In the world of technology, a network is a set of computers that communicates with each other using common language or protocols, leading to more efficiency, speed, and quality of processes and outputs. In the professional learning world, we refer to networks as a set of organizations communicating and learning around a common problem of practice. As with computers, professional learning networks impact our practice by increasing the efficiency of the improvement process and the quality of learning.

Networks support education colleagues to engage in collaborative inquiry, which promotes the ongoing exchange of knowledge, ideas, and resources for continuous improvement. While the format of networks can vary, the goal is to create a collaborative space that results in improvement within systems. Ultimately, networks create the opportunity for educators to work smarter, not harder.

For two years, Learning Forward has worked with Ohio’s State Literacy Network to do just this. The state of Ohio is shifting to a more structured literacy model that reflects the research on the science of reading. As Ohio educators are making dramatic shifts in their approach to literacy, they need networking to learn from one another about implementing and ensuring best practices.

As part of the network, 16 state support teams are responsible for implementing regional services supporting districts that range in size and student and educator demographics. The leaders of these teams participate in high-quality professional learning and, in turn, facilitate professional learning on evidence-based practices that impact student achievement.

With a network of educators working across all regions, and networks among districts within each region, it’s important to ensure that all the learning is grounded in best practices and that leaders at each level model those best practices. Ohio’s network model serves as a thriving example of how Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning create a foundation for best practices and continuous improvement in building educator capacity.

To illustrate how Ohio is aligning its work with the standards, we can look to the work of Laura Jones, regional literacy specialist and network leader for one of the state support teams. Jones uses the tools and knowledge she is gaining through her own participation in the Ohio State Literacy Network to improve the effectiveness of the regional network she is leading. The regional network is creating high-quality professional learning plans on structured literacy. Here are examples of how Jones is incorporating the standards into that work.

**Professional Expertise:** Jones is building her expertise in the tools and processes of continuous improvement and applying them with the network she leads. Through the knowledge she has gained, Jones is improving the support she provides to her network and building her educators’ knowledge of change management and implementation. For example, she uses the Implementation Science checklist to help her plan learning designs for upcoming convenings. In addition, she has used the KASAB model — which means recognizing that learning includes building knowledge.
Continued from p. 8
voices and benefited students and our
building’s culture. As a result, teachers
felt the professional learning or change
was something that was being done
with them, not to them.

The third standard — Leadership
— may seem an obvious choice, but
it’s helpful to understand how it
contributes to teacher retention.

Leadership: Professional learning
results in equitable and excellent
outcomes for all students when educators
establish a compelling and inclusive
vision for professional learning, sustain
coherent support to build educator
capacity, and advocate for professional
learning by sharing the importance
and evidence of impact of professional
learning.

This standard applies to a broad
range of individuals across the
education system, including those
who do not have the word “leader” in
their titles. I was not the only leader
in my building. Grade-level chairs,
content experts, and even students saw
themselves as leaders and as part of
creating and maintaining the vision of
collective efficacy and mutual success.
As a result, they not only felt a sense of
loyalty and a desire to see the changes
carried through, they also could see a
long-term career path for themselves.

I take pride in the way my staff and
I collaborated to grow and improve
and that we had high levels of retention
and satisfaction. This is a reflection of
everyone’s hard work and intentional
commitment, not just mine. But I
understood — and welcomed — the
responsibility I had to create the
conditions for that culture to grow.

As Jason Grissom and colleagues
stated in their report, “Principals who
are successful at retaining teachers
take a proactive approach and
focus on teacher growth, including
building opportunities for teachers to
collaborate.” I encourage all school
leaders to take that message to heart.

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