvement, and designing a plan to test those hypotheses using high-quality learning content and strategies;
- Executing a test of the hypotheses and collecting data to measure how the test was implemented and whether improvements occurred;
- Analyzing the data to determine whether the actions and outcomes that occurred were consistent with or deviated from what was predicted; and
- Deciding what to do next based on what was learned.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN OHIO

Here is an example of how Learning Forward's networks team is helping facilitate standards-aligned continuous improvement in Ohio. In collaboration with the Ohio Department of Education's Office of Approaches to Teaching and Professional Learning, the Learning Forward networks team supports the state literacy network. The network's problem of practice arose after recently enacted state legislation provided new guidelines centered on best practices in literacy

instruction, screening, intervention, and remediation procedures, and a certification process reflected in dyslexia support laws. The problem: Not all districts and schools have the tools needed to implement the dyslexia support described in the law.

To address this, all districts and schools will be equipped to meet the literacy needs of all learners they serve and provide early prevention and intervention "for children with dyslexia and children displaying dyslexic characteristics and tendencies using structured literacy" (Ohio Department of Education, 2022).

Organized into three teams, network participants articulated three goals for developing and testing protocols or tools that districts can use to implement requirements in the law. Using continuous improvement cycles, teams will address their defined problems by developing, testing, and refining promising solutions or change ideas specific to their local context. The teams use data to assess whether they are making progress toward their targeted outcomes.

In using continuous improvement cycles, the network is applying Standards for Professional Learning in multiple ways. First, state education agency leaders in the network are attending to critical actions consistent with the key roles and responsibilities outlined in *Action Guide for the State Commissioner/Minister of Education* (Learning Forward, 2022b), a resource designed to help state-level leaders with standards implementation. For example, as they take actions to inform talent development initiatives, the leaders are committed to "advocat[e] for inclusive learning practices for each learner in any learning environment within the system" (Learning Forward, 2022b, p. 5).

Second, the literacy network team members' work prioritizes the **Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction standard**, which specifies that effective professional learning incorporates high-quality curriculum and instructional materials, supports assessment of student learning, and develops educators' understanding and implementation of curriculum. The protocols and tools they are developing will help educators with "building their capacity to understand curriculum and instructional materials, aligned assessments of and for learning, and teaching strategies in the classrooms they influence or lead," as outlined in the standard (Learning Forward, 2022a, p. 22).

It's important to note that the standards are intentionally connected to one another, so the work the network is doing to address the **Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction standard** also addresses other standards. For example, the **Equity Practices standard** is closely related, as it guides professional learning leaders to address how they will support educators to evaluate, learn, and implement instructional materials "in ways that are culturally relevant and accessible to every learner" (Learning Forward, 2022a, p. 23).

Third, the **Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standard** clearly emerges throughout the work of this literacy network. As outlined in the standard, network members "collaborate for continuous improvement and support their colleagues' ongoing learning and development" and "simultaneously develop individual and collective knowledge and expertise and commit to collective responsibility so together they can better meet student needs" (Learning Forward, 2022a, p. 60). This standard is at the heart of all of our networks because continuous improvement takes collaboration and shared learning.

STANDARDS AT THE CORE

Standards for Professional Learning help Learning Forward networks cultivate systems of high-quality professional learning so that educators advance their knowledge, skills, beliefs, and practice, leading to improvement in outcomes for students. Although each network is uniquely tailored to the context and problems of practice, the standards are a throughline in all of them. They drive the continuous improvement processes and structures we facilitate and also become incorporated into the professional learning strategies network members develop for the educators they serve.

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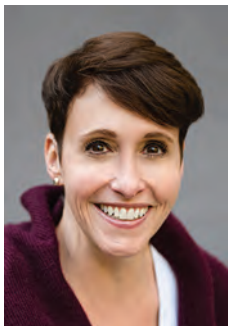

Jennifer Abrams

MODEL THE WAY TO NAVIGATE DIFFICULT TOPICS

Many of us adults have said that it would be terribly hard to be a young person these days, with wildfires and floods, political polarization, violence in our streets, war in Ukraine, civil rights being questioned and denied to many citizens, and one medical challenge on the heels of another. As students navigate these challenges and so many others, they need educators to support them to think about, discuss, and take action on difficult topics. That requires helping them develop skills such as self-awareness and awareness of others, critical thinking, and conflict resolution.

Students notice how we handle our emotions, express ourselves, and respond to difficult situations. The way we interact with each other matters.

As educators, we teach these skills in multiple ways. Not only do we teach them through explicit instruction and discussions in classrooms, but also in how we behave and what we model as we navigate these challenges ourselves. Students notice how we handle our emotions, express ourselves, and respond to difficult situations. The way we interact with each other matters, for our students' sake as well as our own and our colleagues'.

We can grow our own skills and support students' skills by focusing on three behaviors.

1. Do the inner work to contribute to the whole.

We must recognize that we are part of a community and have a responsibility to that community. Behaving in mutually respectful ways that honor the worth and dignity of all will assist us in navigating the tensions we are seeing and living with in school and beyond. That begins with listening. Fortunately, we can grow our ability to actively listen by paraphrasing, asking questions others want to answer, and offering our perspectives in ways that acknowledge others' perspectives and can be heard openly and honestly.

2. Work with cognitive conflict.

We can show students how to work out disagreements with empathy and respect. I find it helpful to use a distinction made by leadership expert Timothy R. Clark (2020): intellectual friction versus social friction. Decreasing social friction helps us feel safe, take risks, and share vulnerabilities. In contrast, increasing intellectual friction supports us to engage in discussions focused on ideas. With less social friction and more intellectual friction, we can stretch our thinking, hear new perspectives, and challenge ourselves to come up with new and innovative solutions. And when we engage in this type of encouraging and supportive conversation, we

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Baruti K. Kafele

BLACK HISTORY IS AMERICAN HISTORY — AND IT MATTERS

"Expose me to my history because I need to know who I am historically." This is the sentiment of Black children all across the U.S. Some students are able to articulate it, but many others simply realize that there is something missing in their classrooms. They know that learning lacks relevance and relatability to their lives, but they can't quite put their fingers on why. It is incumbent upon us as educators to understand the why — and address the problem.

In so many classrooms, Black students are physically present but instruction is delivered in a way that renders them invisible. The historical record of people who look like them is missing from curriculum and instruction. So is the connection of content to their lives and cultures. As a result, teachers and administrators are delivering instruction that doesn't speak to them or their reality.

This is a longstanding problem, and one that has affected me personally. I spent three of my high school years as one of only five Black students in a school of 2,000. One hundred percent of the staff was white. I knew I didn't belong after the first day of classes, and I felt completely invisible for the rest of my time there. I now know that was because there was nothing relevant to my experience as a Black student, not in the classroom and not in the afternoons as a student athlete. But, at the time, I was one of the many young people of color in this country who couldn't pinpoint the problem.

I now know that exposure to Black history in school would have been a game-changer for me. It would be a game-changer for Black children across America today. Millions of Black children go through a K-12 education in which their history is marginalized, caricaturized, distorted, or completely omitted. So often, the richness of Black history is reduced to biographies of famous entertainers and athletes or "famous firsts." This approach is woefully inadequate.

We must take the African American component of American history out of the margins and bring it into an honest and truthful account of history. The story of Black people in America must be told fully and truthfully, as it unfolded from our arrival in 1619 all the way to the present day.

Black children need access to their collective historical experience. And they aren't the only ones who need exposure to the fullness of Black history. White children and other non-Black children need that knowledge in equal measure. Because the vast history of Black people in America is unknown to the masses, many non-Black people look at Black people as strangers in their own country. They know Black people only as athletes and entertainers or see them through the lens of the nightly newscast's negative depictions, not as the individuals we are, born from the rich, diverse communities in which we develop.

I don't have to tell you that this is difficult content to teach. With all there is to learn about African American history and Black people in America, the experience of learning it is not always going to be comfortable for teachers or students. The history of Black people in America, despite its triumphs over the past four centuries, is a painful narrative. Because it is deeply rooted

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If we continue failing to prepare our educators to teach the fullness of history, we will continue failing all our children.

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DISTRICT PERSPECTIVE

Nader I. Twal

'WHERE ARE THE BLACK SCIENTISTS?' MY SON ASKED

If we are going to offer counter-narratives that challenge the single story that minimizes the contributions of minoritized communities, we need to do so overtly and with deliberate intention.

During a recent car ride, my youngest son, who is African American, casually said, "Mommy, white people are better than Black people." My wife's heart dropped as she mustered a response. "Why would you say that, honey?" she asked him. Without missing a beat, our son said, "Because there are more of them than Black people."

His two biracial older brothers, who are intensely protective of him, chimed in immediately. "But think about all of the amazing Black people in our lives, like our friends, and all of the people we have learned about from history!" Again, without missing a beat, our youngest said, "But who are the Black scientists? I want to be a scientist. Are there Black scientists? Where are they?" The car fell silent as everyone bore the weight of his questions.

As a foster-to-adopt family who worked fiercely to reunify our youngest with his birth family and now fiercely love him as his forever family, we take the responsibility to center his Blackness as a serious one.

His identity development needs to be deliberate on our part. So we buy books by African Americans, enrolled our kids in a public school where Black children make up a significant percentage of students and are outnumbered only by Latinx students, and stay connected to his birth family and their traditions. But our efforts are outnumbered by the messages inundating his young mind about the inferiority of Black people. As we probed more deeply, our son began to reveal that he feels invisible because he doesn't see himself in the world around him, despite our best efforts.

One of the reasons is the omission of Black excellence from dominant narratives, including those taught in school books. From these books, our son has heard about some Black changemakers from history like Martin Luther King Jr. and George Washington Carver. But he hasn't heard about astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson or astronaut Jessica Watkins or inventor Lonnie Johnson or so many other Black innovators who are changing the world right now.

As a result, he feels like Black people are a side note, not part of the main story of society. Even though he knows he is loved at home and at school — and would articulate that to anyone who asks — he feels unseen. And I know he is not the only one.

This issue of *The Learning Professional* focuses on teaching during difficult times, and the teaching that feels most pressing in this moment is the teaching we have to do with adults about centering all students' identities and ensuring that all people — especially those who have been historically marginalized — feel seen.

One place to start is with the people who determine what gets taught and how. When teachers and administrators walk into schools, they are typically greeted with materials from publishers who have not prioritized diversity. This includes not only curriculum materials, but

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also trade books used for independent and group reading. When the Becker Friedman Institute at the University of Chicago examined representation in more than 1,000 award-winning children's books, they found that, in mainstream books, the percentage of light-skinned people actually increased over the last two decades (Adukia et al., 2021), despite a growing recognition of the importance of representation. (Books in the diversity collection — those that were selected for awards based on their diverse representation — depicted more characters of color.) Furthermore, children in these texts were more likely to have light skin than adults in the same books.

We need to acknowledge that the gap in reading materials about darker skinned people, especially children, exists, and we need to actively work to redress it. We need to work with publishers to center these narratives, rather than relegating them to footnotes or margins. We need to partner with and better equip our librarians and educators to fill these gaps in their curriculum while publishers catch up. If we are going to offer counternarratives that challenge the single story that minimizes the contributions of minoritized communities, we need to do so overtly and with deliberate intention.

Every one of us needs to do this work. As an educator myself, I know I need to do better, even though I think that I am already trying my best. Before we can teach our students, we may need to admit that we, too, have been consumers of these texts and may have internalized the subtle messages hidden in their pages. Until we do, I wonder how many other children of color will find themselves asking the same question as my son. But if we do our jobs well, students like him will never have to ask, "Where are the Black scientists?" because they will be surrounded by images and examples of such excellence wherever they turn.

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model for students the potential to move into new territory and make progress on difficult issues.

3. Speak up thoughtfully.

We need to show students that we can speak up when we see a change that could be helpful and show that it's important to do so with respect, tact, and consideration. We can do that by modeling the sharing of productive ideas when asked for feedback, using words and messages that are solution-oriented and humane, and choosing to speak up only when we are ready to do so thoughtfully and constructively. As communication expert Liz Fosslien writes, we can proofread comments before speaking them to be authentic yet mindful of our language so we can be heard (Fosslien & Duffy, 2019).

To reflect on whether we are modeling these skills, it's helpful to ask ourselves:

- Am I actively working to word my disagreements skillfully and considerately?
- Am I growing my ability to be uncomfortable with challenging topics to explore what is hidden?
- Am I taking full responsibility for managing my emotional responses?
- Am I actively working to improve my ability to remain resourceful in moments of tension?

We have agency over how we communicate and behave around emotionally heated topics. Our words in all these situations are ours to craft, model, and teach. Asking, "How might I communicate my perspective humanely in a kind, supportive, and nonaggressive manner?" is a collective responsibility for us all. The students are watching.

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in racism, it can be quite difficult for non-Black people, especially white people, to consider and discuss. But this discomfort is exactly what makes it important.

School districts — including professional learning leaders — must develop the courage and the skills to engage in difficult conversations about race, rooted in history. We can't meaningfully engage in conversations about eliminating racism without a thorough examination and understanding of the history that got us here. And we can't truly prepare our teachers to educate students without having those difficult conversations about race — regardless of the skin color of the students they teach.

Because we're not used to having those conversations, it will take support and patience to learn how to have them. We must make this learning for educators a priority. If we continue failing to prepare our educators to teach the fullness of history, we will continue failing all our children. We will continue to graduate students — Black and non-Black — who do not recognize the fullness of who Black people are.

This work is a moral imperative, and we can't wait any longer to do it. The children of America are sitting in our classrooms, looking to us and wondering about that thing that's missing, the thing they can't put their fingers on, but they can feel deep down. ■

EXAMINE. STUDY. UNDERSTAND.

RESEARCH

THE BENEFITS OF TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES

Rates of student trauma and stress are up over the last few years. Trauma-informed practices can help educators teach and students learn, research suggests. Elizabeth Foster reviews two recent studies and considers their implications for professional learning in her Research Review column on p. 20.

RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICES HELP EDUCATORS, STUDY FINDS

▶ THE STUDY

MacLochlainn, J., Kirby, K., McFadden, P., & Mallett, J. (2022, January 5). An evaluation of whole-school trauma-informed training intervention among post-primary school personnel: A mixed methods study. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma, 15*, 925-941. doi.org/10.1007/s40653-021-00432-3

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Attending to the mental health of everyone in schools is critically important, especially now. According to a recent Gallup poll, "More than four in 10 K-12 workers in the U.S. (44%) say they 'always' or 'very often' feel burned out at work." Notably, "within the K-12 employee population, teachers are the most burned out, at 52%" (Marken, 2022). And according to a recent survey of U.S. principals, assistant principals, and high school students by the National Association of Secondary School Principals, about three-fourths of school leaders (73%) and students (74%) reported that they needed help with their mental or emotional health last year (NASSP, 2022).

In addition, there is increased discussion since the start of the pandemic among educators at all levels about how adverse childhood experiences impact teaching and learning. Childhood stress can cause students to have challenges with executive functioning and emotional regulation, impulsivity, communication, and attention — all of which have an impact on classroom behavior and relationships. (See more about trauma's impact on learning in "What to do when the kids aren't alright" on p. 34 of this issue.) Recent heightened attention to equity issues has underscored the need to address stress and trauma to ensure that all students' social and emotional needs are met so that all students can succeed in school.

In this context, it is important to look to the evidence about whether and how investments in professional learning designed to address and support students' and educators' social and emotional health lead to positive results. One such approach is called trauma-informed practice. Trauma-informed practice takes the approach that students' challenging behaviors could be due to previous or ongoing trauma and therefore focuses on the student's need for support, rather than attributing the behavior to defiance or disrespect and responding with discipline or exclusion.

Research suggests that building knowledge and understanding about trauma can improve educators' relationships with students, increase the use of positive approaches to student behavior and learning, and potentially reduce teachers' stress and burnout.

A recent study yields promising findings about how professional learning that addresses educator awareness about trauma as well as trauma-informed approaches can positively impact educator outcomes with regard to supporting students, burnout, and self-efficacy.

METHODOLOGY

MacLochlainn et al. researched a whole-school trauma-informed program in Northern Ireland called the Compassionate Schools approach. The Compassionate Schools program is

grounded in growing evidence about the positive effects on students and educators who engage with trauma-informed practices and is supported by a free handbook designed to be integrated with existing curricula. The goals of the whole-school program are to improve social and emotional learning, improve academic skills of students, and increase the well-being of staff. The intervention studied was a two-day professional learning focused on an introduction to the program, information about how trauma impacts a child's ability to learn, the goals of a trauma-informed approach, self-care guidance for teaching staff, trauma-informed classroom strategies, and the importance of community engagement. The professional learning also included a discussion of how teacher-student interactions that reflect compassion and empathy can increase student resiliency.

The research questions were:

1. Would a two-day professional learning in trauma-informed approaches change school personnel attitudes related to trauma-informed care, and would any changes made be maintained at a six-month follow-up?
2. Would the professional learning influence school personnel's levels of compassion fatigue, burnout, and secondary traumatic stress at a six-month follow-up?

This research compared attitudes and compassion fatigue among 216 educators using two scales: the Attitudes Related to Trauma-Informed Care (ARTIC) and the Professional Quality of Life (Pro-QoL). Quantitative data from the scales was augmented by qualitative data from focus groups.

The Compassionate Schools program is grounded in growing evidence about the positive effects on students and educators who engage with trauma-informed practices.

The researchers note that this is the first study of a whole-school trauma-informed program to use a control group in the research design, adding to the rigor of the study and the value of the findings. Ninety-eight educators participated in the professional learning, while the 118 in the comparison group were put on a waitlist to engage in the professional learning post-study. Researchers use this waitlist control group strategy when it is considered ethically important to not deny one group of educators the professional learning about valuable knowledge and skills. The researchers also surveyed both the 98 participants and the control group six months after the professional learning to determine if any changes were maintained over time.

SURVEY RESULTS

The MacLochlainn research found that the program improved educators' attitudes toward trauma-impacted students and resulted in a decrease in educator burnout among those who participated. These effects lasted when researchers surveyed the educators six months later.

The original participants showed significant positive improvement in overall scores and all subscale scores over three administrations of the ARTIC scale, which is used to assess attitudes among school staff about working with trauma-impacted individuals, including readiness to implement trauma-informed practices, potential barriers, and attitudinal change over time. The validated instrument includes Likert-scale items such as "students are doing the best they can with the skills they have" and "each day is uniquely stressful in this job."

The positive changes remained six months after the workshop, with participants noting that they were now more aware of the profound impact trauma can have on students and a belief that the training had assisted them in their ability to deal with "dysregulation in the classroom." The research also found that educators in the intervention group experienced a slight reduction in burnout immediately after the professional learning and maintained that improvement six months out.

FOCUS GROUP FINDINGS

Seventeen members of the teaching staff also participated in focus groups about their experiences with the Compassionate Schools program. Semistructured conversations invited the educators to talk about work-related changes following the professional learning, as well as about personal growth, barriers related to implementing the trauma-informed framework and practices, and self-care. Overall, the focus groups corroborated the quantitative evidence from the surveys, revealing that "the trauma-informed CS training workshop had a positive effect on teaching staff perspectives, attitudes, and behaviours, which led teachers to adapt their roles

A MINDFUL APPROACH TO TEACHER BURNOUT

Another recent study about a trauma-informed program in Ontario, Canada, is a good complement to the MacLochlainn study and highlights a range of ways to infuse trauma-informed practices into classroom practice. Kim et al. (2021) conducted a mixed method study of how a two-year trauma-informed, mindfulness-based program impacted educators' attitudes and burnout levels.

The Kim study looked at 112 educators over three years: 41 in the comparison group and 71 educators implementing a mindfulness and social and emotional learning curriculum called MindUP. The professional learning included a half-day focused on trauma-informed practices and two full days focused on the MindUP curriculum. The curriculum includes 15 teacher-led lessons along with four units about neuroscience, mindful awareness, and social and emotional learning. A core practice of the curriculum is a mindful breathing exercise three times a day.

As in the MacLochlainn study, the researchers administered the ARTIC scale to educators. They also had educators complete the Maslach Burnout Inventory, which includes items such as, "I deal very effectively with the problems of my students." Researchers conducted 17 focus groups across the three years as well.

The overall ARTIC scores significantly increased for educators in the participant groups, even after the educators rated themselves fairly highly on the ARTIC scale before the program started. There were also significant improvements on the self-efficacy items among educators who participated for two years. There were some subscales with no statistically significant changes over the course of the study.

The focus group responses revealed the value of the new knowledge about how trauma can show up in students and classrooms. Educators made comments like, "Sometimes, something so small that normally wouldn't bother a child makes this particular child just snap. From that training, you realize there's so much going on. … It changes how you approach everything."

The researchers summarized the focus group data by saying, "Taking this approach has allowed educators to be more 'understanding and patient,' 'forgiving,' and 'compassionate.' " Teachers observed that students' breathing breaks and mindful pauses and behaviors resulted in improved listening skills, emotional self-regulation, and classroom behaviors.

The study found that the curriculum had a positive impact on the teachers as well. Improvements were especially noticeable among teachers who had participated for two years. One teacher said, "It's not just them that needs the brain break, it's me. That has really changed for me as a teacher, for getting a handle on my own frustrations that are inevitable in teaching when you are in a room full of kids with interruptions."

Another educator expressed the value of slowing down the pace of the classroom with mindfulness breaks: "That's time I need to spend because I'm going to gain it back later with more productive work."

within the classroom to a more trauma-informed, compassionate approach."

More specifically, four themes emerged from the focus groups:

Challenges: Among the challenges described by focus group participants were the increasing pressures related to getting results as measured by grades and percentages while working hard to accommodate trauma-related student behaviors and the resulting outcomes. Educators also commented about the need for more support from system leaders in implementing the new approaches to behavior management.

Self-care: Educators said that more support from leadership would be helpful as teachers tried to balance self-care with classroom and other duties.

Outreach: Educators said that students would benefit from more information about the Compassionate Schools program as well as in the related behaviors to build a common understanding in classrooms. Some educators said that every person in the school should participate in the program; others expressed a desire to have families and community members engaged as well.

Role adaption: Teachers said that they were identifying more trauma-impacted students based on an increased awareness of how that might look in the classroom. They noted that, in addition to a change in attitude, they could see the need to adapt previous approaches, pausing to assess student behavior in a holistic way, and consider alternative ways of engaging or reacting.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

It is critical, especially now, to support educators' social and emotional health and their feelings about being able to be successful in their classrooms and their relationships with students. Unrecognized trauma-related behaviors can be overwhelming to students and teachers alike, exacerbated by a lack of understanding and a limited toolbox of helpful strategies and practices.

This study is relatively small but is clear about how a focused workshop can change educators' knowledge and attitudes about students impacted by trauma as well as trauma-informed schools and practices. Although the professional learning being studied is short in duration (a two-day intensive workshop), the pre- and post-workshop data show that it had a significant and lasting positive effect on attitudes related to trauma-informed care.

These findings support the idea that intensive workshops have their place in

a comprehensive approach to improving teaching through professional learning. However, the focus groups also surfaced that the teachers who had been through the short workshop wanted more opportunities to learn about trauma-informed practices and strategies.

As the **Learning Designs** standard of the Standards for Professional Learning notes, the duration and approach of the professional learning may need to be expanded to address that emerging need as well as a newly recognized need to change attitudes about trauma-informed practices among students, family and community members, and leaders. Other research suggests more intensive and long-lasting interventions hold promise. For example, Kim et al. (2021) conducted a mixed method study of a two-year intervention that combined trauma-informed practice with a mindfulness-based program for educators and students and found that it improved educators' attitudes and reduced burnout levels. (See p. 22.)

Building knowledge and skills among educators to recognize and respond to trauma-related student behaviors addresses key aspects of the **Equity Practices** standard: "honoring all aspects of identity students bring to the school" and "deepening their understanding of who their students are and how their life experiences and identities impact what they need at school" (Learning Forward, 2022). It can be challenging to understand what it means to honor students' identities and understand their life experiences in a classroom setting. Studies that provide detail about how programs and practices help achieve this aspiration in the Equity Practices standard and share the impact on teacher attitudes and practices can be a valuable starting point for educators seeking to better support all students.

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DATA POINTS

$60 MILLION TO ADDRESS TEACHER SHORTAGES

The U.S. Department of Education has awarded more than $60 million to address teacher shortages and help ensure long-term investments in teacher pathways and development programs. "Now more than ever, we are supporting teacher preparation and development programs that provide educators with meaningful, relevant, and evidence-based strategies for promoting student success and social and emotional well-being," said U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona.
bit.ly/3CuHF7O

53% OF SCHOOLS ARE UNDERSTAFFED — EVEN FOR COACHES

The U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences released data in September showing that 53% of U.S. schools surveyed reported being understaffed this year. Special education teachers (65%) and transportation staff (59%) were the most understaffed positions, but teachers of STEM subjects and foreign language also had high rates of vacancies. As of August, 24% of surveyed schools reported difficulty filling coaching positions, and an additional 33% found it somewhat difficult. In every region, the top two reasons cited for shortages were too few applicants overall and too few qualified candidates in particular.
ies.ed.gov/schoolsurvey/spp/

7- POINT DECREASE IN MATH TEST SCORES

For the first time in the 50-year history of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as "the nation's report card," there was a statistically significant decline in 9-year-olds' reading and math scores from 2020 to 2022. Average scores declined seven points in math and five points in reading. Declines were steepest for Black and Brown students and for students who were already struggling academically, but students of all backgrounds and abilities lost ground. In a commentary, Frederick Brown, Learning Forward's president and CEO, noted that professional learning can help educators at all levels address those gaps and change the troubling trends. "The declines in NAEP scores make clear that we are in a situation we've never seen before and that teachers have an array of new challenges," Brown wrote. "In this context, it is clear that access to high-quality professional learning for all educators is an urgent equity issue."
bit.ly/3CbwZcC

7- YEAR PROJECT SUPPORTS EQUITY-MINDED LEADERSHIP

The Wallace Foundation — working with the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Council of the Great City Schools and the National Urban League — launched a novel effort to see if their districts, especially those serving high-need communities, could use the Every Student Succeeds Act to promote more effective and equity-minded school principals. A newly released report on the seven-year endeavor details the results, including state policy ideas and programs. Results included the creation of new collaborative professional learning for principals, the development of equity leadership learning modules for principal preparation providers, and generating new resources for the field about fostering equity-minded leadership.
bit.ly/3RD8ATb

58% OF TEACHERS OF COLOR PRIORITIZE STUDENT LOAN FORGIVENESS

A recent report from RAND's 2022 State of the American Teacher survey examined how to address the need for greater racial and ethnic diversity of the teacher workforce. The most popular strategy for recruiting more teachers of color was student loan forgiveness or service scholarships to make becoming a teacher more affordable, endorsed by 67% of Black teachers, 58% of all teachers of color, and 79% of administrators surveyed or interviewed. Expanding teacher preparation programs at minority-serving institutions was popular with teachers, while grow-your-own programs were popular with administrators. For hiring and retention strategies, teachers ranked increasing pay as the most important strategy, while bonuses for working in high-needs schools were popular with administrators. Other strategies popular with both groups were allowing licensure reciprocity across states and partnering with diverse teacher preparation programs.
www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-6.html

INFORM. ENGAGE. IMMERSE.

FOCUS

TEACHING IN TURBULENT TIMES

NAVIGATE ROUGH WATERS WITH PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

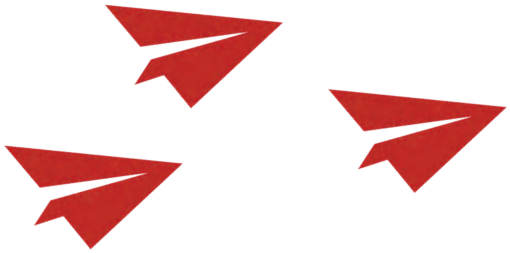
With student needs evolving rapidly and new challenges erupting constantly, professional learning plays a critical role for everyone in schools. As the authors in this issue's Focus section show us, timely, high-quality professional learning can support educators as they navigate a range of challenges and controversies with skill, sensitivity, and resilience.

LEARNING TO TEACH CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES: A PATH FORWARD

BY JUDITH L. PACE

Dealing with controversial issues is one of the most important tasks teachers perform. At the same time, we must acknowledge that today, fear of backlash for addressing "contentious, politicized topics" contributes significantly to educator stress (Woo et al., 2022). A widespread "conflict campaign," a right-wing movement attacking curriculum that addresses gender and sexuality, racial injustice, and other subjects related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (Pollock & Rogers, 2022), has generated laws in 17 states and 100-plus pending bills that censor teaching. Teachers confront a real dilemma as they weigh their commitment to educational purposes versus protection for themselves, their students, and their schools.

As a nation and a world community, we are facing unprecedented attacks on democracy and human rights, consequences of a global pandemic, and environmental



devastation caused by climate change, along with other crises. Hope for the future depends on cultivating an informed, concerned, and engaged democratic citizenry. That means educating young people who discern facts from fake news; think critically about local, national, and global issues; and deliberate on pressing questions about how to live in a multiracial democratic society. A powerful way to achieve this fundamental purpose is through a methodology called teaching controversial issues, which is supported by research and advocated all over the world (Kerr & Huddleston, 2015; Pace, 2021a).

I conducted an international research project focused on how four teacher educators prepared their preservice teachers for teaching controversial (and often sensitive) issues in history, citizenship, and social studies classes. My findings from Northern Ireland, England, and the U.S. help us address the paradox of urgency and anxiety around teaching controversial issues. But first, a few core concepts and research findings are essential for understanding what teaching controversial issues is all about and why it is so important to develop capability in this methodology.

WHAT DOES TEACHING CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES INVOLVE AND WHY IS IT CRUCIAL?

Teaching controversial issues through classroom discussion is considered a cornerstone of democratic education (Hess & McAvoy, 2015). Contrary to public opinion, it is the antithesis of indoctrination. It engages students in examining significant questions from multiple viewpoints, weighing evidence from legitimate sources, deliberating on answers to those questions, and forming their own conclusions.

Controversial issues are different from controversial topics (Ho et al., 2017). The latter refer to broad subjects that some stakeholders oppose being taught in schools, such as gender identity and white privilege. Controversial issues are important questions under public debate related to politics, history, and other subjects. They are considered open if currently debated, settled if they were once controversial but are no longer debated, or tipping if they are moving from open to settled or vice versa (see Hess, 2009). Deciding the status of controversial questions is vital because that will help determine how to approach them in the classroom.

Open controversial issues include:

- Should vaccination be required in schools?
- What are the best technologies for stopping climate change?
- Should SCOTUS be reformed through expansion and/or term limits?

Settled controversial issues include:

- Do humans contribute to climate change?
- Do humans share a common ancestor with apes?
- Should women have the right to vote?

Discussion of open controversial issues in an open classroom climate, where students feel free to disagree with the teacher and their peers, is crucial for several reasons. Research finds that it benefits students and society by increasing political knowledge, engagement, and efficacy (Hess & McAvoy, 2015; Torney-Purta et al., 2001). It is a powerful vehicle for developing civic reasoning and discourse in all subjects and an entry point to media literacy and inclusion of historically marginalized perspectives. Students find exploring issues and exchanging views with their peers engaging and meaningful. Amid polarization, echo chambers, and vitriolic political discourse, young people need classroom experiences to learn how to communicate respectfully across differences.

Unequal access to this democratic learning opportunity remains a serious concern (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Junco, 2018). Students privileged by socioeconomic status, race, and high-track classes have greater access to discussion of issues than students of color, new to the U.S., or from low-income families (Kahne & Middaugh, 2008). Discussion of controversial issues happens less frequently in racially pluralistic schools than racially homogenous ones (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Levine, 2015).

HOW SHOULD EDUCATORS APPROACH CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES?

School leaders and the teachers they support can do something about this problem by cultivating the understandings and skills involved in

using a research-based methodology (Journell, 2022). That methodology includes creating a supportive classroom environment, selecting and framing authentic issues, and choosing valid sources and dialogic pedagogies that involve students in inquiry and discussion (Hahn, 1998).

I conducted a qualitative study that explored how four teacher educators, working at universities in Northern Ireland, England, and the Midwestern U.S., prepared their preservice teachers to take up controversial issues in social studies, history, and citizenship classes. My book, *Hard Questions: Learning to Teach Controversial Issues* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), tells the stories of these brilliant teacher educators and courageous student teachers who took up what they learned in their own classrooms. A key finding was that teacher educators acknowledged the anxieties their students had about controversial issues and provided concrete strategies for containing the risks they feared.

I developed a framework based on my cross-national research (Pace, 2019, 2021a, 2021b) and supported by a prizewinning study conducted by Diana Hess and Paula McAvoy (2015). The Teaching Controversial Issues Framework for Reflective Practice represents an approach I call "contained risk-taking," which encourages examining and discussing controversial issues while employing strategies that proactively address the risks that concern educators. When professional learning leaders help educators understand and use the framework, leaders and teachers can become more comfortable with facilitating classroom discussions and better prepared to respond to families and other educators about what they are doing and why.

I organized the framework around the following eight elements.

1. Cultivate a supportive environment.

Teachers create a classroom culture of trust and respect in which diverse identities are affirmed. They spend time building a sense of belonging through individual affirmation, community building, warmth, and humor. Their classes continually practice norms such as active listening, respectful dissent, open-mindedness, and evaluation of knowledge sources. Tools such as norms and sentence frames help students learn how to exchange ideas across differences. Collaborative learning is a key goal.

2. Select authentic issues.

Teachers thoughtfully select open issues appropriate for their curriculum and students and frame them as questions to encourage inquiry and discussion of diverse perspectives. The sequencing of issues should progress from cooler to hotter. For example, teachers might start off with, "Should the voting age be lowered to 16?" and move to, "Should vaccinations and masks be mandated?" Controversies that are empirically settled, such as the scope of the Holocaust or the legitimacy of the 2020 presidential election, should NOT be examined as open controversial issues.

3. Prepare thoroughly.

Careful and mindful lesson planning is essential. Teachers deepen their content knowledge on the issues they teach and related content to develop a robust purpose, rationale, and goals for lessons. They create developmentally appropriate curriculum based on knowing their students well. They also understand their school communities and take stakeholders' perspectives into consideration when anticipating possible reactions to their lessons.

4. Choose resources and pedagogies.

Teachers select creative resources to stimulate thinking and provide entry points to discussion. They choose pedagogical approaches, such as structured discussion activities, that allow all voices to be heard and that align with the issues being explored and their students' identities. If the issue is highly charged and may make students from specific communities feel vulnerable, teachers use pedagogies aimed at surfacing reactions and understanding different perspectives. If the issue does not hit so close to home, more immersive pedagogies such as role play are appropriate. Teachers should avoid deliberations on questions that set up a false equivalence that normalizes offensive or misinformed viewpoints.

5. Think through teacher stance and roles.

Teachers reflect on their own positions on the issues they teach. They think about the roles they adopt during discussion (for example, advocate or devil's advocate) to further students' thinking. Past research shows that teachers can be transparent about their own political views in class while fostering critical examination of competing perspectives and encouraging students to formulate their own positions. But in this intensely politicized climate, teachers should think hard about the purposes behind disclosing their own specific views and the potential risks before doing so. That said, teachers must stand up for civil and human rights.

6. Guide discussion.

Teachers use questioning, discussion formats, and protocols to guide discussions. There are many different discussion models and strategies available, such as Socratic seminar, structured academic controversy, philosophical chairs, and town hall. Teachers facilitate exchanges among students rather than defaulting to teacher-student recitation-style interactions. They teach skills, such as preparation with assigned texts, active listening, and building on others' ideas to work toward high-quality discussions. Teachers attend to power dynamics and work toward equity among students.

7. Communicate proactively.

Teachers are ready to communicate their rationales behind teaching controversial issues and the methods they use to parents and administrators in advance. They explain that discussing controversial issues involves research-based practices that promote independent thinking, not indoctrination. Teachers let students know the controversial issues they will be studying.

8. Addressing emotions.

Teachers balance affective and intellectual engagement. They provide a space to process emotions, use de-escalation techniques when needed, and get students to think metacognitively about emotionally entrenched perspectives and social divisions. Teachers understand that emotions play a significant role in learning. They are careful not to demonize or alienate students while providing emotional stability when discussions get charged.

Each of these elements is a ripe area for professional learning, and resources can be found on my website at **teachingcontroversies.com**.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS AND LEADERS

Professional learning leaders have several roles to play in fostering these reflective practices, beginning with professional learning for leaders and teachers to ensure skillful and responsible teaching of controversial issues. Hess and Zola (2012) recommend specific strategies for high-quality professional learning around controversial issues. First, develop teachers' content knowledge and multiple perspectives on controversial issues. Second, provide models of effective teaching of such issues and opportunities for educators to practice pedagogical approaches.

Hess and Zola also point to aspects of high-quality professional learning that are always important, and certainly when dealing with controversial issues: Promote collaboration among teachers, employ ongoing, practice-embedded learning approaches such as coaching, and consider context and the needs of the community and individual students. These recommendations are consistent with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning.

Professional learning leaders can also help school and district leaders proactively communicate with parents and stakeholders about the value of teaching controversial issues and developing students' critical thinking and discussion skills (Kawashima-Ginsberg & Junco, 2018). No matter how thoughtful teachers are in framing and executing lessons on controversial issues, some parents, community members, or other stakeholders may react negatively. School leaders must support their teachers, assuming they have made appropriate pedagogical decisions.

Defending teachers from external threats is, unfortunately, part of supporting the civic development of students in this era of political divisiveness (Pace & Journell, 2021). Professional learning can provide a safe, collaborative space for leaders to learn the most constructive and effective ways to do so and work through thorny issues as they arise. Just as teachers need the support of their leaders, leaders need the support of their peers.

Many of us hold misconceptions about what teaching controversial issues involves. My professional learning work with teachers suggests that developing robust understanding and confidence is best served by a series of professional learning sessions in combination with relevant reading, journaling, and collaborative design of discussion-based lessons.

ENGAGE WITH CONTROVERSY, DON'T AVOID IT

Classrooms are typically the main space — sometimes the only space — where young people get the opportunity to critically examine information sources, weigh evidence to inform their thinking, and discuss public issues with peers from backgrounds different from their own (Parker, 2006). And educators know from experience that controversy often enters the classroom whether or not we plan for it (Pace, 2015). Rather than avoiding it, engaging with it through thoughtful approaches helps teachers and students.

Professional learning is essential for ensuring that educators are prepared and supported to tackle controversial issues in productive and beneficial ways. The Teaching Controversial Issues Framework for Reflective Practice offers a research-based foundation for professional learning to help educators who are striving to fulfill their mission while coping with the risks of teaching in a combative political climate. Our world, and our classrooms, are not going to get less contentious anytime soon. But educators can learn to discuss controversies so that young people are better prepared to navigate the challenges ahead of them.

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Continued on p. 38

It's OK to be uncomfortable when talking about race

BY MIRKO CHARDIN AND KATIE NOVAK

We live in perilous times for educational equity. The progress we've made in desegregation, culturally responsive pedagogy, and social justice is threatened by backlash legislation and protests in defense of the status quo. The pushback is happening at structural levels and very personal levels.

Consider some unsolicited commentary we recently received about our organization's equity-focused professional learning services. Via email, an anonymous sender accused us of "dumbing-down American Education through diversity, equity, and inclusion" and went on to say that "these notions are idiotic and evil; they are incompatible with excellence, achievement, and just basic learning."

This commentor had never worked with us. Their uninformed opinions of our work, and of diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts in general, were based on bias and fear. Unfortunately, this kind of "feedback" is not uncommon for us, nor is it for the educators or students

we serve. We live in a world where many people fear the loss of their power and privilege and will resort to hateful, defamatory comments in an effort to protect it.

At the same time, cancel culture, shaming, and the #IsOverParty make many students and educators afraid to say the wrong thing, so they forgo healthy debate and avoid uncomfortable conversations. The result is that constructive discourse has been compromised.

In this context, there is an urgent need for professional learning that prepares educators to stay the course and lean into difficult conversations about race and equity.

To help students navigate tensions and respond to difficult conversations, educators need to build their own skills first. How can an adult who has never been at the center of their own learning experience create rich learning experiences for students? In the same vein, how can adults who have not wrestled with the presence or absence of privilege create spaces and circumstances in which their learners can do the same?

School leaders and professional learning facilitators share a moral imperative to create safe spaces where educators can learn to engage in constructive dialogue around their identity, race, personal safety (or lack of it), and how our systems are designed to benefit privileged students at the expense of their peers. Without such learning opportunities, many educators avoid and undermine initiatives aimed at increasing equitable access. Educators can unintentionally inflict tremendous harm on students if they do not have spaces where they can lean into critical conversations with humanity, an open mind, and an acceptance of nonclosure.

Having difficult conversations about race requires more courage and vulnerability than most people know or understand. Educators in dominant groups may experience discomfort, defensiveness, and withdrawal. Conversely, educators who struggle with oppression have to figure out how to navigate the system while also providing relief to students as well as colleagues who are not prepared for this work. This is why professional learning must intentionally and skillfully support educators to do the hard work and navigate these challenges.

This begins with supporting educators to enter into difficult conversations. It's not enough for them to read about how to have difficult conversations. They must engage in them. In difficult conversations, we ask students to be publicly vulnerable with each other, and yet, too often, we don't model this vulnerability within professional spaces or shy away from it or are resistant to it. Educators need to know what it feels like to sit with the discomfort, as well as the potential lack of closure.

In our work with educators, we apply strategies and tools designed to facilitate challenging conversations. We highlight these here to help other educators in their own conversations and challenging situations.

ENTERING DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Marshall Ganz's (2009) work on public narrative is a helpful starting point. Ganz, a senior lecturer in leadership, organizing, and civil society at Harvard University, anchors the process of leaning into difficult conversations by asking participants to explore their own identity, values, and life journey, using these questions:

- What is my identity?
- How have my race and gender played a role, whether positive or negative, in my life and professional career?
- What do I value and how has my decision-making or journey shown evidence of this?
- Have I or do I benefit from systems of oppression?
- Do I often feel seen and heard?
- Do I authentically see and hear individuals who are different from me?

These questions can be challenging. Grappling with them and other difficult questions requires that learning spaces adopt the four agreements and tools of courageous conversations articulated by Glenn Singleton in his book *Courageous Conversations About Race* (2012):

- Stay engaged.
- Speak your truth.
- Plan to experience discomfort.
- Expect and accept nonclosure.

The courageous conversations framework acknowledges that different people enter difficult conversations from different spaces. These entry points are illustrated in the compass visual from Singleton's book (see figure on p. 32).

Some people enter into difficult conversations emotionally and respond with feelings such as anger, sadness, or embarrassment. Others enter conversations intellectually, which disconnects them emotionally while they search for more information or data.

When entering into a conversation morally, people come from a deep-seated and profound belief system, but it may be difficult to articulate these views because they are often seated in

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATION COMPASS

Source: Singleton, 2012

the "gut" (Singleton, 2012). Lastly, some people enter into conversations relationally, and they tend to respond to difficult conversations by taking action and changing behaviors.

None of these entry points is right or wrong. We need to make space for all of them. But understanding and identifying them can help us support our own and others' self-reflection and listen deeply to each other.

GETTING COMFORTABLE WITH DISCOMFORT

Although the conversations we facilitate about race should be nonthreatening, we do not want people to associate nonthreatening with comfort. Listening to the stories of others who have overcome challenges may cause discomfort — and that is a necessary part of the learning process.

For example, we once facilitated a professional learning session with an educator who said that when she was in elementary school, she didn't have school supplies at home and rifled through the recycling bin at the end of each day to bring home paper. Her teacher observed this and called her Trash Girl.

This story triggered several guilt responses from attendees, who immediately shared how they would never do that to a student, how they donated supplies to students, and how they, too, were insulted by a teacher. Instead of acknowledging the burden this educator had carried from this experience or celebrating her resilience, people tried to shift discomfort to assuage their guilt.

Instead of placing blame or distancing ourselves from another person's pain, we have to sit with this discomfort to be allies. Our goal, therefore, is not to minimize discomfort but to eliminate the blame, shame, and guilt that often accompany this work.

REGULATING EMOTIONS

Because difficult conversations about race often cause discomfort, it is critical to provide tools to help educators with emotional self-regulation. Zaretta Hammond (2015) introduces a strategy called SODA in *Culturally Responsive Teaching and the Brain* as a process for self-regulation. SODA stands for stop, observe, detach, and awaken.

Applying this approach, facilitators start by reminding participants to stop and pause when they feel discomfort. This pause allows one to breathe deeply and observe what is going on. It is critical to take at least 10 seconds for this observation because, when the brain gets triggered, it takes stress hormones about 10 seconds to move through the body to the prefrontal cortex, the part of the brain involved in self-regulation.

When a conversation triggers individuals, we need to allow people to step away, or detach. But detaching does not mean abandoning the conversation. Facilitators should provide options to help participants disengage when needed — for example, to sketch, play with fidgets, take a short walk, or get a drink of water before returning to the conversation.

After a brief period of detachment, we can encourage colleagues to awaken and become more present. In this space, they can lean into the discomfort and sit with it to try to understand what the other person is saying. Reflection prompts may include, "What are they thinking? How are they feeling at the moment?" Shifting perspectives can help create a more positive interaction.

Some people may not feel ready to have these conversations or may not feel ready to return to them when tension arises. We find that this is often a reflection of privilege. We remind educators that many students and educators experience daily discomfort as they sit in systems that were not built for them. They do not have the luxury of opting out — and neither should the rest of us. We must opt in to conversations that will create more equitable opportunities for students, especially those most often marginalized, to learn.

AVOIDING DEFENSIVENESS

Creating more equitable and inclusive schools and systems will require leaders, educators, and students to navigate difficult conversations,

weather controversies, and recognize how identity and stories of self contribute to our work. The adults in our schools must feel safe and supported in having these conversations.

We cannot let conversations turn into debates, fueled by defensiveness. Defensiveness will not result in the changes necessary to create more equitable systems. At the beginning of this article, we shared some hostile, misinformed feedback we received about our work. It can be tempting to respond to such feedback with defensiveness. But we know this is counterproductive.

When you have courageous conversations, you will likely hear hostile things and be tempted to respond defensively, too. And when you do, we ask you to call people in to the conversation, instead of calling them out.

Remember that listening and agreeing are two different things. Although we do not agree with the feedback we received, we can listen and try to learn from it. We all have to commit to being lifelong learners and helping difficult conversations about race continue. If we let the conversations end, we are saying that the journey of equity has come to a conclusion. And as we have seen, it's not over yet.

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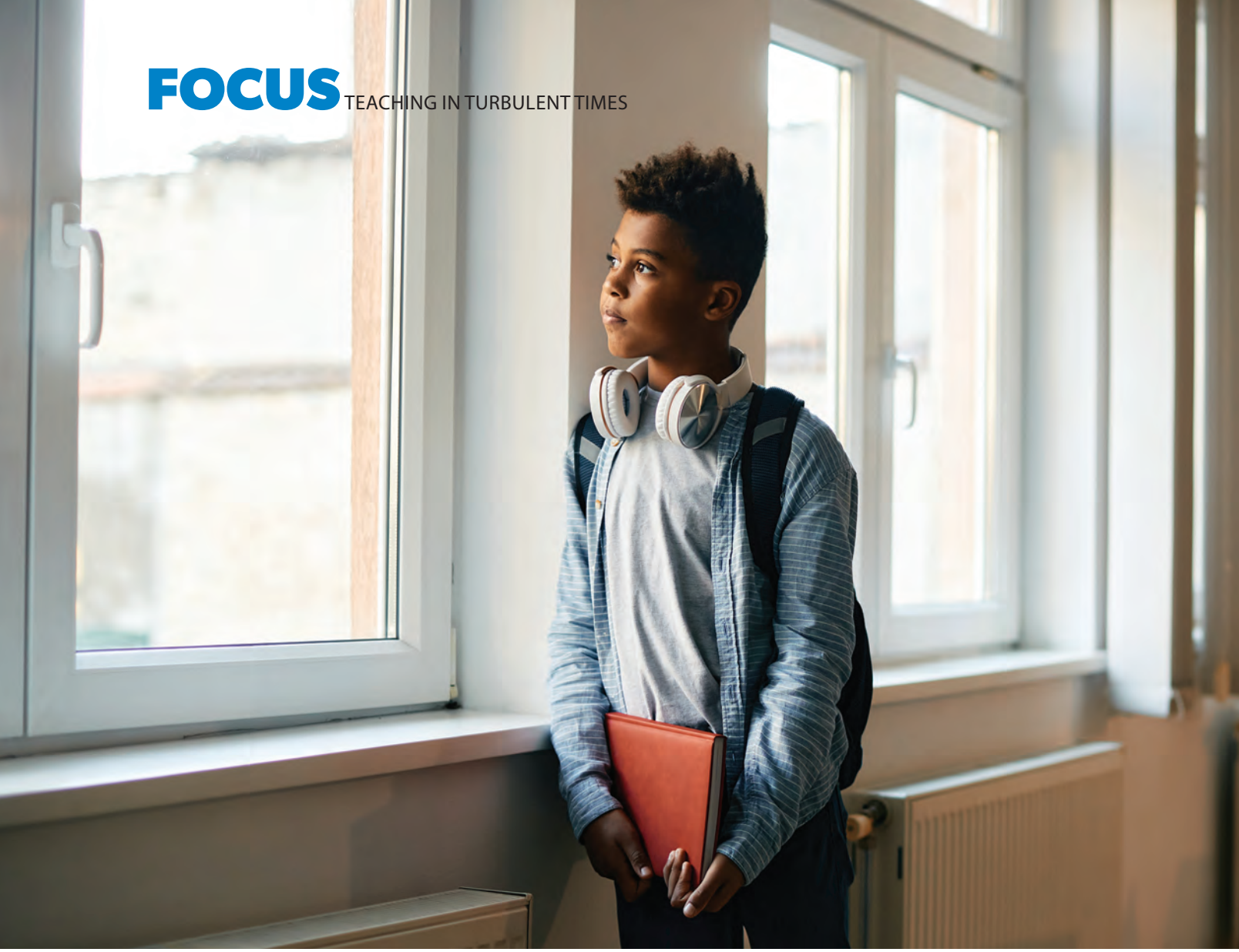

What to do when the kids aren't alright

BY GINGER CHRISTIAN, MEGAN QUINN, AND VIRGINIA FOLEY

In the aftermath of the acute phases of COVID-19, some schools are adopting trauma-informed, high-leverage practices to help educators and students cope with the psychological impact of the pandemic on learning. But given the scope of the pandemic's devastation, scattershot approaches are not enough. We need systemic approaches to ensure that all educators and students can benefit from trauma-informed approaches.

East Tennessee State University and Unicoi County Schools recognized the value of developing and sustaining a partnership to build strategies and leadership capacity for trauma-informed systems. Seeing the need for professional learning, coaching, and assessment tools, the professors and researchers at the Strong Brain Institute and Educational Leadership and Policy Analysis Department developed a five-year strategic partnership with the school district.

Through this partnership, we are

A universal approach to trauma-informed practice is important because we cannot always see which students have experienced trauma and its impacts.

designing a pre-K-12 resilient schools district model so students will receive a continuum of services through elementary, middle, and high school transitions. The trauma-informed system highlights social and emotional learning and resilience and how they are connected to academic excellence and college and career opportunities.

TRAUMA'S IMPACT

Although most educators recognize that many students have experienced trauma as a result of the pandemic, they may not be familiar with the research showing the impact of trauma and stress on students' developing brains.

The ability and capacity to deal with stress is controlled by a network of related brain circuits and hormone systems that are inherently designed to adapt to various challenges. When a person experiences a stressful or threatening situation, the brain triggers the release of stress hormones that heighten awareness and help prepare the body and brain to respond to an immediate threat. In our evolutionary history, this process has been vital to survival.

But long-term elevation of stress hormones can negatively impact the brain. For example, prolonged activation of the stress response can lead to impairments in learning and memory (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2014). It can also lead to changes in the expression of genes associated with physiological and psychological disorders — that is, stress can effectively switch on (or off) certain genetic traits and dispositions (Elhert, 2013).

These effects are more likely to occur under conditions of what is known as toxic stress — stress that is chronic, uncontrollable, or experienced by a child with no support system — and with exposure to adverse childhood experiences (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2014). The impacts of toxic stress and adverse childhood experiences, which are sometimes known as ACES, are particularly marked in early childhood, when the brain is especially pliable.

Toxic stress at this important developmental stage can lead the brain to be either over- or underreactive to perceived threats, even small ones (Loman & Gunnar, 2010). This can lead children to develop poorly controlled stress responses and struggle with self-regulation as well as feelings of anxiety and depression — and these effects can persist into adulthood if not addressed.

Fortunately, it is possible to reverse this pattern and help children develop a healthy stress response. Researchers have found that the presence of a positive and responsive caregiver can serve as a buffer against stress system activation (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child, 2014). And the more positive and caring adults surrounding the child, the better.

That's where schools come in. Sometimes, school is the only place where a child finds a supportive adult. Even for students who have caring relationships outside of school, it makes a difference to interact with educators who are responsive and knowledgeable about trauma because that creates a web of support around the student. A universal approach to trauma-informed practice is important because we cannot always see which students have experienced trauma and its impacts.

SYSTEMS APPROACH

Because of the ongoing and persistent effects of trauma and stress, trauma-informed practice is not a program or a one-and-done event. We believe that schools should provide a continuum of services through a

multiyear cycle to initiate, continue, and leverage trauma-informed resources for students. A trauma-informed approach should be embedded in an ongoing, intentional focus on creating a positive and nurturing school culture, implementation of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support to address students' social and emotional needs, and restorative practices that help the community address and heal from incidents that have caused harm or disruption.

This represents a shift for many educators who are used to applying a more punitive or discipline-oriented approach. But students who are removed from class due to behavioral disruptions miss learning opportunities and demonstrate lower levels of academic proficiency (Benner et al., 2013). The shift to a trauma-informed approach is important, but it is not simple. It requires capacity building and support for school leaders, teachers, community partners, and other staff.

University partnerships have a unique opportunity to provide a continuum of systemic support for principals, school leadership teams, and professional learning organizations that seek to solve the complex challenge of high numbers of office referrals and low academic growth (Baker, 2011) with a trauma-informed approach. We designed the Resilient Schools Project to personalize our support to the district and its local schools.

This began with assessing the district's and schools' past professional learning about trauma-informed practices and related initiatives (e.g. Response to Intervention for behavior, Multi-Tiered Systems of Support, and school culture and climate). Teams of school and district administrators and university professors are working together to develop goals and professional learning plans and timelines aligned to district goals.

The purpose of the partnership is to provide systemic processes grounded in hope and to design what Hirsh et al. (2014) identified as key components for leading change: establishing shared vision and values among partners; developing skillful and committed leaders; engaging stakeholders in planning and implementation; understanding context; building staff members' capacity; and strengthening organizational infrastructure.

FRAMEWORK OF SUPPORT

To build principal and teacher expertise in trauma-informed practices, we developed a framework that guides a systematic cycle of professional learning, policy development, strategic planning, and instructional practices addressing both long- and short-term goals. Goals are strategic, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, time-bound, inclusive, and equitable, sometimes known as SMARTIE (Learning Forward, 2021).

One of the first steps was to design professional learning to all district personnel about the foundations of trauma-informed practice and specific strategies. The East Tennessee State University team needed to determine how best to facilitate professional learning that was consistent while supporting varied school schedules. A hybrid approach helped us meet this goal.

To ensure that all faculty and staff developed knowledge and awareness about adverse childhood experiences, the Strong Brain Institute provided access to a free 4½-hour session in a virtual setting available in four modules.

Next, the educational leadership professors worked with principals and school leadership teams to connect neuroscience to seven high-leverage practices for trauma-informed systems of support:

1. School culture and climate core values;
2. Social emotional learning;
3. Digital learning;
4. STEAM innovation;
5. Cross-curricular learning;
6. Extended learning; and
7. College and technical career vertical alignment.

We started with culture and climate because they lay the groundwork for everything else. They are the soil for trauma-informed practices — without rich soil, the seeds of change cannot take root and grow. School culture captures what educators and students believe about learning. Climate core values identify the behaviors associated with the beliefs.

In the first year, each school spent time identifying what they believed about teaching and learning. All faculty members selected core beliefs and resilient school teams captured the overarching guiding beliefs and behaviors. Students had an important voice in this process. Principals met with students and invited them to tell the story of their schools. Through this process, the teams established consistent schoolwide positive expectations and created posters to teach the core values and connect them to trauma-informed systems. School mascots provided a tangible way to illustrate these values.

For example, one school used a creative connection to trauma-informed practices and values with its mascot, the Pirate. To champion the Pirates, they defined consistent values on an anchor chart that hangs in classes and hallways: growth mindset commitment, adaptability, and compassion. Additionally, they designed a reset space to support students so they can anchor their emotions on challenging days.

SUPPORT FOR RESTORATIVE PRACTICES

In working with schools, we recognized that educators did not have a high level of knowledge about restorative practices and needed support. This was an important area of focus because we saw that schools did not provide a bridge for students from an office discipline referral to restoring relationships involved in the conflict that caused the referral.

To close the gap in knowledge specific to restorative practices, each school created a resilient school team that provides restorative services for students from pre-K to 12th grade. Team members include district supervisors, principals, a counselor, and teacher leaders. During the summer, the team created and implemented a restorative process for all students following a discipline referral, as well as a transition plan for a successful return to the classroom setting.

The new process designated the counselor as the primary role to oversee the restorative actions with clear communication to the adults and students involved in the incident. Additionally, new policy and procedure updates were added to the handbook to educate parents and community members.

In our second year, we are working with each school to identify a teacher leader who will complete the professional learning in restorative practices for educators and establish a train-the-trainer model to support sustainability and ongoing expertise at the building level.

We gave leaders in these roles a set of questions to use to facilitate restorative conversations. These questions provide an immediate and consistent resource and intervention for both adults and students:

1. What happened?
2. What were you thinking about at the time?
3. What have you thought about since?
4. Who has been affected by what you have done? In what way?
5. What do you think you need to do to make things right?

We also provided resilient schools assessment tools, which provide baseline data and help educators identify students who may require additional mental health resources to heal from traumatic events.

COLLABORATION IS VITAL

To enact all of these components for building educators' knowledge, we designed the initiative with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in mind. One of the standards we focused on is Culture of Collaborative Inquiry, which recognizes that establishing shared goals and working together is paramount to designing and implementing innovation and engaging successfully in the continuous improvement process.

The strategic plans developed during the initial stages of implementation are grounded in collaboration and building capacity to collectively design and implement sustainable trauma-informed systems for students. Educators are engaged in providing feedback through assessment tools and professional learning communities to document findings, analyze data, and adjust identified goals.

One of the powerful components of this partnership is to invite school leaders, teachers, and staff to commit to continuous improvement through the action research cycle. The research component provides a systematic approach to investigate the challenges associated with adverse childhood experiences, engage all stakeholders in the change process, and follow a plan-do-study-act process to design innovative solutions and systems. This approach initiates safe spaces for adults and students to learn how to overcome the complex challenges associated with trauma.

John English, director of Unicoi County Schools, has been a champion of collaboration in this initiative and has demonstrated how the Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standard is embodied in all stages of the work. In the initial stages of the partnership, English scheduled a collaborative conversation with principals and university professors to discuss the resilient school framework, training, coaching, and assessment tools. He modeled respectful and thoughtful dialogue with his colleagues, demonstrating the Resilient Schools Project's focus on positive relationships, and communicated a commitment to the work over a period of years.

"The project champions the Unicoi County School System's vision to invest in students and build our future. We are excited about the focus on social emotional learning and research-based programs that align with our district goals," English said, establishing a tone of excitement about the initiative and a clear signal about the power of partnerships in designing new systems of support through a pre-K-12 lens.

NEXT STEPS

As this work continues, our team will analyze data, reflect on progress and challenges, and make modifications to ensure a systemic approach to identifying and supporting student needs. This is why we have placed a strong emphasis on the action research cycle. In this process, teacher perception data is vital for principals and leadership teams to review annually and adjust implementation and professional learning plans accordingly.

Communication is also essential. For example, the principal's ability to communicate findings to all stakeholders and engage in genuine dialogue is paramount for implementation to be effective and for modifications to be made when necessary.

With all of the pieces in place, a trauma-informed systems approach to student behavior can result in decreased office discipline referrals, increased positive feelings about school among educators and students, and higher engagement in the school community and in learning. The purpose of the Resilient Schools Project is to equip educators to understand how to capture students' hearts while building strong brains so that all students can have a bright and productive future.

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Learning to teach controversial issues: A path forward

Continued from p. 29

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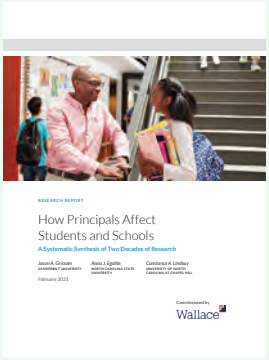
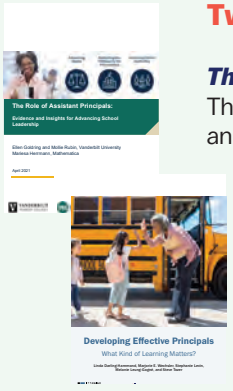
THE POWER OF INVESTING IN PRINCIPALS:

Cultivating effective leaders can improve outcomes for students, teachers, and schools

Join us for a thought leader session on December 5 to learn why the researchers who wrote ***How Principals Affect Students and Schools*** conclude, "It is difficult to envision an investment in K-12 education with a higher ceiling on its potential return than improving school leadership." Find out which skills and practices among principals the researchers found are linked to positive outcomes for students and why diversifying the leadership pipeline is vital to achieving educational equity.





Two additional syntheses on school leadership to check out:

The Role of Assistant Principals: Evidence and Insights for Advancing School Leadership
This Vanderbilt University and Mathematica report based on two decades of research sheds light on an increasingly prevalent but often overlooked role. Learn how assistant principals could become a more powerful force in advancing equity, school improvement and principal effectiveness.

Developing Effective Principals: What Kind of Learning Matters?
A Learning Policy Institute report highlights the positive impact high-quality preparation and ongoing support can have on school leaders. High-quality principal preparation programs are linked to improvements in school culture, teacher satisfaction and retention, and student achievement.

Download all three reports without charge at
www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/school-leadership/pages/default.aspx

Wallace

Jessyca Mathews is an English teacher in her hometown of Flint, Michigan. "I wanted to go back and be what I didn't have," she says. Photo courtesy of My City Magazine.

An advocate for 'good trouble' and teaching truth

Q&A with Jessyca Mathews

BY LEARNING FORWARD

Jessyca Mathews' father always knew she would become a teacher, but she wasn't so convinced. When Mathews' path did lead her to education, she decided not only to teach in her hometown of Flint, Michigan, but in the school she had attended, Carman-Ainsworth High School. "I wanted to go back and be what I didn't have," she says now. What she didn't have was a single Black educator from K-12. As a result, she felt that many aspects of her identity were questioned or misunderstood.

Mathews is now an award-winning educator who was Michigan's 2018 Secondary English Teacher of the Year and a finalist for 2019 Michigan Teacher of the Year. She has received numerous accolades and extensive media coverage for the work she did to help her students write about the Flint water crisis. She is also a prolific writer, speaker, and advocate for social justice and what she calls "good trouble" — a reference to the phrase

If we are not open and honest and raw about the things we experience in education, nothing will shift.

used by the late civil rights leader and Georgia Congressman John Lewis.

Mathews will be a keynote speaker at the Learning Forward Annual Conference on Dec. 5 in Nashville, Tennessee. *The Learning Professional* spoke with her recently to hear more about her journey and the themes she plans to touch on at the conference. That conversation has been edited for publication.

What is "good trouble," and how did you decide to make it part of your work as a teacher?

Good trouble is about standing up for what's right, helping people find their voices, and speaking truth to help make the world a better place. In our current environment, there are so many things that are going against speaking truth, celebrating diversity, pushing toward equity. For educators everywhere, there's a sense of fear and of being blocked from teaching truth. Making good trouble is about countering that fear.

I wasn't always the good trouble teacher. It's been part of the journey. In the beginning of my career, I was focused on being the right role model for kids in my community. But I realized it's bigger than that. With the low number of Black teachers in education, I have to think about how to make a bigger impact.

Making good trouble comes in various ways. Sometimes it's about me questioning things, going to my administration to ask questions and push back on things. But a lot of the time, it's about me helping young people, my students, make good trouble. They're better at it than us! They're more passionate than us. They're not afraid. They're not going to be ignored. That's one thing I love about Gen Z: They're ready to make change.

You've said that the turning point for you in making good trouble was the Flint water crisis, when a change in the city's municipal water supply caused pipes to corrode and lead leached into the water, causing physical and behavioral health problems for thousands of people. How did that crisis change your teaching?

The water crisis is such a devastating thing that happened in my community. I experienced it personally, and my students experienced it. I saw cloudy water in my faucet and brown water coming from the hydrants. I went to a water station for the first time, and what I saw felt very much like the Third World. So my students and I talked about it. We talked about it way before the crisis got national exposure.

Knowing that almost 90,000 folks in my city could be poisoned and people didn't even want to talk about it or hold anyone accountable, I felt uncomfortable teaching the same old standard things without addressing what was going on. I looked at some of the things we were supposed to teach, and I thought, "Why would my kids care about that when they are telling me stories of hair loss, rashes, dental issues, miscarriages in their families?"

I thought about what my role was. I thought, "You can teach well and write well. How can you take those things to start to develop young people's voices about what's going on?" That's how I decided to work with the kids on writing about the crisis.

I went to my administrator and said, "I want to try something new and make a shift." I did my research first, and I presented my sources and explained what I wanted to do. I was teamed up with Michigan State University, where they had a grant to focus on developing voices around what was going on, and with another school in Lansing. Having that partnership and investment from the university was a huge part of allowing

the shift to happen because we had support and credibility.

It was all about lifting up the students' voices, and learning together how to be advocates. Allowing my students to talk, hearing their stories, sharing mine, and learning how to advocate was life-changing for me and my students.

What do you say to people who criticize this work as too political?

Education has always been political because we function in a biased political system. Our education system was not built for BIPOC people, and that's a problem we have to talk about.

We are a community in the real world, and politics is there. The fact that my students don't have the same things as students at a school 15 minutes away is political. The fact that I am oppressed by certain laws is political. I have to share that narrative. My white students might not even know that narrative if I don't share it.

No one can tell me not to function in the system that I'm giving my life and my passion to. No one has the right to tell me that the things that have happened in my life should not be said to my students for growth, learning, and understanding. I don't have to put my political affiliation out there, but I can share my story — and I want students to share their stories.

Many other educators are weathering crises and controversies in their own communities. What is your advice to them about navigating these situations, especially when they fear backlash?

I always tell people that doing small, supplemental things can make a difference. If you're not allowed to have that book on your shelf, go find an article that you can tie into what you're doing. Talk about examples of justice in the community. There's always social justice, as much as some people want to suppress it.

I also study the Common Core State Standards and tie what I'm doing to them. I can say, "It says very clearly right here that students need to do argumentative writing, and that's what I'm teaching." I show that what I'm doing is what I'm required and expected to do as an educator.

Instead of thinking about the barriers in front of you, I tell people to think about all the open space you actually have.

I encourage teachers to get involved outside the classroom, too. No one can stop you from reading about certain topics in your own home or being part of a book club. They can't stop you from informing yourself and talking to other people, which is the real way people learn.

Instead of thinking about the barriers in front of you, I tell people to think about all the open space you actually have.

With all that's going on in schools, and all the stresses teachers are facing, they need and deserve support. How can we make sure professional learning is meaningful and doesn't feel like just one more thing to do?

If you are focused on the right things, educators will gravitate to professional learning. But rarely are teachers asked what they need. Administrators and professional learning staff need to ask teachers, "What do you need at this moment?" They need to acknowledge teachers' worries, concerns, areas they want to grow in. If you listen and provide that, teachers will come and engage.

But also, professional development doesn't need to be just what's given to you in your school district. Professional development is about reflecting on yourself. It's about asking yourself, "What areas do I need to build up?" and then learning with people who are like-minded. The majority of my growth in the last 10 years has been a result of me going to conferences and engaging with people on Twitter.

We all have to seek more. That's what we would want from our students. If you're telling them to seek more, why won't you do it?

In addition to teaching students, you have led professional learning for other educators. What do you focus on and why?

I just led a professional learning session at my school that was about "How can we liberate our kids?" Having those conversations with teachers is so important, but it's challenging. It's very different than the work I do with kids. With kids, I can talk very comfortably, and kids are willing to process. But educators sometimes come in with a specific vision of what education has to be, and it's hard for them to break that.

When I work with educators, I tell them, "I'm going to challenge your whole educational experience. I'm going to point out some of the things you're doing in your classroom, and it will probably hurt your feelings a little bit." To do this work right, you have to make them uncomfortable. Sometimes they're willing to take it, and sometimes they're offended and feel attacked. But they're not being attacked. There's a difference between being attacked and being challenged.

After the session, many people reached out to me and thanked me for pushing them. They said that the things we talked about are what they need to know and do this school year. They appreciated that it was responsive to their needs and that they could use it immediately.

You write a lot about teaching, social justice, and empowering students. Why do you think it's important for educators to be writers and advocates?

It's really important for us, as teachers, to write and to share our stories. I know it can be terrifying to tell your stories because you are opening yourself up to so much vulnerability. But if we don't share

our stories, someone else is going to make the narrative for us. We already have people trying to do that. If we are not open and honest and raw about the things we experience in education, nothing will shift.

I tell people that the first step is to take some personal time to reflect. Some people put everything out there on social media without reflecting on it. You have to first get your words down for yourself. Write in a journal, even just one sentence, or put notes in your phone. Once you're comfortable writing down the things coming into your head, then you start to think about whether you want to put it out there, and you think about what audience you want to hear your message.

I also tell people you don't necessarily have to write it. If that's not your skill, vlog it or do a podcast, or make a beautiful piece of art for people to discuss. There are so many different ways for us to tell our stories.

You'll be sharing more about your journey and your advice at this year's Learning Forward Annual Conference. How does the conference theme, "Reimagine," resonate with you?

There are a lot of "re" words we should be using in education right now. Reimagine is one. Reconstruct is another. If we don't demolish some of the systems that are holding people back, we're contributing to harm. Education was never developed for BIPOC individuals to succeed. We need to have some very open and genuine conversations about that.

One of the big problems is that we still have education systems that are majority white. We have to get more diversity in the education profession. In Michigan, where I teach, 91% of educators are white. So I'm always asking, "What are we doing to make education more diverse? What are we doing to encourage diverse young people to go into this profession and see that they are needed?"

I'm very passionate about this. Because why would someone want to go into teaching right now when they can go into other professions and be more protected and earn more money? We're asking young people to walk into spaces that are dangerous in many ways, especially for BIPOC educators. We need to help young people feel, "I still need to do this," or help them change their thinking to say, "With all that's going on, I am needed."

Making education more diverse matters. I recently posted a picture on Facebook of the Black staff members in my building with the caption, "Black excellence in the teaching staff is happening." It used to be just me, but now there are seven of us. I had kids and former students commenting left and right about how happy they were to see that. To have people who look like you, who understand what you're going through — it seems like a small thing, but it's so important. ■

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As systemic demands on educators continue to rise, how do you plan and implement professional learning that ensures equitable and excellent outcomes for all students? It is critical that today's leaders have strategies to prepare new teachers, develop new leaders, and scale best practices across a system to ensure a pipeline of leadership for the future. Learning Forward's team of experienced educators and expert facilitators is here to support you in this work. We meet your unique needs through our customized professional services that have a proven track record of results for educators and students.

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SATURDAY | 4-6 p.m.

SUNDAY | 7:30 – 9 a.m.

MONDAY | 7-8 a.m.

MONDAY | 3-4 p.m.

TUESDAY | 7-8 a.m.

TUESDAY | 3-4 p.m.

WEDNESDAY | 7:30-8:30 a.m.

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- 2102 | The Feedback Process

JOHN EYOLFSON & KELLIE RANDALL

- PC02 | Becoming a Learning Team
- 1215 | Growing Your Professional Learning Team Facilitators

KAY PSENCIK

- PC11 | Leveraging Learning Systems to Create a Culture of High Expectations for All
- 1104 | The Principal: Leading Learning
- 2105 | System Within a System: Instructional Leadership & Coaching Model

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- 1410 | Digitally Enhanced Professional Learning

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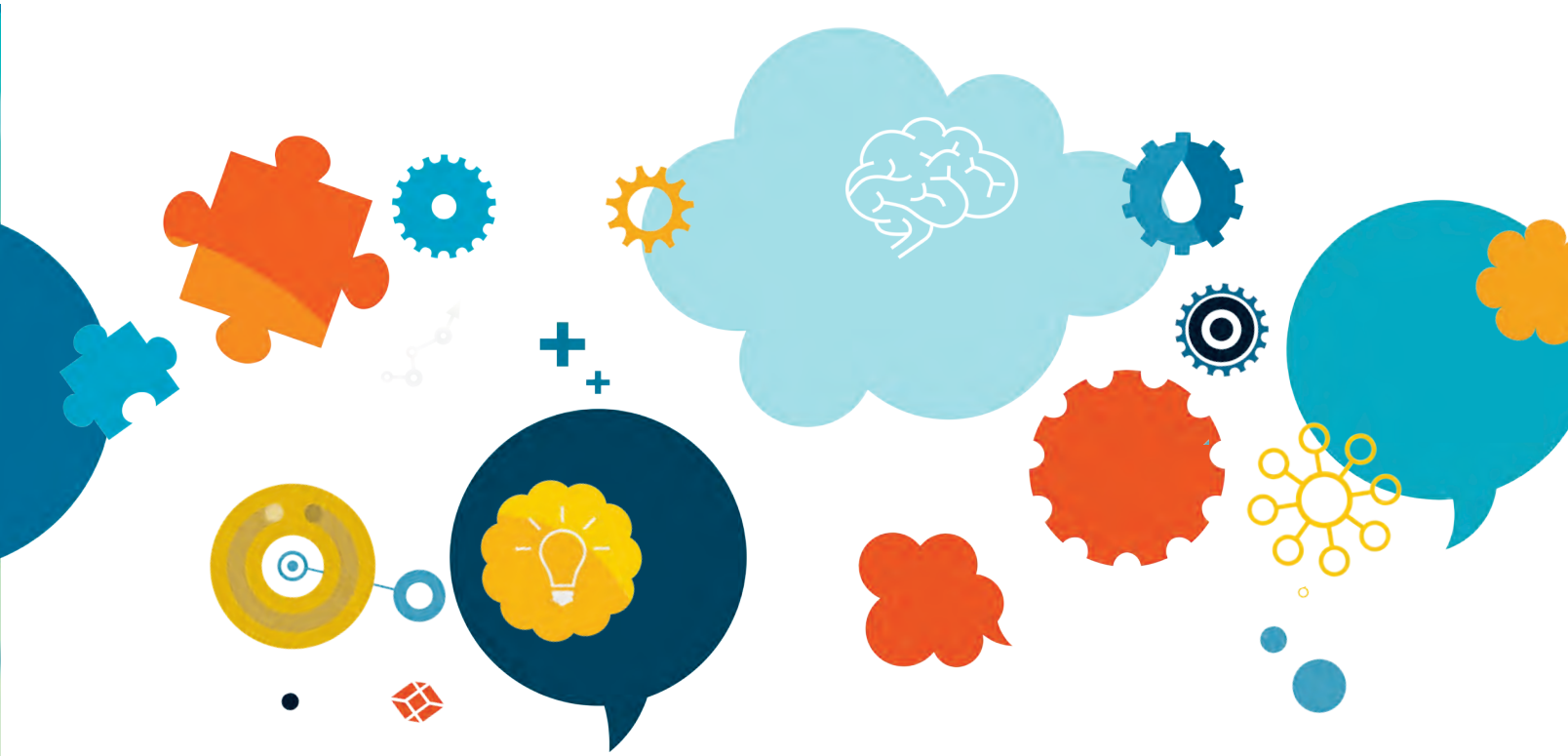
Educators value social and emotional skills.

HERE'S HOW TO BUILD THEM.

BY SUZANNE BOUFFARD

Most educators believe that social and emotional learning (SEL) skills are a fundamental part of good teaching and learning (Education Week, n.d.; Hamilton et al., 2019) because they help children and adults set and reach goals, navigate their environments, and thrive in community. SEL includes skills such as paying attention, waiting for one's turn to talk, managing frustration, maintaining a growth mindset, demonstrating empathy, and getting along with others.

Long before the pandemic, surveys showed that teachers believed these skills were essential for students to learn at school (Bridgeland et al., 2013), and research confirmed that



they are linked with measures of academic success (Jones & Kahn, 2017). But there's reason to believe those skills have become even more important as students and teachers recover from the setbacks and trauma of the pandemic. There's also reason to believe those skills are less developed now because many students — and adults — got out of the habit of using them, lost opportunities to strengthen them, or experienced trauma that dampened them.

As researcher and SEL expert Stephanie Jones explained in a recent episode of the "Let's Talk Social and Emotional Learning" podcast, remote learning and the bumpy transition back to in-person learning helped many teachers realize that SEL is key to how instructional work happens in the classroom and with their students (Held, 2022).

Recognizing the importance of SEL is an important step, but embedding it in schools and classrooms is not an automatic process. Educators need knowledge and skills to intentionally embody, model, and teach the social, emotional, and cognitive skills that enable students to engage in and succeed at academic work. That's partly because SEL is more than a series of discrete lessons. It lives in the way educators interact with students and each other, including how they listen to one another, give feedback, express empathy, create opportunities for productive struggle, and beyond.

If educators can't give students social and emotional skills, or ensure that they use the ones they already have, what can they do? What does it take to make SEL a meaningful part of schools in a way that supports learning and development? Researchers, educators, and leaders have been working to answer these questions and share strategies with teachers, administrators, and others who work with young people.

One initiative that is pointing the way is the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative, a multiyear, multisite effort supported by The Wallace Foundation. The initiative provided four years of support and tools, based on research, to help school and out-of-school time programs strengthen students' social and emotional learning skills. Extensive research, including in-depth case studies of the sites' work and participants' development from the RAND Corporation, has illuminated some key lessons about how to make a difference for students.

All of those lessons point to the importance of building adults' understanding of and capacity for modeling and encouraging social and

emotional learning. One of them — which the report's authors refer to as "sequencing" SEL — emphasizes the need to focus on building adults' SEL skills before implementing strategies to encourage students' SEL development. Together, the findings suggest that professional learning on SEL is an essential strategy for ensuring that everyone can thrive in the classroom — especially in a time of stress and recovery.

SEL INITIATIVE OFFERS LESSONS FOR EDUCATORS

Starting in 2017, The Wallace Foundation awarded implementation grants to partnerships between school districts and out-of-school time intermediaries in six communities: Boston, Massachusetts; Dallas, Texas; Denver, Colorado; Palm Beach County, Florida; Tacoma, Washington; and Tulsa, Oklahoma. Each community site focused on an initial cohort of five to seven school and out-of-school time program partnerships. Altogether, 38 elementary school and out-of-school time program partnerships implemented SEL strategies over four school years.

Research on the Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative included multiyear case studies of the six sites. A summary of the findings highlighted two overarching elements of success for SEL — establishing a supportive climate and taking a consistent approach across a campus or program — and eight common themes, each of which was observed at two or more of the sites (Tosh et al., 2022):

1. Committed school and out-of-school time program leaders took concrete actions that laid the foundation for SEL.
2. Establishing trusting relationships was a necessary first step to building an effective school-program partnership.
3. SEL committees guided and supported implementation.
4. Starting with adults' own SEL skills proved central, followed by professional development about developing students' skills.
5. Short SEL rituals were often the first and most widely adopted strategy, setting the stage for formal instruction.
6. Prioritizing time for SEL in schedules was important to making implementation consistent and routine.
7. Formal SEL resources facilitated a consistent approach within and across settings.
8. Distributing ownership of SEL across staff and students increased buy-in and sustainability.

Educators need knowledge and skills to intentionally embody, model, and teach the social, emotional, and cognitive skills that enable students to engage in and succeed at academic work.

All eight themes rely, to varying degrees, on investments in capacity building for teachers, leaders, and other staff. For example, leaders cannot set the vision for SEL and allocate the resources to achieve it if they do not have opportunities to develop their own understanding and skills. But the importance of building educators' capacity was clearest in theme No. 4: sequencing SEL competencies to focus on adults' skills first before focusing on students'.

TULSA FOCUSES ON SEQUENCING SEL SKILLS

As often happens with new initiatives, some of the sites learned what to do the hard way — by first trying to do something else. Although some sites started with adults' SEL skills and knowledge right away, others tried to jump in with student strategies and found that they had missed a critical step. This was the case at the Tulsa site, especially at Whitman Elementary School and its partner out-of-school time program, Youth At Heart.

According to the case study, "Whitman and Youth at Heart had uneven success when they started their effort to teach students social and emotional skills in the 2018-2019 school year" (Christianson et al., 2022). Although teachers had participated in some professional learning that introduced several SEL rituals and routines, they rarely implemented those practices. A survey in spring 2019 found that only half of teachers reported using rituals, such as a morning meeting, and only 17% reported using written SEL plans that had been provided. When researchers observed the classrooms, they observed explicit instruction about SEL in only 25% of the 17 classes they visited.

A lack of understanding of SEL appeared to contribute to this low level of implementation, and that, in turn, was related to a lack of high-quality professional learning. Teachers reported that the learning they had engaged in did not contain enough information, and they requested more opportunities to see others modeling the use of the SEL resources.

Some of the leaders of the site suggested this may have been a result of the train-the-trainer model they had used for professional learning, which they said caused confusion and felt, as one put it, "like a game of telephone" (Christianson et al., 2022). In addition, many of the teachers who were struggling with the SEL practices were relatively new. The school had been experiencing high levels of turnover and had higher than usual numbers of new teachers.

When school leaders put the brakes on the student SEL strategies to focus on adults' SEL skills instead, they had several goals in mind. They hoped that building teachers' SEL

skills would increase their coping abilities and capacity to support struggling students, especially for the stressed new teachers. They had observed that some teachers were struggling to regulate their own emotions in the classroom and felt they needed support to embody and model better self-regulation. They also hoped this focus on social and emotional skills and well-being would increase teachers' sense of belonging and community and therefore increase teacher retention.

The pivot began with an optional SEL book club that one of the teachers started with a group of peers that grew to include 10 teachers. By the following fall, one of the SEL project leads partnered with that teacher to co-lead professional learning for teachers focused on self-care, self-regulation, and coping with stress.

At the same time, administrators aimed to foster stronger relationships and a sense of belonging among staff. The school and out-of-school time program also hosted joint professional learning on adult SEL. The timing was good because all of this focus on relationships and coping was under way by the time the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close and heightened everyone's stress.

The sequencing approach to building SEL continued with helping the adults understand the importance of SEL, especially in the face of trauma. Professional learning in fall 2020 helped educators in both settings understand why consistent routines and classroom management — key elements of the student SEL strategies — matter and help create a safe and stable learning environment.

The change in approach, to focusing first on adults' SEL skills, made a noticeable difference quickly. Both school and out-of-school time program staff reported improvements in educators' social and emotional skills over time, and they saw it pay off in classrooms. In both the 2019-20 and 2020-21 school years, administrators reported that they were observing teachers demonstrate more patience and positive interactions with students, and they believed student behavior improved as a result.

In Tulsa, and in the other sites, building adults' knowledge of and capacity for SEL was a multifaceted and ongoing process. The findings of the six case studies suggest valuable strategies for facilitating that process.

Researchers noted some examples of the change as well. For example, "we observed a teacher modeling how to calm herself when her class became noisy. She told her class that she needed to decompress, set a timer, and instructed students to work independently on their computers as she sat at her desk" (Christianson et al., 2022).

As school leaders had hoped, staff burnout and turnover decreased. The percentage of staff reporting they felt burned out dropped markedly, from 62% in spring 2018 to 29% in spring 2020 (before the pandemic), and turnover dropped from 33% to 23%.

Following these improvements in adults' SEL and well-being, the sequencing of SEL proceeded to include more educators teaching SEL skills to students. The percentage of teachers who reported incorporating short SEL rituals, using an SEL lesson plan, or integrating SEL into academic instruction increased significantly from spring 2019 to spring 2021. And by spring 2021, all teachers who responded to the survey said they were incorporating SEL into their academic instruction.

As a result, Whitman — which initially had the lowest implementation of SEL practices among the district's participating schools — now had higher implementation levels than the other schools.

In turn, educators began reporting that students' SEL skills, such as regulating emotions and maintaining healthy relationships, improved, as did students' classroom behaviors. From spring 2018 to spring 2021, adults' responses to the following survey items increased noticeably:

- "Students treat teachers with respect" increased from 24% to 79%.
- "Students treat students with respect" increased from 14% to 89%.
- "Students care about each other" increased from 38% to 95%.

The percentage of student suspensions dropped in the 2019-20 school year. According to interviews with school staff, in that same period, fewer teachers called the office for discipline support and there were fewer fights among students.

The data speak volumes, but so do the voices of the educators who participated in the sequenced approach to SEL. Administrators attributed the improvements in their schools to the adult SEL investments. One said, "If we could start over again, we would start with adult practices before we tried to roll it out to the building. [By] rolling it out to the building and then working backwards to adults, we lost some of the buy-in. I wish we had done it differently from the beginning" (Christianson et al., 2022).

SITES LEVERAGE PARTNERSHIPS

In Tulsa, and in the other sites, building adults' knowledge of and capacity for SEL was a multifaceted and ongoing process. The findings of the six case studies suggest valuable strategies for facilitating that process.

Partnerships were key. One reason the initiative focused on school and out-of-school time partnerships is that community-based programs, such as afterschool and mentoring programs, have a long and successful history of promoting youth development,

including life skills, personal development, and SEL. Shared professional learning across school and out-of-school time settings helped all the adults involved in the initiative learn from one another and leverage each others' strengths.

Different sites found creative ways to weave such sharing into professional learning. For example, in Palm Beach County, a school and its out-of-school time partner paid for out-of-school time program staff to attend the school's grade-level meetings throughout the year. Other sites used summer professional learning time to bring staff members together. In Denver, an out-of-school time program used grant funds to cover shared professional learning that was held during summer and winter breaks to overcome the common barrier of schedule conflicts caused by the fact that school and out-of-school time staff tend to work different hours.

The case studies also found that it was important to have people who are specifically charged with overseeing professional learning. In particular, the researchers found, SEL committees composed of multiple leaders and staff helped keep things on track. The researchers pointed to an example at the Tacoma site, where an SEL committee developed a set of SEL lessons and resources and engaged in professional learning with all school staff in how to use them consistently.

Some sites, such as the Boston site, incorporated coaching on the SEL practices. Coaches from the school district and the out-of-school time intermediary coordinated with one another to create consistency and ensure that all staff had support. The coaching helped leaders feel comfortable giving staff some autonomy in how to incorporate the SEL practices.

Finally, processes for input and feedback were important for ensuring that professional learning was meeting educators' needs, that staff understood how to use the rituals and routines consistently, and for ensuring educators' buy-in and support.

SEL IS 'PART OF OUR HUMANNESS'

The Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative lessons are valuable for schools and communities far beyond the six study sites because they suggest ways that educators can build adults' SEL capacity to build students', especially if they work in partnership with community organizations and youth development professionals. Educators are hungry for these strategies.

Teachers say they could use more support on SEL strategies (Hamilton et al., 2020), and some settings and communities appear to be struggling more than others with how to implement SEL. For example, SEL implementation is far less frequent in middle and high schools (Schwartz et al., 2022), despite the fact that social and emotional skills continue to develop in adolescence. In fact, the increasing importance of social relationships and the emotional changes of adolescence make it especially important to attend to these dimensions of learning and development at the secondary school level.

The Partnerships for Social and Emotional Learning Initiative makes clear that SEL is not an either/or proposition. SEL skills develop in and are applicable in schools and community settings and homes — and all of the other places where young people spend their time. As developmental psychologist Stephanie Jones put it, SEL "can't only be in one place because it is part of our humanness and our human interactions" (Held, 2022).

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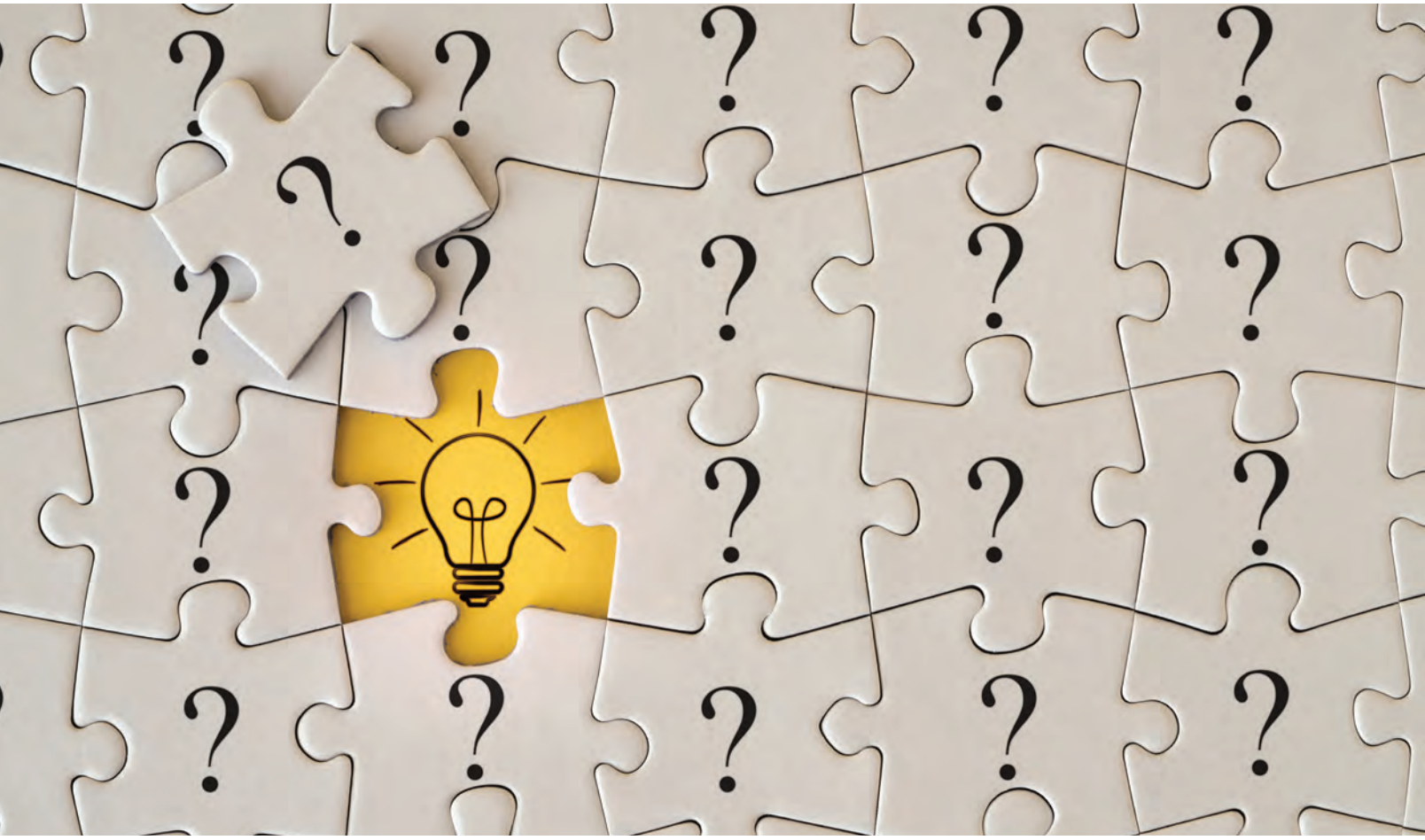
REACH. INVESTIGATE. DISCOVER.

IDEAS

THE PATH TO IMPROVEMENT

Continuous improvement is at the heart of professional learning. The authors in this issue's Ideas section examine how improvement tools and processes help educators identify change goals, monitor progress, and make adjustments.



Ask why and anticipate challenges: **Improvement science at work**

BY KATHLEEN M.W. CUNNINGHAM AND ERIN ANDERSON

Education professionals face myriad problems of practice, especially in the face of current trauma, injustice, and other stressors. To address those challenges, educators should work collaboratively to target the sources, not just the symptoms, of the problems. Asking why can begin to surface root causes, which may be related to systems, structures, and processes. Getting at the actual problem and confronting the reality of the situation invites the opportunity for effective, lasting change (Langley et al., 2009).

We encourage educators to tackle pressing problems of practice using improvement science, a process for solving complex, persistent challenges by learning deeply about a problem and the systems that produce it, and then designing steps to address it (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2020). Improvement science focuses on determining "what works, for whom, and under what conditions" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 13). It requires interrogating the context, system, and elements within the system that might be leading to the current results.

Improvement science invites disciplined inquiry within a collaborative team setting (Bryk et al., 2015). This helps educators avoid the tendency to "jump to solutions and not

think deeply about the problems we are trying to solve" (Grunow, 2012). Taking time to understand the problem by asking why, honoring the input of the user (i.e. those experiencing the problem), and testing incremental change ideas are three critical components to keep in mind.

ASKING WHY

Think of a curious young child who asks "why?" and then, after hearing an initial explanation, keeps drilling down with a series of "why?" questions. To start thinking like an improvement scientist, one must act a little bit like that child, digging deeply to get to the root of the problem.

For instance, let's say a school is experiencing frequent teacher absences. One administrator suggests requiring teachers to supply a doctor's note when they call in absent to discourage absences that aren't sick days. Another administrator suggests a different approach: figuring out why teachers are calling in sick. She suspects that cracking down on sick days won't address the real issue and that, even if the need for substitutes abates, the unaddressed actual problem will likely just manifest as other symptoms to which administrators will have to react.

After choosing to delve into the root cause, the school uses a team-based brainstorming exercise called the five whys (Spaulding & Hinnant-Crawford, 2019) that involves asking "why" several times to get closer and closer to a hypothesized root cause. (Note: Despite the exercise title, team members may need to ask why more or fewer than five times). With a purposeful improvement team composed of administrators, teachers, and staff at the school, this exercise might look something like this:

1. **Why are teachers tending to call in for a substitute?** One member of the improvement team says, "Because teachers are exhausted and stressed."
2. **Why are teachers stressed?** An instructional coach on the improvement team says, "Because there is so much on their plate."
3. **Why do teachers feel like there is so much on their plate?** A teacher on the improvement team says, "Well, one thing is because the pace of the curriculum is super demanding. It's unrealistic, especially as students come back to face-to-face learning environments with varied e-learning experiences. Plus, the accountability reports due to the principal and the district each week are burdensome and do not support teachers' instructional practice."
4. **Why are the accountability reports a source of stress?** Another teacher on the improvement team says, "That reporting form contains so much detail that it feels pointless, and the same info needs to be inputted every single week. The form takes a lot of time and doesn't provide a whole lot of value to me."
5. **Why are the accountability reports designed this way?** The teachers and instructional coach on the improvement team answer in unison, "We don't know. We were just handed it to do. It's been like this for the last two years."

As a result of asking "why?" multiple times, the administrators now have a clearer understanding of one potential source of teacher stress that is in the locus of control

Related resource: What Matters Now Network

Learning Forward's What Matters Now Network, which ran from 2016 to 2021, offers an example of improvement science in practice. The network brought together three state coalitions, composed of educators at multiple levels in Ohio, Maryland, and Rhode Island, to improve instruction and make progress toward achieving content standards.

Learning Forward supported the state coalitions to learn about improvement science practices, create driver diagrams, and engage in multiple plan-do-study-act cycles aimed at their unique goals: increasing teacher capacity to identify and implement Next Generation Science Standards-aligned professional learning and instructional resources in Maryland; using collaborative learning teams to strengthen teacher practices for pre-K-3 literacy outcomes in Ohio; and increasing teacher engagement in examining student data and reflective instructional practice to meet identified student needs in Rhode Island.

An evaluation by WestEd found that the network's improvement cycles improved teachers' knowledge and skills, increased the effectiveness of professional learning, improved classroom practices, and increased student learning.

You can read more about the network's improvement science approach at **learningforward.org/journal/february-2019-vol-40-no-1/network-uses-improvement-science-to-scale-up-change/** and about the evaluation findings at **learningforward.org/journal/building-community-in-a-divided-world/evaluation-shows-the-impact-of-a-professional-learning-network/.**

of the administrators — onerous accountability reports — that might be contributing to the problem of teacher stress and resulting absenteeism.

HONORING USER INPUT

This example highlights a critical component of understanding the problem: talking with people. By "people," we mean those who are involved and impacted (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020). Reaching out to those most affected by the problem — teachers, in this case — is vitally important. One technique for deep listening is conducting empathy interviews, which have been described in previous issues of *The Learning Professional* (see **learningforward.org/journal/supporting-each-other/empathy-interviews/**).

The information gathered can be used for further discussion, analysis, and reflection. A fishbone diagram is a helpful tool for taking those next steps. It offers a visual representation of what might be contributing to the problem. Each "bone" in the fish is labeled with a contributing cause. One or more bones in the diagram can then be selected as the focus of a driver diagram, which maps out a team's theory of improvement.

A driver diagram is a tool that articulates and organizes the team's goal, drivers that impact that goal, and change ideas the team hypothesizes could positively impact their aim. The driver diagram also helps illustrate the team's theory of improvement in an if-then statement (e.g. if we [change idea to test], then it will impact [name the driver(s)], and we will address [goal/aim]). In our example, a driver diagram can illustrate a theory of improvement such as: If we collaborate with teachers to make the accountability form shorter and more applicable to instruction (change idea), then professional culture will improve (e.g teachers feel less burdened and frustrated) (driver), and teacher absences will decrease by 30% in the next semester (aim).

TESTING INCREMENTAL CHANGE IDEAS

With that if-then statement in place, team members can start testing strategies to chip away at the problem — in this case, redesigning the form with teacher input to make sure it is valuable and not overly time-consuming. Plan-do-study-act cycles create a structure for testing the change idea. After the plan and initial do phases, team members examine what has happened so far (study) and adjust the plan and actions accordingly.

A key part of this approach is ongoing data-gathering and assessment of progress. If the change idea does not seem to be leading to progress, the idea can be adapted and retested or even abandoned to test a new change idea. In the improvement science process, failed ideas are just as important as successful ideas because there is valuable information to learn from them.

If the change idea seems to work in one small setting, the team can scale it incrementally to broader settings and test its impact there. Additionally, or alternatively, team members can identify other drivers of the problem and change ideas to test. For example, even if redesigning the form helps teachers feel less stressed, there are likely to be other causes contributing to their stress (such as pace of the curriculum and students' social and emotional needs). The goal is not to assume there is a singular cause and solution that will fix everything but to be intentional and strategic about targeting specific elements of the problem.

CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIES

Using an improvement science framework is advantageous and often rewarding, but is not without challenges. Here are a few common challenges and considerations for preventing and addressing them.

Selecting the right problem

Sometimes it's convenient to choose a problem because the district or school has already identified that area as a priority, such as increasing low mathematics scores. But a school likely has additional critical problems that may or may not be directly related to math but need attention, like students' senses of belonging, student tardiness, or teachers' instructional observation procedures as examples.

To find the right problem to tackle, teams must explore different avenues and devote time and resources to determine what is important, needs improving, and is in their locus of control (Perry et al., 2020). Exercises that invite deep understanding (e.g. school-based data, scanning literature, fishbone diagrams, empathy interviews) can highlight where an improvement team can focus.

By gathering information from multiple sources, including the users, the team will deepen what they know about a problem (Carnegie, 2020). In addition, we believe that selecting a problem for improvement should prioritize increasing equity and the educational experiences of all students, with particular attention to social justice (Hinnant-Crawford, 2020; Perry et al., 2020).

Jumping to solutions versus slowing down to improve

It takes humility to acknowledge you probably do not have the right solution yet, and many education leaders may be tempted to provide a solution immediately since they are professionally socialized to fix problems right away, not to mention pressured by superiors and outside forces to make changes fast. Improvement science is not a quick process.

But as one education leader we worked with noted, slowing down and digging deep revealed more. This leader reflected that she was "not sure if we did it in a more traditional way, we would've gotten" to the solution and progressed as effectively. One way to slow down is to let the data guide your pace instead of letting urgency take over.

Engaging in the critical steps of the process

To really engage in improvement science and see positive changes, it's

important to engage in the whole process, not just parts. Although improvement science is flexible and allows for the use of different tools and measures based on varying contexts and needs, it is critical for some key elements and steps to be in place. They include thoroughly examining root causes to get to the right problem, including users in defining the problem, brainstorming change ideas that are closely aligned to the root causes, and measuring the degree of success of both specific change ideas and improvement aims or goals to answer "what works, for whom, and under what conditions" (Bryk et al., 2015, p. 13).

The approach is seemingly simple but is actually quite complex. Sometimes schools and organizations think they are doing improvement science because they are doing parts of the process, such as plan-do-study-act cycles, but elements like understanding the problem before testing solutions can get overlooked, reducing the potential of this approach.

Although schools are already focused on outcome data, such as formative and summative assessment scores, one area that can be particularly challenging is measuring and documenting the successes of the day-to-day implementation of the change idea. Implementation data are just as important as outcome data for improvement science. Routines that dedicate time in the calendar and the use of protocols (e.g. fishbone, plan-do-study-act forms) can help support the team in staying in a disciplined inquiry space. If possible, it is helpful to have a dedicated staff member or improvement coach to help shepherd the improvement team's progress.

Making space for developing collaborative structures

Reaching out to others for input can be tough for many educators who simply want to get things done. It requires a relinquishing of control that some may not be used to, and it takes time. But that time is well spent. Improvement cannot be done by one or two isolated individuals.

There is an impressive amount of professional expertise within school buildings. Teachers, administrators, and student support staff bring deep understanding of various aspects of education, and all have valuable insights to contribute. Harnessing their expertise is a critical move for improvement scientists. One educator we worked with noted the importance of collaboration: "It was more of a team approach [to problem-solving] in multiple ways. I think the people who were on our leadership team this year were all very unified in this approach and then they brought in the teacher voice. … I see our collective ownership building."

"We don't have time for this!"

The improvement science process invites educators to learn quickly through small, incremental steps. This is at odds with popular messages about how school improvement should work and with the urgent demands that school leaders and teachers face every day. It can feel intimidating, or even impossible, to focus on the process of incremental change when you are in the midst of dealing with urgent issues.

It's helpful to keep in mind that improvement is not just another thing to do, but a strategic way of approaching pressing problems of practice. We suggest integrating the school improvement plan with an improvement science framework. This can result in the whole school making larger, sustaining gains, even if they come at a slower pace.

UNDERSTANDING IMPROVEMENT SCIENCE

Using an improvement science approach to address problems of practice requires a shift in mindset and a change in habits, from rushing to fix a problem to going slow to learn and improve quickly. It can feel overwhelming.

To make it feel more manageable, we recommend focusing on asking why and listening to the answers. This requires educators to work with humility, curiosity, and collaboration. In that spirit, we encourage professional educators to explore resources to increase their familiarity with improvement science. Practicing assuming you do not have all the information will allow you to learn more and target resources to find and address the root causes of the pressing problems in schools.

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A practical path for continuous improvement

BY MICHELLE PLEDGER AND MARI JONES

Continuous improvement is at the heart of all teaching and learning. Just as we strive to nurture our students' growth and improvement, educators should be continually growing and improving. When we designed the Deeper Learning Hub Fellowship, an initiative to build teachers' capacity in social and emotional learning and culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy, we wanted to encourage teachers to engage in intentional and reflective improvement and accountability over time.

However, we didn't want the improvement process to be too complex to implement. For a classroom teacher navigating a plethora of competing commitments, the cognitive lift of learning and integrating continuous improvement tools can feel overwhelming — especially since the start of the pandemic. We launched the year-long fellowship in August 2020, just five months after the pandemic closed K-12 schools. Our fellows were navigating unprecedented challenges of remote teaching, chronic absenteeism, student disengagement, and constantly shifting policy mandates.

In this context, we knew the need to address social and emotional

learning and culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy was urgent. These aspects of teaching are necessary for deeper learning, which encompasses "higher-order thinking skills, learning dispositions, and collaboration skills needed for students to succeed in 21st-century work and civic life" (Deeper Learning Hub, n.d.).

How could we get teachers who were immersed in the challenges of pandemic teaching to engage deeply in continuous improvement? To make the improvement process straightforward and easy for teachers to connect to their urgent needs, we designed a professional learning model grounded in cycles of inquiry and simple processes for reflecting and iterating on practice.

This model incorporates concrete resources with ongoing opportunities for reflection and discussion to support educators as they try out new practices for integrating social and emotional learning and culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy in their classrooms. At the center of this approach is a focus on healthy team dynamics, such as establishing relational trust, psychological safety, and shared accountability.

By simplifying the tools of continuous improvement processes and focusing on relationships, we found that it's possible to do improvement cycles without making the process sound clinical or jargony. We learned to do continuous improvement in a way that helps educators develop the dispositions and routines necessary for shifting mindsets and practices and making systemic transformation.

THE FOCUS OF OUR WORK

The aim of the Deeper Learning Hub Fellowship was to increase K-12 teachers' self-efficacy and collective efficacy in social and emotional learning and culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy — essential aspects of high-quality teaching that are not always given sufficient attention. Social and emotional learning encompasses the processes through which children and adults develop awareness and management of emotions, social interactions, executive functioning skills, and well-being, all of which affect academic learning (Payton et al., 2000).

To make the improvement process straightforward and easy for teachers to connect to their urgent needs, we designed a professional learning model grounded in cycles of inquiry and simple processes for reflecting and iterating on practice.

Culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy refers to the ways teachers cultivate an environment that is responsive to the diverse and dynamic young people in the classroom and work to sustain the cultural capital and brilliance that students already possess. Unlike some scholars and practitioners who use either the term culturally responsive teaching or culturally sustaining pedagogy, we combine the terms to reflect the importance of both cultivating responsive practices that are relevant to and representative of students and honoring students' cultures and assets in sustaining ways that nurture identity.

Our conception of culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy builds on the work of seminal scholars who contend that culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy involves learning about and leveraging the lived experiences of young people by supporting them to nurture cultural competence, navigate critical consciousness, and nourish cognitive capacity development (Ladson-Billings, 1992; Gay, 2000; Paris & Alim, 2017; Pledger, 2022).

Social and emotional learning and culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy are more than a curriculum — they are ways of being. Because of this, social and emotional learning and culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy involve a mindset shift, and the first step to achieving this is to shift behaviors. Continuous improvement practices provide opportunities to couple behavior change with data that demonstrates the benefits of the change, and this can lead to the mindset shift.

DEEPER LEARNING HUB FELLOWSHIP

We chose to work with two schools — one elementary and one secondary — with culturally diverse and socioeconomically disadvantaged populations. They each addressed a problem of practice relevant to their context using continuous improvement approaches. The elementary school, which focused on social and emotional learning, serves 94% students of color who are all experiencing homelessness. The high school, which focused on culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy, serves 98% students of color, with 82% of students receiving free and reduced-price lunch.

EXAMPLES OF TRY-COLLECT-REFLECT CYCLES

Below are an elementary teacher's strategies and reflections from a social and emotional learning try-collect-reflect inquiry cycle. During this cycle, the teacher tested the strategy of using explicit instruction to promote language development and emotional awareness to help students better express their emotions.

TRY	COLLECT	REFLECT
What are you going to try?	**What data will you collect? By when?**	**What did you learn?**
Bitmoji classroom word wall with emotion words, and a lesson on emotions. Teaching students to name their emotions and understand what they are feeling. Growth mindset lesson series on perseverance, with a specific focus on disappointment. Build on emotions list developed through discussions in our growth mindset curriculum.	Student responses in writing and out loud. Student participation (how well students are able to make personal connections and identify emotions).	More students using specific language to describe feelings (disappointed versus sad). More students willing to participate and share their experiences than before and include their feelings. Lots of student participation, students made personal connections and identified feelings.

Below are strategies and reflections from a high school teacher's inquiry cycle about culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy. During this cycle, the teacher worked on one aspect of being a culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy educator: intentionally providing time for students to connect as humans at the beginning of class before diving into math content.

TRY	COLLECT	REFLECT
What are you going to try?	**What data will you collect? By when?**	**What did you learn?**
Waterfall check-in. Good human check-ins/openers. Mathematician of the day.	Collect students' check-in responses in the chat or unmute students for human check-in opportunities at the beginning of class.	Making conscious effort to use time at the beginning of class to ignite the lesson or do a human check-in really centers and grounds the students in the learning for the day. It's important to be OK with more or less participation depending on the question and topic.

A team of classroom and special education teachers from each school participated in two full-day sessions, two classroom observations, monthly one-on-one coaching, and monthly team meetings where professional learning centered around try-collect-reflect cycles.

These cycles are adapted from the plan-do-study-act cycles of more formal improvement science approaches. They provide a simple, straightforward method for teachers to test change ideas, begin to refine them, and expand their capacity to notice what works for students. We chose to use the terminology try, collect, and reflect because these words fit into the existing schema of teachers: Teachers are always trying something, collecting data, and reflecting.

The monthly team meeting structure was intentionally designed to provide both care and challenge for

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each teacher as they became immersed in social and emotional learning or culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy. First, each meeting began with a check-in that gave each teacher the opportunity to share on a personal level before jumping into pedagogy. Team members responded to prompts such, "What does it feel like to be you lately?" or "How have you been practicing self-care this week?"

Second, we engaged in celebrations of learning, during which each teacher shared how they implemented a practice or strategy to improve social and emotional learning or culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy and what they learned during their try-collect-reflect cycle. This layer of loving accountability served as an internal and external motivator for each educator to consistently engage in the work.

Third, we engaged in resource exploration, a segment where we brought a resource related to social and emotional learning or culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy for the team to explore or discuss. The discussion is as important as the resource itself because meaning-making is essential to mindset and behavior change.

Lastly, resource exploration helped generate change ideas that each teacher used to plan their next try-collect-reflect cycle and identified what they wanted to try and what data they would collect (see tables on p. 58).

CONNECTION AND TRUST

A key part of this improvement process is emotional connection and psychological safety. To employ loving accountability, each individual needs to feel emotionally connected and psychologically safe. We strive to create conditions where people feel a sense of belonging and purpose so they can feel safe to be vulnerable and also push on each other's practice.

We began to do this during our fellowship launch by focusing on community building to establish relational trust. We continued this focus on community through our monthly meetings. In addition, one-on-one coaching calls allowed us as coaches to understand the teacher and student experience and develop trusting relationships with our teams.

The community element of the fellowship gave the fellows a space to connect, share, and grapple with other educators hoping to grow in their practice. As psychological safety increased, the fellows reported that the monthly team meetings gave them an opportunity to share and learn from their colleagues in ways that pushed their practice.

One teacher said, "The monthly team meetings supported my growth because I was able to see how other content areas were able to apply the different levels of culturally responsive pedagogy. It was also a safe place to be vulnerable and share my struggles. The best part about the team meetings was the positivity that Michelle brought to the meeting. I felt valued and appreciated as I grew my culturally responsive muscle."

The focus on supportive, collaborative try-collect-reflect cycles fostered a sense of belonging where team members were able to support one another as they navigated the implementation of culturally responsive-sustaining pedagogy and social and emotional learning. At the end of the yearlong fellowship, one veteran teacher was surprised by a significant shift in her teaching after 22 years in the profession, saying, "I had always considered SEL important, but now I see it as an integral part of my teaching. It is no longer a thing I teach; it is how I teach."

She went from thinking about social and emotional learning as a curriculum to seeing how it is woven throughout her practice. "Whether it be the way we start our mornings, to identifying what we see in characters, to how we interact with one another in the classroom, it is a part of everything," she said.

IMPROVEMENT CAN BE SIMPLE

In this fellowship, teachers found value in cycles of improvement, even though we never used those explicit terms. The beauty of continuous improvement is that it can be simple. In this professional learning model, teachers tested their theories about how they might improve student experiences, collected data and observations, reflected on the impact on their students, and made decisions about how to inform their next moves as part of their ongoing work in the classroom, not as an additional responsibility. In practical, everyday ways, they engaged in continuous improvement.

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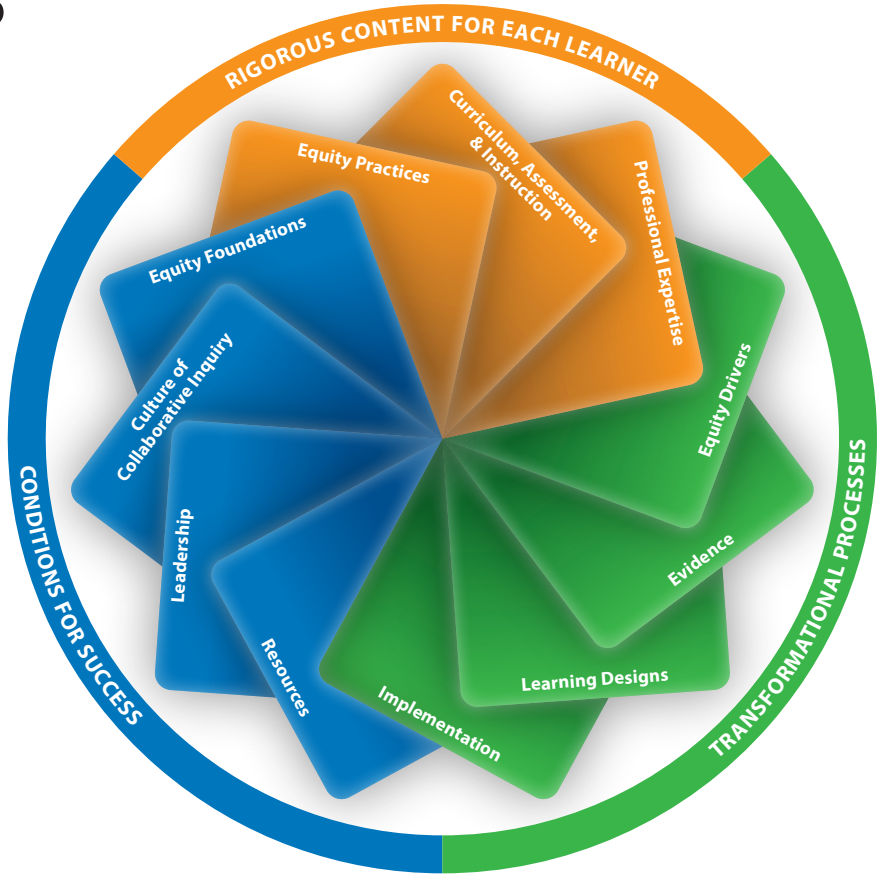
DISCUSS. COLLABORATE. FACILITATE.

TOOLS

STANDARDS GUIDES FOR ALL ROLES

Everyone has a role to play in implementing Standards for Professional Learning, and Learning Forward is committed to supporting all of those roles. A set of Action Guides, tailored to educators in different roles, is posted on our website, along with guidance and first steps for implementation. This issue's Tools section highlights the responsibilities outlined in those Action Guides and shows how the roles work together to create a systemic approach to professional learning. You can find the Action Guides at **standards.learningforward.org**.



What's your role in implementing standards?

BY LEARNING FORWARD

All educators have roles to play in implementing Standards for Professional Learning so that systemic, high-quality professional learning is available to every teacher, leader, and staff member. To help stakeholders determine the responsibilities most relevant to their roles, Learning Forward developed Action Guides tailored to system/central office leaders, principals, coaches, external partners, superintendents, teachers, and state commissioners/ministers of education.

The pages that follow detail key responsibilities for each of those roles, organized according to each of the three standards frames (Rigorous Content for Each Learner, Transformational Processes, and Conditions for Success). The responsibilities are not meant to be used as an all-inclusive checklist, but rather to drive critical actions to achieve system goals and priorities.

We recommend starting with the key responsibilities for your role, then considering those of other roles to see how the responsibilities complement and support each other and how collaboration is embedded throughout. (Note that the role most relevant to your work might not match your job title. For example, an assistant principal may fill the role of a coach or a head of school might fulfill the role we refer to as principal.)

The key responsibilities are followed by a set of reflection questions that can be used across roles, either individually or in collaboration with colleagues.

For more content from the Action Guides, and for interactive Innovation Configuration maps that detail specific implementation steps for those in coach, system/central office, principal, and external partner roles, visit **standards.learningforward.org** and click on the "Action Guides" tab.

System/central office leaders

System-level leaders of professional learning include but are not limited to directors of professional learning, directors of equity, curriculum directors or coordinators, assistant superintendents of teaching and learning, and assistant superintendents of talent development. They typically have primary responsibility for both the long-term planning and day-to-day implementation of professional learning in their contexts and are the go-to professional learning experts in their systems. They support educators at the school level, advocate for high-quality professional learning resources, and educate stakeholders about the importance of professional learning.

RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER

- **Learn about student contexts and life experiences and their potential impact on teaching, learning, and interactions at school.**
- **Prioritize understanding and applying inclusive education practices across the system or district.**
- **Focus professional learning on how to implement high-quality curriculum and instructional materials and aligned assessments.**
- **Focus professional learning for self and others on relevant and role-specific standards, guidelines, and research.**

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

- **Leverage inclusive professional learning practices across the system, removing barriers that result from historical or systemic inequities.**
- **Address how bias, assumptions, and beliefs about aspects of educator identity impact teaching and learning and collaboration with colleagues.**
- **Use learning theory in the design of professional learning and match appropriate learning designs with educator learning goals.**
- **Use multiple types of data and evidence to plan, design, implement, and evaluate professional learning.**
- **Apply change management theories and tools as part of the learning process.**
- **Sustain learning with opportunities for practice, feedback, and follow-up in coordination with human resources such as leader and school coaches.**

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- **Create and support a culture where professional learning connects to each student's opportunity for and access to rigorous learning.**
- **Create a vision for how professional learning enables educators to achieve system goals.**
- **Allocate resources, particularly time, money, people, and technology, to achieve system learning goals.**
- **Design structural coherence across all entities that provide leader and educator professional learning services across the system.**
- **Advocate for adoption of Standards for Professional Learning.**
- **Prioritize and model learning as a leader.**
- **Embed continuous collaborative learning in each educator's workday.**

Superintendents

Superintendents are critical to establishing and sustaining powerful learning in school systems, including high-quality professional learning systems for educators. Superintendents — and those in similar roles — are responsible for advocating for, allocating resources to, and aligning other systems with professional learning. Standards for Professional Learning help superintendents understand and advocate for critical aspects of high-quality professional learning. Superintendents build this knowledge, in part, by applying standards to build their own capacity as they create a vision and provide resources for a systemwide professional learning system.

RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER

- **Learn about student and family contexts and life experiences and their potential impact on teaching, learning, and interactions at school.**
- **Prioritize understanding and applying inclusive education practices across the system or district.**
- **Develop policies to provide high-quality curriculum and instructional materials and aligned assessments.**
- **Focus professional learning on standards and research.**

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

- **Set expectations for inclusive professional learning practices across the system, removing barriers that result from historical or systemic inequities.**
- **Support and connect educator and leader learning strategies to specific desired learner outcomes.**
- **Embed use of data and evidence in all aspects of professional learning.**
- **Track impact of professional learning on educators and students.**
- **Sustain investment in professional learning for long-term change and growth.**

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- **Create a context so professional learning leads to each student having access and opportunity for rigorous learning.**
- **Establish and share a vision for how professional learning enables educators to achieve system goals.**
- **Provide and advocate for sufficient human and fiscal resources.**
- **Ensure structural coherence across the multiple departments or offices that support educators and teaching and learning.**
- **Advocate for adoption of Standards for Professional Learning.**
- **Prioritize and model learning as a leader.**
- **Embed continuous collaborative learning in each educator's workday.**

Principals

Principals, in many ways, are the keystones of effective professional learning systems because the vision for high-impact professional learning must be enacted with coherence and intention at the school level as part of educators' daily work. As used here, the role of principal includes assistant principals, heads of school, deans of students, and other school-level leadership roles. These leaders work closely with other instructional leaders to ensure equity of access to timely, relevant, and powerful professional learning for each educator, guided by Standards for Professional Learning.

RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER

- **Learn about student and family contexts and life experiences and their potential impact on teaching, learning, and interactions at school.**
- **Prioritize understanding and applying inclusive education practices across the school.**
- **Develop or contribute to policies to provide high-quality curriculum and instructional materials and aligned assessments.**
- **Focus professional learning on standards and research.**

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

- **Leverage inclusive professional learning practices in the school, removing barriers that result from historical or systemic inequities.**
- **Address how bias, assumptions, and beliefs about aspects of educator identity impact teaching and learning and collaboration with colleagues.**
- **Set professional learning goals with staff tied to student needs to engage in or create aligned professional learning.**
- **Use multiple types of data and evidence to plan, design, implement, and evaluate professional learning.**
- **Apply change management theories and tools as part of the learning process.**
- **Sustain learning with opportunities for practice, feedback, and follow-up with coaches and team leads.**

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- **Create a school culture where professional learning connects to each student's opportunity for and access to rigorous learning.**
- **Create a vision for how professional learning enables educators to achieve school and system goals.**
- **Create schedules that include time for job-embedded learning for all educators in a school.**
- **Advocate for adoption of Standards for Professional Learning.**
- **Prioritize and model learning as a leader.**

Coaches

Coaches deploy job-embedded professional learning that supports educators in their daily work in close collaboration with system and school leaders. They maintain an awareness of educator needs for professional learning and help build educators' individual and collective knowledge. They use standards to help educators set professional learning goals, advocate for equitable learning, and leverage multiple types of data to inform teaching and learning. They model use of the standards by building their own capacity through continuous learning and improvement.

RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER

- **Learn about student contexts and life experiences and their potential impact on teaching, learning, and interactions at school.**
- **Support educators and self to apply inclusive education practices at the school or system level.**
- **Facilitate and support professional learning on how to implement high-quality curriculum and instructional materials and aligned assessments.**
- **Focus professional learning for self and others on relevant and role-specific standards, guidelines, and research.**

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

- **Serve as school- or system-level resource to leverage inclusive professional learning practices in the school, removing or mitigating barriers that result from historical or systemic inequities.**
- **Serve as school- or system-level resource to address how bias, assumptions, and beliefs about aspects of educator identity impact teaching and learning and collaboration with colleagues.**
- **Help staff members set professional learning goals tied to student needs to engage in or create aligned professional learning.**
- **Serve as school- or system-level resource to use multiple types of data and evidence to plan, design, implement, and evaluate professional learning.**
- **Apply change management theories and tools as part of the learning process.**
- **Support sustained learning for educators with opportunities for practice, feedback, and follow-up in concert with principals and team leads.**

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- **Contribute to a school or system culture where professional learning connects to each student's opportunity for and access to rigorous learning.**
- **Share and support a vision of how professional learning enables educators to achieve school and system goals.**
- **Help educators get maximum use out of professional learning resources, particularly time and technology.**
- **Advocate for adoption of Standards for Professional Learning.**
- **Prioritize and model learning as a leader.**
- **Support continuous collaborative learning for all educators.**

Teachers

Teachers actively engage in professional learning to refine knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and beliefs into practice that enhances the richness of student learning. Teachers use Standards for Professional Learning to advocate for access to high-impact professional learning for themselves and their peers. They also use standards to guide their own instructional, disciplinary, and classroom management practices, and encourage colleagues and leaders to adhere to the standards to ensure stability and consistency in times of constant change.

RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER

- **Learn about student and family contexts and life experiences and their potential impact on teaching, learning, and interactions in class and at school.**
- **Prioritize understanding and applying inclusive education practices at the school level.**
- **Engage regularly with colleagues in professional learning on how to implement high-quality curriculum and instructional materials and aligned assessments.**
- **Focus professional learning on relevant and role-specific standards and research.**

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

- **Participate in and contribute to inclusive professional learning practices in the school, recognizing how historical or systemic inequities have created barriers.**
- **Address how bias, assumptions, and beliefs about aspects of educator identity impact teaching and learning and collaboration with colleagues.**
- **Set professional learning goals with colleagues tied to student needs to engage in aligned professional learning.**
- **Use multiple types of data and evidence to plan, design, implement, and evaluate professional learning.**
- **Develop awareness about change processes and what they mean for professional learning.**
- **Engage in processes to sustain professional learning, including opportunities for practice, feedback, and follow-up.**

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- **Expect and contribute to a school culture where professional learning connects to each student's opportunity for and access to rigorous learning.**
- **Understand school and system vision for how professional learning enables educators to achieve school and system goals.**
- **Maximize use of job-embedded and out-of-school professional learning time.**
- **Become familiar with Standards for Professional Learning and advocate their use in school and system professional learning.**
- **Create and embrace opportunities to demand high-quality professional learning.**
- **Engage in continuous learning with peers.**
- **Model "leading from the classroom" for peers and novice teachers.**

External partners

External partners, or technical assistance providers, offer essential expertise and support as educators seek to leverage professional learning for maximum impact. Their roles and tasks vary widely depending on the purpose of the partnership, but they are often responsible for helping leaders establish and sustain learning systems that lead to improvement for every educator and student. Standards offer external partners guidance in implementing evidence-based professional learning approaches and a common framework and language for conversations with clients.

RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER

- **Help clients understand student and family contexts and life experiences and their potential impact on teaching, learning, and interactions at school.**
- **Help clients and self apply inclusive education practices.**
- **Support clients in using professional learning to implement high-quality curriculum and instructional materials and aligned assessments.**
- **Focus professional learning for self and clients on relevant and role-specific standards, guidelines, and research.**

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

- **Help clients leverage inclusive professional learning practices in the school, removing barriers that result from historical or systemic inequities.**
- **Address with clients how bias, assumptions, and beliefs about aspects of educator identity impact teaching and learning and collaboration with colleagues.**
- **Help clients set professional learning goals tied to student needs to engage in or create aligned professional learning.**
- **Help clients use multiple types of data and evidence to plan, design, implement, and evaluate professional learning.**
- **Apply change management theories and tools as part of the learning process with clients.**
- **Sustain learning with clients, supporting processes for practice, feedback, and follow-up.**

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- **Help clients connect professional learning to each student's opportunity for and access to rigorous learning.**
- **Help clients create a vision for how professional learning enables educators to achieve system goals.**
- **Help clients maximize use of professional learning resources, particularly time, money, people, and technology.**
- **Advocate for adoption of Standards for Professional Learning.**
- **Prioritize and model learning in the presence of clients.**
- **Help clients embed continuous collaborative learning in each educator's workday.**

State commissioners/ministers of education

State commissioners or ministers of education set the strategic vision for education and professional learning in their state, province, or region. They use Standards for Professional Learning to ensure an integrated, aligned system of evidence-based, high-quality professional learning that leads to improved and equitable outcomes for each and every educator and student. For standards to have their intended impact, state commissioners and ministers of education serve as lead learners, building their own capacity to create a vision and provide resources for a comprehensive professional learning system.

RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER

- **Advocate for inclusive learning practices for each learner in any learning environment within the system.**
- **Develop state and system policies to provide high-quality curriculum and instructional materials and aligned assessments.**
- **Establish expectations that professional learning for each educator is aligned to role- and content-specific standards, guidelines, and research.**

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

- **Set expectations for inclusive professional learning practices across the system, removing barriers that result from historical or systemic inequities.**
- **Create expectations that learning theory informs the design of professional learning.**
- **Create expectations and structures that require the use of multiple types of evidence to plan, design, and evaluate professional learning.**
- **Analyze and track the impact of investments in professional learning on teacher and leader growth, retention, and student outcomes.**
- **Ground actions in understanding that professional learning is a change process that requires alignment across the whole system and sustained investment and implementation support.**

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

- **Set expectations that professional learning ensures all students have access to rigorous learning, inclusive of their race, gender, ethnicity, language, ability, and other assets of identity.**
- **Establish a vision for how high-quality professional learning enables educators to achieve system-level goals, priorities, and outcomes.**
- **Advocate for professional learning resources with policymakers at local, state, provincial, regional, and federal levels.**
- **Allocate resources to establish and sustain high-quality professional learning systems as outlined by Standards for Professional Learning.**
- **Require local systems to document the use and impact of professional learning resources.**
- **Advocate for adoption of Standards for Professional Learning.**
- **Model the importance of learning as a leader.**

Identifying first actions

Use the reflection questions below to determine action steps you will prioritize to develop, strengthen, transform, and sustain professional learning. Collaborate with colleagues to complete this table and clarify how you will move forward.

QUESTION	REFLECTIONS	FIRST STEPS
After reviewing the responsibilities on the preceding pages, what would we say is our highest learning need as a team or individuals?		
How well does our vision for professional learning describe how to achieve improved teaching and student learning?		
How well do we use data and evidence to inform professional learning priorities, selection, and design?		
What is our vision for how professional learning can lead to increased equity across our system?		
How well do we use data and evidence to inform professional learning priorities, selection, and design?		

CONNECT. BELONG. SUPPORT.

UPDATES

STANDARDS LAB: A NEW ADDITION TO THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Learning Forward's 53rd Annual Conference will feature numerous opportunities to get to know the recently revised Standards for Professional Learning, including standards-focused preconference and concurrent sessions as well as a new conference experience called Standards Lab.

Standards Lab will be a daily fixture at the conference, to be held Dec. 4-7 in Nashville, Tennessee, offering a destination for attendees to get answers to their questions and participate in immersive discussions moderated by experts in professional learning and the standards.

See the chart for Standards Lab hours. For more information about the conference schedule, visit **conference.learningforward.org**.

STANDARDS LAB MODERATED DISCUSSION SCHEDULE

Date	Time	Scheduled discussion themes
Saturday	4-6 p.m.	What's new and different
Sunday	7:30-9 a.m.	How to get started with implementation
Monday	7-8 a.m.	Interactive standards simulation
Monday	3-3:30 p.m.	The equity standards
Tuesday	7-8 a.m.	The Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction standard
Tuesday	3-4 p.m.	Standards Assessment Inventory/How to measure implementation
Wednesday	8-8:30 a.m.	Policy development at all levels

UPDATES

Annual Conference early registration discount ends Oct. 31

Register for Learning Forward's Annual Conference by Oct. 31 to receive early registration savings of up to $460.

This year's in-person conference, to be held Dec. 4-7 at the Gaylord Opryland Resort and Conference Center in Nashville, Tennessee, will offer more networking and reflection time, a deep dive into the revised Standards for Professional Learning, and a focus on building equitable learning communities. An array of thought leader sessions and keynote speakers adds to the learning experience.

To register or learn more about the conference, search for sessions by topics, participant roles, session types, and more, visit **conference.learningforward.org**. You'll also find a tool kit you can download to justify the cost of your attendance.

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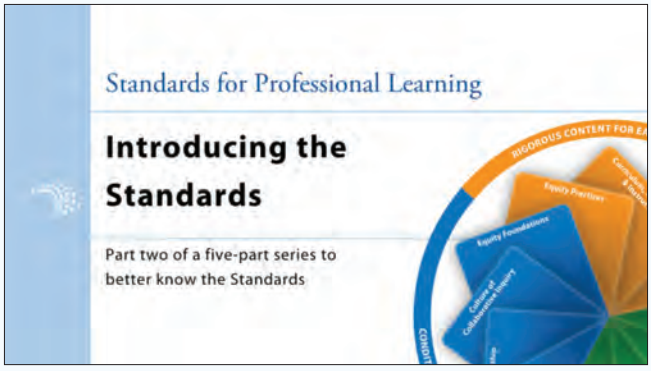
Pictured from left: Heather Platt, conference chair; Frederick Brown, Learning Forward president/CEO; Shannon Bogle, Learning Forward director, networks & academy; and Naomi Church, Learning Forward Florida president-elect.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THE STANDARDS ON OUR BLOG

Learning Forward is publishing a series of blog posts about Standards for Professional Learning that covers topics such as how the revised standards have evolved since the last iteration, how leaders see them as transformative, and how states are implementing them. Find the blog posts at **learningforward.org/blog**.



In the coming months, we will share standards implementation plans from Learning Forward members, district and state leaders, clients, policymakers, and others to serve as a professional learning resource. We invite you to share your stories about how the standards are making a difference in your work by contacting Gail Paul, content marketing specialist at Learning Forward, at **gail.paul@learningforward.org**.

Other standards resources now available include the official *Standards for Professional Learning* book, which is available at **learningforward.org/bookstore**, and role-specific Action Guides at **standards.learningforward.org**.

Learning Forward Florida conference

Learning Forward Florida hosted its fall conference in September with the theme **"Ignite the Spark."** Keynote speakers Allison Rodman, founder and chief learning officer of The Learning Loop, and Frederick Brown, Learning Forward president/CEO, fired up the audience for learning together during and beyond the conference.

The conference included concurrent sessions, community of practice time, and role-alike and regional meetings. Concurrent sessions covered topics such as student-focused learning, thriving with high-quality instructional materials, universal design for learning, teacher leadership, equity, and virtual professional learning.

FALL WEBINARS RETURN

Learning Forward kicked off its fall webinar series with a discussion about supporting new teachers. Additional webinars explore the power of the principalship and how to center equity in your work.

Learning Forward webinars, free to members, feature leaders in the field discussing key topics affecting today's educators. Watch your email and social media for announcements about upcoming webinars or visit **learningforward.org/webinars**.

TWITTER CHAT EXPLORES NURTURING NEW TEACHERS

Learning Forward hosted a Twitter chat in September on the topic of supporting new teachers. Joined by authors from the August issue of *The Learning Professional* and practitioners from diverse locations and perspectives, we discussed strategies for mentoring and coaching, ongoing skill development, and creating a web of support. To read the discussion and be notified of future Twitter chats, follow #TheLearningPro on Twitter.

LEARNING FORWARD WELCOMES THE FOLLOWING NEW DISTRICT MEMBERS:

- Akron Public Schools, Akron, Ohio;
- Jennings School District, Jennings, Missouri;
- Johnson City Schools, Johnson, Tennessee;
- Marysville Exempted Village, Marysville, Ohio;
- Murfreesboro City Schools, Murfreesboro, Tennessee;
- New London Public Schools, New London, Connecticut;
- Options for Youth – Duarte, Palmdale, California;
- Reynoldsburg City Schools, Reynoldsburg, Ohio;
- State of Hawaii Department of Education, Aiea, Hawaii;
- Spartanburg School District 7, Spartanburg, South Carolina; and
- Sycamore Community City, Blue Ash, Ohio.

We are also pleased to continue our relationship with North Brunswick Township Schools in North Brunswick, New Jersey, and Sullivan School District in Sullivan, Missouri.

Arizona partnership

Learning Forward kicked off a yearlong partnership in September with Arizona's Department of Education Adult Education Services division at the state's Adult Education Institute. Through this partnership, Learning Forward will support the professional learning of the state's adult educators.

Providing high-quality professional learning and support to the educators of adults can have important and enduring positive impact on students and the communities in which they live because students in grades pre-K through 12 are directly impacted by the adults in their lives.

At the kickoff event, Frederick Brown, Learning Forward president/CEO, delivered the opening keynote, highlighting the mindset shift required to achieve high-quality professional learning, the importance of collective efficacy, and the urgency of providing an excellent education for all students.

Following the keynote, Learning Forward facilitated a daylong session introducing Standards for Professional Learning and the learning processes detailed in Learning Forward's book *Becoming a Learning Team* (Learning Forward, 2018). Teams of educators in various roles from higher education, local education agencies, and community-based organizations worked together to identify how to best implement cycles of learning within their systems.

Learning Forward will continue to support the learning of these teams, modeling high-quality professional learning that is sustained, job-embedded, and collaborative. The teams will engage in learning and deepening their knowledge of what it means to become a learning team through six monthly virtual sessions from October through May.

Learning Forward joins technology project

Learning Forward is partnering with the State Education Technology Directors Association in a 15-month project to develop the next National Educational Technology Plan for the U.S. Department of Education. Other partners include Innovate EDU, Project Tomorrow, and Whiteboard Advisors.

The coalition's work will support the U.S. Department of Education in leveraging federal technology and connectivity investments to help schools create powerful and engaging learning opportunities for students and educators.

A primary goal for the work is to give the public ample opportunity to provide input to the development of the plan. Learning Forward and Project Tomorrow will co-lead a listening tour to gather this feedback. This will include facilitating individual and group sessions as well as the development of a work plan, protocols and templates for the meetings, and a synthesis of the feedback to inform the plan.

The development of the National Educational Technology Plan supports Learning Forward's advocacy efforts to gather input from constituents across the education system and emphasize the importance of high-quality professional learning as a must-have for a successful technology plan. For more information, contact Melinda George, Learning Forward's chief policy officer, at **melinda.george@learningforward.org**.

VIRTUAL ADVOCACY DAY FOR EDUCATORS AND LEADERS

Learning Forward hosted its first Virtual Advocacy Day in September to help school and district educators and leaders make their personalized and compelling cases to lawmakers for professional learning policy and funding.

Participants learned advocacy strategies and tips to build their advocacy skills and shared ideas about how to collect and present data and evidence about the impact of high-quality professional learning to their representatives. Participants also met with key staff from the Congressional offices representing their states and districts.

ADVOCACY FOR TITLE IIA IS KEY

As of this writing, the House and Senate have negotiated a continuing resolution, a temporary budget measure that will keep the government operating through Dec. 16. During that period, Congress will work on finalizing fiscal year 2023 appropriations for all federal programs, including education programs. Title IIA, which provides funding for professional learning to school districts, is in relatively good shape going into these negotiations, with the House Appropriations Committee approving a $100 million increase for next year and Senate Democrats supporting an $83 million increase. However, it remains to be seen what the final number will be and whether Congress can complete work on fiscal year 2023 appropriations before it adjourns for the year.

Learning Forward and its stakeholder community have urged Congress to approve a final, negotiated fiscal year 2023 omnibus appropriations bill that contains a $100 million increase for Title IIA. We do not want Congress to kick funding decisions on Title IIA and other key education programs into next year or simply pass a yearlong continuing resolution that would lead to flat funding for Title IIA and virtually all education programs.

For more information, contact Melinda George, Learning Forward's chief policy officer, at **melinda.george@learningforward.org**.

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2023 themes for *The Learning Professional*

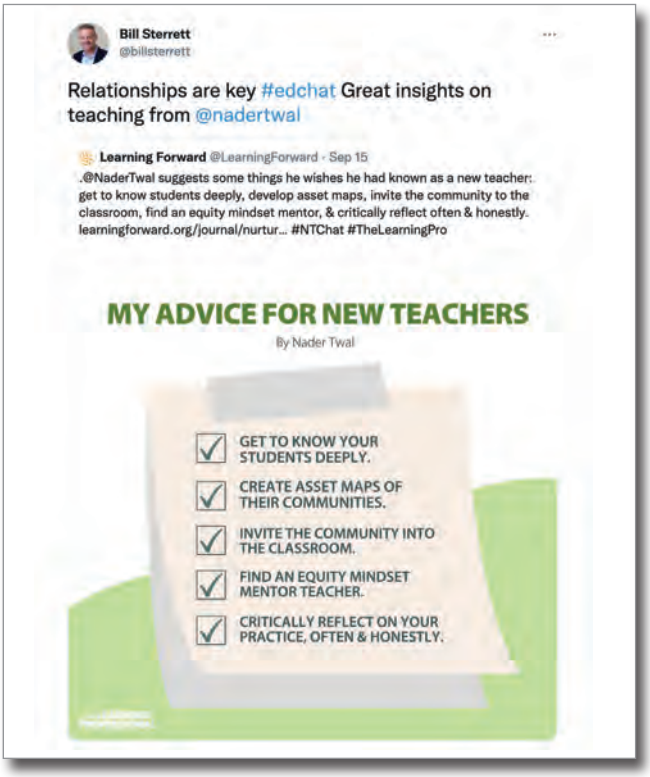
Here are themes and submission deadlines for the 2023 issues of *The Learning Professional*:

- February 2023: **The retention challenge** (due Nov. 1, 2022).
- April 2023: **Continuous improvement in schools** (closed to submissions).
- June 2023: **Accelerating learning** (due Feb. 1, 2023).
- August 2023: **About time** (due April 1, 2023).
- October 2023: **Supporting students with special needs** (due June 1, 2023).
- December 2023: **Taking the next career step** (due Aug. 1, 2023).

To learn more about the themes and view submission guidelines, visit **learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/write-for-us**.

#TheLearningPro

FEATURED SOCIAL MEDIA POST



Follow us on social media. Share your insights and feedback about *The Learning Professional* by using **#TheLearningPro.**

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ABOUT LEARNING FORWARD

Learning Forward shows you how to plan, implement, and measure high-quality professional learning so you and your team can achieve success with your system, your school, and your students.

We are the only professional association devoted exclusively to those who work in educator professional learning. We help our members effect positive and lasting change to achieve equity and excellence in teaching and learning.

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THROUGH THE LENS

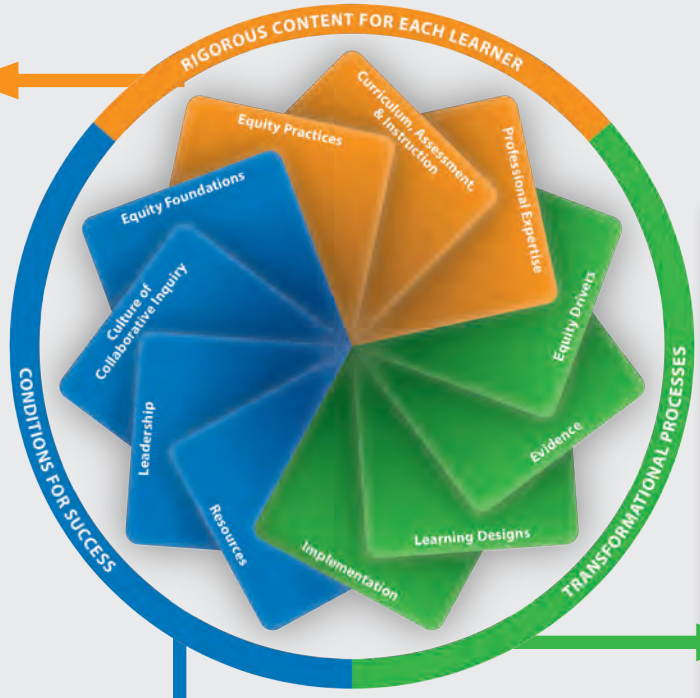
OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Standards for Professional Learning describe the content, processes, and conditions of high-quality learning that makes a difference for students and educators. They are organized in a framework of three interconnected categories. Understanding each category and each standard can help learning leaders build systemic professional learning.

To help you deepen your understanding, this tool provides reflection questions that draw on articles from this issue of *The Learning Professional* and connect to standards from each category. You can use these questions to guide your reading of the articles or you can use them in conversations with colleagues — for example, during professional learning communities, observations, or planning discussions.

The page numbers after each question will take you to the article that corresponds to the question.

HOW TO IMPLEMENT STANDARDS IN TURBULENT TIMES



Rigorous Content for Each Learner

- What kinds of **professional expertise**, such as trauma-informed practice, does your team need to build to navigate these challenging times? (p. 34)
- How are you helping your team engage in **equity practices**, such as examining whether and how teaching and learning are relevant to students' current lived experiences? (p. 40)

Transformational Processes

- Asking "why" questions is an essential part of continuous improvement processes to address challenges. What kind of **evidence** are you using to understand "why"? (p. 52)
- High-quality **implementation** of professional learning doesn't shy away from controversial issues. In fact, it provides support to approach them. What structures and strategies do you find most helpful? (p. 26)

Conditions for Success

- What structures do you have in place to help educators engage in uncomfortable but important conversations about **equity foundations**? (p. 30)
- Partnerships are important **resources** for learning how to navigate turbulent times and controversial issues. What partnerships do you have now or need to develop to ensure professional learning meets educators' timely needs? (p. 34)

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at **standards.learningforward.org**

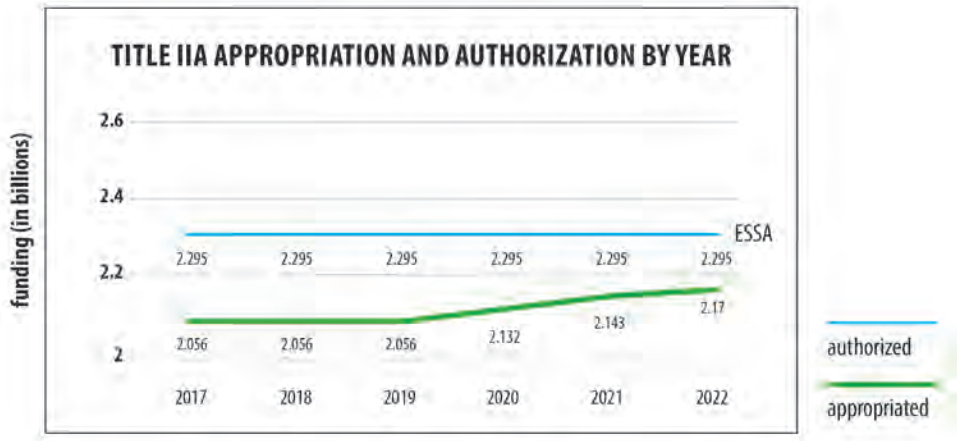
AT A GLANCE

YOUR ADVOCACY FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MATTERS.

Title IIA of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) is the primary source of federal funding for professional learning in the United States. For four years in a row, beginning in 2017, lawmakers **proposed full elimination** of its funding.

Learning Forward members and stakeholders sprang into action, establishing the "A-team" and honing advocacy skills through the Every Educator Is an Advocate Campaign. Over the next five years, you spoke out and marshaled support for maintaining and increasing funding.

Because of your collective action, not only has Title IIA been saved on Capitol Hill, but **funding has increased** for the first time in over a decade.



HERE ARE SOME OF THE ACTIONS WE'VE TAKEN TOGETHER THAT HAVE MADE A DIFFERENCE.

2017 & 2018:

- 350 Title IIA impact stories shared with members of Congress.
- "I Am Thankful for Title IIA" social media campaign.
- Tweet-storm achieved 400,000+ social media impressions.
- National Title IIA Day of Action and Capitol Hill briefing held.

2019 & 2020:

- Proclamation for Professional Learning, with 1,700+ signatures, delivered to members of Congress.
- Learning Forward Advocacy Day and Capitol Hill briefing held.
- Preparing Educators to Prepare Students Increase (PEPSIncrease) petition shared with lawmakers.

2021 & 2022:

- PoweredbyTitleIIA website attracted 5,000+ visitors in the first three months.
- Virtual Advocacy Day included participants from 46 states.
- U.S. Department of Education Secretary Miguel Cardona addressed 2,000+ attendees at Learning Forward Virtual Conference.

OUR WORK IS NOT DONE.

The top line on the graph shows that ESSA allows for more funding than lawmakers have allocated in the budget.

Let's keep up the good work to get the full funding educators need and deserve.

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