NETWORKS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO WORK SMARTER, NOT HARDER

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I n 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,

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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.

REFERENCES

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aspirations, skills, attitudes, and behaviors — with her districts to assist them in beginning their professional learning plans.

Evidence: Jones uses a wide range of data points in designing the learning for the educators she supports. She uses surveys, polls, and protocol tools to gather information about her districts' progress. This allows her to gauge where they are in the process of developing a professional learning plan as well as determine any remaining gaps in knowledge. In addition, Jones focuses heavily on data use with her districts, helping them set goals and determine the data sources and systems they can use to monitor progress. She is building the capacity of her districts to determine meaningful ways to evaluate their work.

Learning Designs and Implementation: The districts in Jones's region are identifying the learning designs most appropriate for ensuring that

their educators progress to full implementation of new instructional practices. The state provides the structured literacy training that the districts will use, so the focus for Jones and the educators she supports is to design the job-embedded follow-up for each district tailored to its level of capacity to support teachers. One of Jones' goals is to create a coherent system for how districts develop their professional learning plans by building foundational knowledge in high-quality professional learning, change management, and implementation sciences.

Culture of Collaborative Inquiry: As Jones works to drive the networks model into her region, her goal is to create an environment where educators work smarter, not harder, so that they are doing less but more effective work. Collaboration helps leaders and staff move toward this goal. Because districts are collaborating around similar problems of practice, they help each

other access resources and ideas from districts across their region. In her next convening, Jones will use a structured protocol that allows districts to partner in a consultancy-type space to problem-solve around their progress. This kind of collaboration also helps the leaders build a culture of collective ownership for all of Ohio's students.

The Ohio Department of Education has committed to improving student learning, particularly in literacy, across the state. That doesn't mean all districts are approaching the work in the same way. Ohio has given school districts local control, which means that they are all approaching their challenges in ways that suit their contexts. The network model is essential because it allows districts to learn from and with each other by sharing what is working and what is not. By leveraging Standards for Professional Learning to guide their work, Ohio educators are engaging in meaningful learning and growing their practice for the benefit of students across the state. ■