

THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

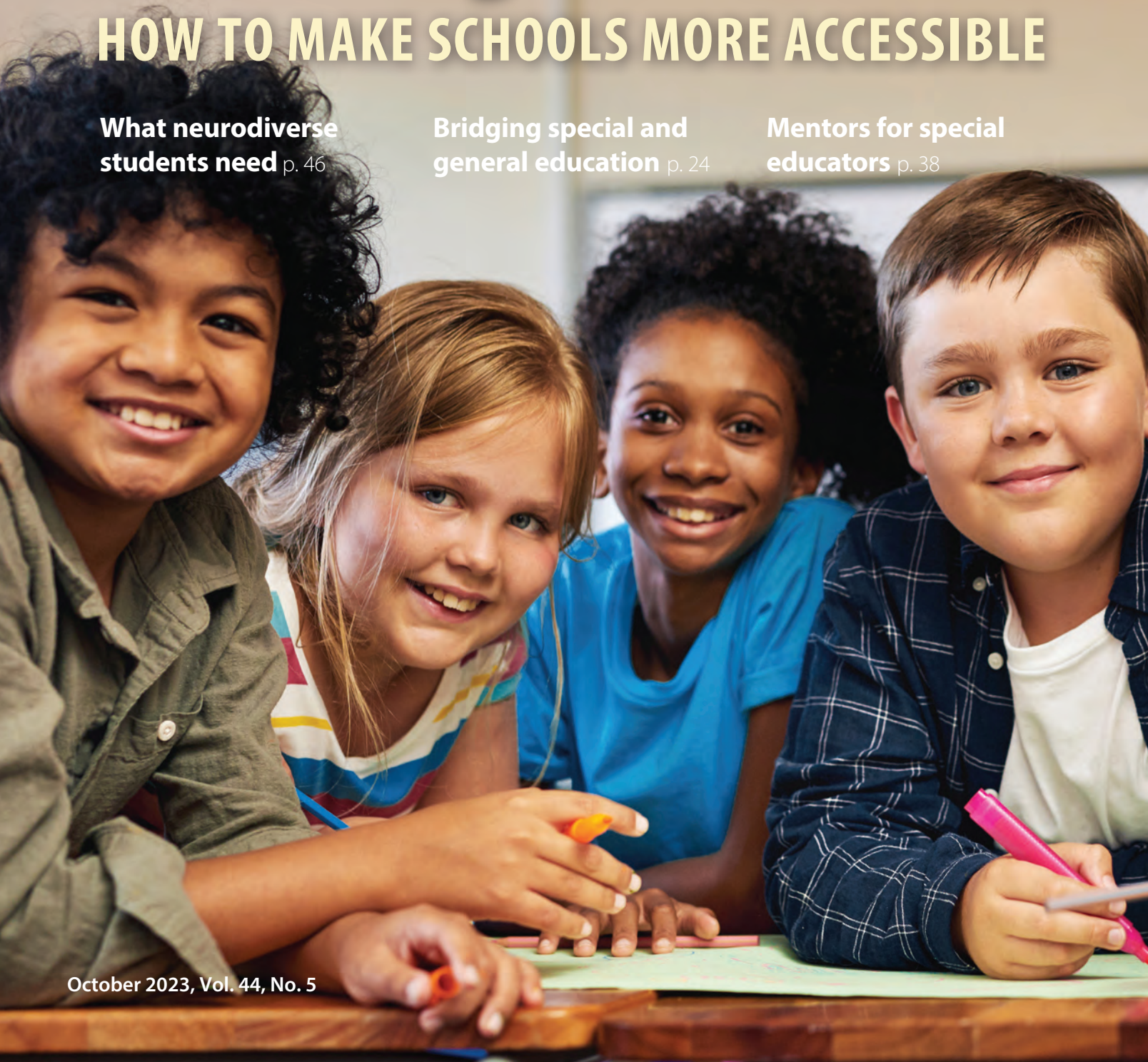
Reaching all learners

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Find the Fibonacci sequences in the image:
Where can you find the sequences in nature?
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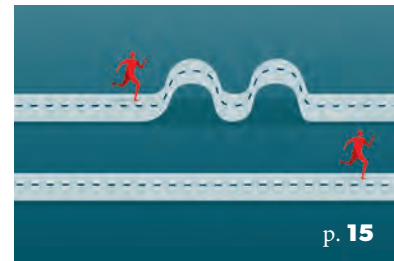
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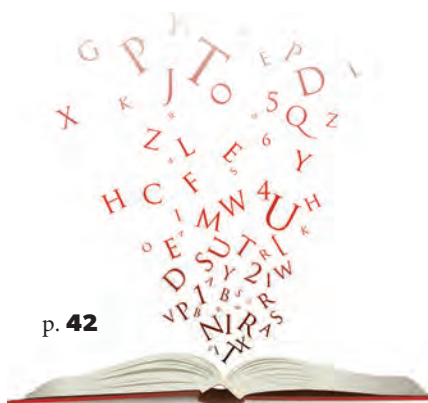
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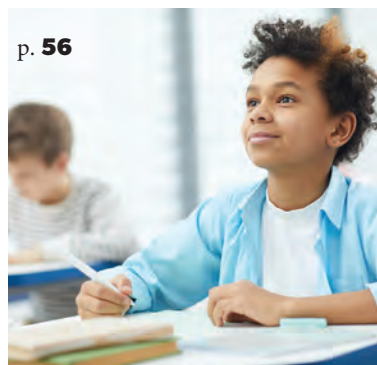
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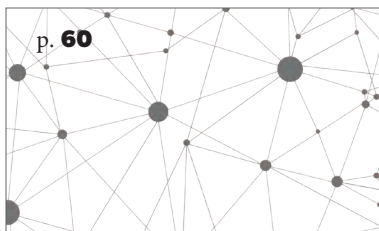
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14-year-old disability activist, scholar, artist, and speaker



“Look for the lonely child sitting by themselves at school. The child that no one picks for play or group work. ... Look for me in your school and in your classroom. And be my champion! I am a prime example of a child that can soar and succeed if you champion me. And to be clear, being a champion to me means confronting your own deficit ideology and seeing my assets. ... It means championing my work and my character. It means learning more about how to support the students with disabilities in *your* classroom. ... Be that adult. Be that champion.”

— Source: Excerpted from remarks to the National Education Association Representative Assembly, July 4, 2023. bit.ly/3PZXqKK

Learning Forward's 2023 Annual Conference

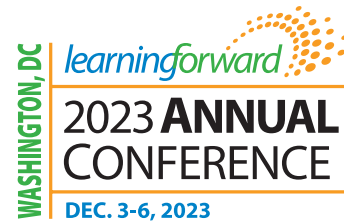
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HERE WE GO

Suzanne Bouffard

WHEN IT COMES TO UNDERSTANDING STUDENTS, WE ARE ALWAYS LEARNERS

It's vital to have opportunities, methods, and habits for continuing to learn because student needs evolve and educators' positions change.

The great promise of public schools is that they serve all children equitably and effectively. Doing so is essential and complex because students' needs are so diverse. Ideally, educators have a broad knowledge base and skill set for meeting learners' needs from Day One in the classroom. But it's also vital to have opportunities, methods, and habits for continuing to learn because student needs evolve and educators' positions change.

This issue of *The Learning Professional* focuses on students with complex learning needs that have not always been met fully. We spotlight students with a range of disabilities, diagnoses, and learning needs. While the articles don't represent the full spectrum of diverse learning needs that students bring to school, the professional learning lessons within them can be applied to many situations.

The term "learners," rather than "students," is intentional because all *teachers* need support to reach all *students*. Both special education teachers and general education teachers need opportunities to increase their knowledge about and practices for helping students with disabilities succeed. Special educators tell us they want more professional learning tailored to their roles and their students and more time to share their expertise with and co-plan with general education teachers. We know that many general education teachers have little background in working with students with disabilities, yet two-thirds of those students spend 80% or more of their time in general education classrooms (National Center for Education Statistics, 2023).

This issue includes articles about professional learning for educators in both of those roles. For example, Alexa Quinn and colleagues write about a project that helped general education teachers use research-backed practices for students with math disabilities, and Amanda Morin and Emily Kircher-Morris share recommendations for making all classrooms welcoming to neurodiverse students. Homing in on special education teachers' needs, Denise Heppner reports on preservice special educators' areas of interest and need, and Dana Curton and Laura Hess share how their district has bolstered the skills of novice special education teachers enrolled in alternative certification pathways.

A note about terminology: Authors in this issue use different terms to refer to focal students and teachers. As we have done with other topics, *The Learning Professional* honors authors' expertise, and we acknowledge that they write about a range of contexts and from varying positionality. For example, many authors use the term students with disabilities, as we do in our own writing for this issue, in accordance with guidance from the National Center on Disability and Journalism (2021). But the issue also uses terms like special education and special educators, in keeping with the terminology used in many schools and by the U.S. Department of Education.

The strategies and recommendations in this issue are meant to be part of a comprehensive professional learning approach. Such an approach can bring together the instructional, relational, and environmental factors it takes for all teachers to support all students. As Frederick Brown, Learning Forward CEO, writes on p. 8, "A systemwide commitment to high-quality professional learning is the best route to ensure educational equity for students with disabilities and all students."

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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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THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL
ISSN 2476-194X

The Learning Professional is a benefit of membership in Learning Forward. \$118 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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VOICES



TO DEVELOP STUDENTS, DEVELOP EDUCATORS

“Educators are in the business of people development. So we need adults who can bring the best of themselves to the work. Growth is a struggle. But it’s well worth it.”

Source: Eleanor Drago-Severson, Learning Forward Book Club discussion, Oct. 3, 2023.



Meeting the needs of every single child, including those with disabilities, is an equity imperative. It is vital work and also complex work.

Frederick Brown (frederick.brown@learningforward.org) is president and CEO of Learning Forward.

CALL TO ACTION

Frederick Brown

TO SUPPORT ALL STUDENTS' NEEDS, TEACHERS MUST BE CONSTANTLY LEARNING

When parents send their children to school, they want them to be cared for and educated as the unique individuals they are, regardless of whether they have an intellectual or physical disability, are multilingual learners, are still struggling to recover from pandemic setbacks, want extra academic enrichment, or face any number of challenges. And they expect their children will be seen and valued, regardless of their cultural background, race, class, disabilities, or life experiences.

U.S. schools serve more than 7 million students with disabilities, making up about 15% of the total student population (Schaeffer, 2023). That percentage has nearly doubled since the National Center for Education Statistics began tracking it in 1976, after the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (NCES, 2023). The increase is surely due, in part, to improved identification and recognition that students have varied needs that all deserve support.

Meeting the needs of every single child, including those with disabilities, is an equity imperative. It is vital work and also complex work. I know this firsthand. My godson is a childhood cancer survivor, and his battle left him with a number of physical challenges that required a 504 plan. His mother and I noticed a stark difference among his teachers in how they adjusted their lessons and classroom practices to meet his specific needs. He thrived in classrooms where teachers understood the importance of focusing on his strengths. But not all teachers did.

To support all students' varied needs, teachers must be constantly learning — about the latest research on the brain and instruction, about each and every child's challenges and strengths, and how to make high-quality instruction accessible to all students using a range of tools and methods. This means that teachers' learning and growth matter because they are essential for students' learning and growth. I suspect that the teachers who helped my godson thrive had opportunities to learn about and continually improve their practices for and with students with disabilities. And I'll always believe that effective professional learning and leadership could have significantly benefited those teachers whose practices didn't support his needs.

A systemwide commitment to high-quality professional learning is the best route to ensure educational equity for students with disabilities and *all* students. Learning Forward defines equity as the outcome of educator practices that respect and nurture all aspects of each and every student's identity rather than treat them as barriers to learning. Equity means every student has what they need to succeed — pure and simple.

Fifty years ago, schools did not have IEPs (individualized education programs) or 504 plans to formalize plans to support students with disabilities. Systems and frameworks like Universal Design for Learning and Multi-Tiered Systems of Support have only come into existence in



the last three or four decades. The neuroscience of reading and reading disabilities has expanded greatly in the last 20 years, and states are still at varied stages of implementing early literacy screening. As developments like these have evolved, and as they continue to evolve into the future, one thing is constant: Educators need opportunities and resources to learn about them, implement them, and ensure that students are receiving the best we have to offer.

This is why professional learning is essential. It is a critical lever to achieve equity and success for all students. This connection between educator professional learning and student learning is vital but often doesn't get its due. That's why I make it a priority to be explicit about Learning Forward's work championing equitable professional learning. It's time for everyone to get on the same page about supporting teachers, instructional staff, and leaders so that every child learns, regardless of their unique needs.

Schools ensure success for every student when education leaders create, support, sustain, and advocate for coherent systems and programs that connect effective adult learning with equitable student outcomes. That includes, for example, making sure that every teacher is knowledgeable

about best practices for teaching reading and is able to implement the school's plan for learning recovery at all levels of students' mastery. It also includes making sure that every teacher is knowledgeable about supporting students with disabilities because most children with disabilities are served in general education settings, and research shows that students with disabilities show academic gains when they spend 80% or more of their school day in general education classrooms (Cole et al., 2022).

To fulfill its potential and achieve equity, we believe that professional learning must be guided by key principles grounded in research and informed by best practices. We embody these principles through Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, which inform the entirety of our work. Our three equity standards emphasize the importance of building on students' assets; understanding the connection between students' selves, identities, and learning; seeing the connection among social, emotional, physical, and academic aspects of learning; recognizing the impacts of ableism and other -isms; and, in short, understanding and valuing students holistically (Learning Forward, 2022).

In the standards and elsewhere, we say that equity is at the heart of

our work. What that means is that we're here for each and every student, not for some or most, and we help educators put that commitment into action. It means we help them to see and honor every child's unique gifts, strengths, and backgrounds. It means we help them build schools that make space for everyone, where everyone learns and everyone succeeds. It means every educator has access to effective professional learning so they can be at their best for their students.

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WEBINARS

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Principals, assistant principals, supervisors, teacher leaders, and other education professionals can improve their teams' work by developing strong coaching skills like listening, questioning, and paraphrasing.

CONFERENCE SPOTLIGHT

Learning Forward

THE POWER OF COACHING: VOICES FROM THE FIELD

Coaching is one of the most powerful forms of professional learning, leading to improved teacher instruction and student achievement (Kraft, 2018). Too often, educators limit its potential by assuming that it can only be done by people with the word “coach” in their title. In fact, coaching is a set of skills that anyone who leads and supports others can use. Principals, assistant principals, supervisors, teacher leaders, and other education professionals can improve their teams' work by developing strong coaching skills like listening, questioning, and paraphrasing.



At the 2023 Learning Forward Annual Conference, a keynote panel of coaching experts will debunk the myth that only coaches can coach and share insights on how to develop and deploy your coaching skills (see text box on p. 11). They will explain why coaching benefits everyone, the most important coaching skills to learn, and how to distinguish building capacity from giving advice.

One reason it's important to intentionally build coaching skills among all leaders is to ensure that coaching is authentic and meaningful. When coaching is confused with giving advice, it does not build the coachee's capacity to think and practice differently. Furthermore, when leaders dole out advice without encouraging the coachee's own reflection, the result is a recycling of the same ideas over and over — especially when there is a power differential between the two people, which causes advice to be interpreted as a directive.

In contrast, when the conversation is a back-and-forth exchange characterized by genuine curiosity and authentic listening, it allows the parties to think creatively and share reflections that can lead to innovation. As a result, the best coaches hold their expertise lightly, rather than imposing it heavily upon others.

Conference panelists will explain what this looks and sounds like, drawing on examples from their own work and lives. Their discussion will make you rethink your assumptions about coaching and open up new avenues for educators at all levels to benefit from coaching.

We asked the expert panelists about the insights they plan to share during the conference. Here are highlights.

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WHAT COACHING EXPERTS SAY



“Coaching is a skill that extends beyond a role. Coaching builds capacity in others, and it’s the way all educators should be relating. We want everyone to know they can use coaching conversational skills to support others’ thinking and that everyone should be coached because there is so much value in it.”

— **Sharron Helmke**, senior vice president, professional services content, Learning Forward



“When we’re talking about coaching for teachers, we’re not talking about an extra thing, we are talking about the work that you do. We’re talking about being more thoughtful about that work. We’re not saying let’s add something. We’re saying let’s slow down and look at what we’re already doing and refine that.”

— **James Thurman**, Blueprint Literacy Coach for Baltimore City Public Schools, Maryland



“We coach the whole person [because] it’s not just about your work self, it’s about your whole self. Have a personal win in this coaching session, have accountability to move forward with a next action, because we know that will have ripple effects and create momentum.”

— **Jen Lara**, professor of education, lead coach, and co-creator of Anne Arundel Community College’s Engagement Coach Training Program, Maryland



“Great coaches don’t tell anyone what to do. We ask great questions.”

— **Jackie Owens Wilson**, executive director of the National Policy Board for Educational Administration and co-author of *Blended Coaching: Supporting the Development and Supervision of School Leaders*



COACHING KEYNOTE DEC. 5

Join four coaching experts — Jen Lara, James Thurman, Jackie Owens Wilson, and Learning Forward’s Sharron Helmke — for an insightful discussion about coaching at the 2023 Learning Forward Annual Conference, to be held Dec. 3-6 in Washington, D.C. This keynote conversation on Dec. 5 will explore why coaching works, how successful educators in a range of roles can use coaching skills, and how to establish an organizational culture of collaborative coaching. Learn more and register for the conference at **conference.learningforward.org**



Member districts will address shared problems of practice in a collaborative environment fueled by rapid inquiry cycles to test ideas and document improvement.

Michelle Bowman (michelle.bowman@learningforward.org) is senior vice president, networks & continuous improvement at Learning Forward.

NETWORK ADVANCES CURRICULUM-BASED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The value and promise of teaching with high-quality instructional materials has been well-documented, but research suggests that good curricula can only do so much to advance student learning. High-quality curriculum-based professional learning is required to realize its potential (Chu et al., 2022). Diverse stakeholders must work together to produce improved professional learning that strengthens educational experiences and outcomes for students.

Learning Forward's new Curriculum-Based Professional Learning network aims to do just that. The network provides member districts with an opportunity to work collaboratively with Learning Forward to advance the use of curriculum-based professional learning to implement and scale instructional practices that positively affect equitable student outcomes. This improvement network provides a research-informed structure to organize learning and address shared problems of practice in a collaborative environment fueled by rapid inquiry cycles to test ideas and document improvement.



The need for this network is underscored by the fact that the field of curriculum-based professional learning is promising but still emerging, with impact not yet consistently felt across the education ecosystem and a need for focused attention to resources, actors, and the evolving knowledge base (Chu et al., 2022).

The network is grounded in two premises. First, curriculum launch or implementation without tightly aligned professional learning can lead to content gaps from one grade to the next, lessons targeted at the wrong level, and ineffective differentiated support for students. Second, to effectively implement a high-quality instructional model with integrity, educators need a supportive, coherent professional learning system that is aligned with Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022). Alignment to the standards will ensure that professional learning is coherent, job-embedded, relevant to educators' day-to-day work, and addresses critical issues affecting all students' learning and achievement.

The network's district partners for the 2023-24 school year include the School District of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Montgomery County Public Schools, Maryland; and Metro Nashville Public Schools, Tennessee. The member districts are all in early phases of implementing Illustrative Mathematics at the middle school level. Each member district will engage a core team of cross-role district- and school-based leaders from two to three middle schools reflecting the diversity of the district's student population.

With funding from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, the network will meet throughout the school year for in-person and virtual convenings, virtual coaching sessions, and professional learning webinars. The teams will use Learning Forward's well-established continuous improvement strategies and active learning grounded in Standards for Professional Learning. They will test evidence-based actions and collect immediate and practical data to inform decisions and

Continued on p. 14



COACH'S NOTEBOOK

Kathy Perret

LIKE GARDENERS, COACHES PLANT THE SEEDS — FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

As in tending a garden, coaching involves closely and frequently observing the growing buds. In classrooms, those buds are students.

I enjoy caring for my garden and aim to learn something new each year. This summer, my primary focus was growing vegetables and flowers from seeds for the first time. Planting seeds and watching them grow was an invigorating process. I celebrated and enjoyed each new stage of the transformation. I was amazed by how the tiniest seeds transformed into unique plants — especially my sunflowers that towered over my garage.



As I observed my garden's growth while drinking my morning coffee each day, I pondered the similarities between instructional coaches and gardeners. As a

coach, I strive to sow the seeds of knowledge, cultivate an environment of growth, offer personalized support that meets unique needs and conditions, and appreciate the blooms that emerge.

Here are some of the strategies I use in both gardening and coaching that could help you plant your metaphorical seeds and nurture them to optimal growth.

SCATTER SEEDS

One of my favorite children's books is *Miss Rumphius* by Barbara Cooney. The narrator tells the story of a librarian named Alice Rumphius who had three lifelong goals: travel to faraway places, live by the sea, and do something to make the world more beautiful. To accomplish the third goal, she decided to spread lupine seeds wherever she walked. But a bad back forced her to stop spreading her seeds. Yet, to her surprise, others (including birds and the wind) continued the process for her and helped her make the world more beautiful.

Like Miss Rumphius, good coaches scatter seeds wherever and however they can. For example, when I was a school-based coach, I sent a weekly newsletter as a seed for sparking interest and initiating coaching cycles. I followed four key principles with the acronym FACE: **f**requency so that teachers came to expect it and looked forward to the tips; **a**udience tailoring to help teachers discover how they might use coaching; **c**ontent that was practical and aligned with school goals and student needs and provided food for thought; and **e**ase of creation and use through a streamlined template that made it feasible to drop in new ideas as they came to me.

TEND THE BUDS

As in tending a garden, coaching involves closely and frequently observing the growing buds. In classrooms, those buds are students. In coaching, I've found it effective to center our attention on students and whether they are growing as teachers aim for them to do. This helps to dispel the unfortunate belief among many that coaching is a way to "fix" teachers.

An effective coaching cycle begins with observing and listening to gather information that reflects the current classroom situation to guide teachers' goal-setting. Coaches can help teachers gather this information by observing. For instance, a teacher might be interested in assessing how often students participate in class, and a coach can gather this information using simple tallies.

Kathy Perret (kathyperret consulting@gmail.com) is an independent educational consultant and virtual coach focused on instructional coaching.

Continued from p. 12

catalyze the next iteration of a change. They will use change management tools and resources that help leaders create effective professional learning policies and in the service of improved teaching practices and changes in student learning and achievement. Resources such as *The Elements: Transforming Teaching Through Curriculum-Based Professional Learning* (Short & Hirsh, 2022), the network’s research and tools, and Learning Forward tools aligned to Standards for Professional Learning will undergird participants’ learning.

Districts in the network will:

- Share promising practices that

support curriculum-based professional learning.

- Co-produce solutions regarding the implementation of high-quality instructional materials.
- Network with role-alike professionals and gain additional perspectives to support teacher teams and student outcomes.
- Gain additional perspectives on challenges and opportunities.

By working collaboratively, sharing knowledge, and engaging together in learning and problem-solving, they will make progress on a shared problem of practice to improve student learning in

math through the combination of high-quality curriculum and high-quality teaching practices that are aligned to it.

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Coaches can also encourage and support teachers to collect the data. For example, to foster a holistic approach beyond data that can be quantified, I’ve encouraged teachers to collect open-ended responses from students at the end of a lesson, such as asking them to write about what they learned.

Observing and collecting data allows us to understand the buds we are tending and what they need so we can tailor our efforts to improve engagement and comprehension and help students blossom.

INVITE OTHERS TO HELP SPREAD SEEDS

As Miss Rumphius discovered, even dedicated gardeners can use a little help. Some of my most successful coaching cycles started with others planting the initial seeds. For example, a supportive school principal I worked with understood coaching and embodied many of its principles when working with teachers. Because he deeply understood each teacher’s goals, he could provide them with various options for the next steps, including

highlighting how my coaching could support them in achieving their goal. Teachers, recognizing the value of this guidance, soon realized that working with a coach was like having a skilled gardener by their side. It became evident that coaching was a time-saving approach, sparing them the effort of figuring things out independently and instead nurturing their growth efficiently.

NURTURE, DON'T CONTROL

One of the valuable lessons I learned early in my coaching journey was understanding that my role wasn’t to force teachers into teaching the way I did. Like a unique plant, each teacher possesses their strengths and challenges, and they need different supports and nutrients to nurture students in their distinctive manner. When I shifted my approach from “here is something I did” to focusing on the teacher and their specific circumstances with students, coaching became a more meaningful and appreciated practice.

And, as in a garden, we can’t control the outcome — we can only

provide the care and attention that maximize the chances of growth. I discovered that coaching thrives when it is a natural response to a recognized need. Teachers benefit most when they willingly embrace coaching because they understand its value.

Instead of rushing toward the teachers I initially thought needed improvement, I started seeking out those teachers who were eager to grow. Interestingly, this approach often led to indirect seed planting, as other teachers observed the positive outcomes of our collaborative work and became interested in participating.

With these tips in mind, being an instructional coach can be very similar — and similarly rewarding — to being a gardener. It involves focusing on growth and progress, nurturing the growing process with care and attention, adapting to the evolving landscape, learning from challenges and unsuccessful experiments, practicing patience, and celebrating successes.

Let’s plant the seeds of success together, and may this year’s harvest be bountiful and fulfilling for all. ■



EQUITY & IMPROVEMENT

Val Brown

DOES YOUR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SUPPORT EDUCATORS WITH DISABILITIES?

Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimates one in four adults has a visible or invisible disability, yet we rarely talk about supporting educators with disabilities in professional learning.

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Most educators have worked with 504 plans or Individualized Education Programs (IEP) to support students with disabilities and specific learning needs. But do we have similar supports and structures for adult learners? Recent data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2023) estimates one in four adults has a visible or invisible disability, yet we rarely talk about supporting educators with disabilities in professional learning.

Fifty years ago, the U.S. government passed the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, a precursor to the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

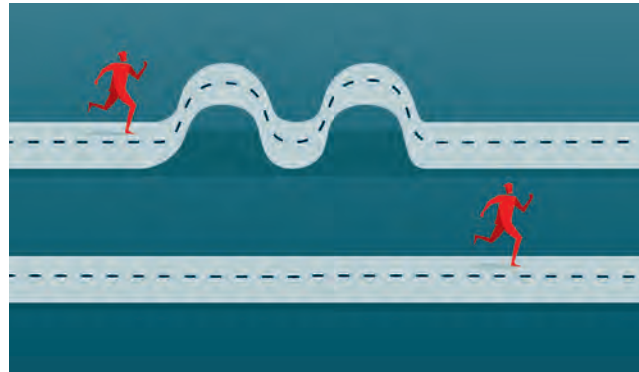
Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act prohibits discrimination based on disability. Before this legislation, it was legal to exclude disabled students from formal schooling or equitable instruction. With the passing of IDEA, disabled students attending elementary and secondary institutions were guaranteed access to the learning environment and accommodations to ensure academic success. The importance of these changes cannot be overstated.

While a classroom teacher, I collaborated with special educators to write and implement IEPs and 504 plans and took necessary steps to keep any student from feeling excluded in my classroom, but it was years before I recognized how accommodations I made for one or two students helped all my students. I didn't come to this understanding on my own, but through the expertise of special educators. One shared an illustrative example that helped me understand how inclusivity benefits everyone: Entrance ramps designed to make buildings accessible to wheelchairs also make it easier for strollers, young children learning to walk, and people making deliveries. Everyone wins.

That principle also applies to educators' professional learning, yet we often fail to see it. One reason is that many of us have an unconscious ableist bias. When I was a classroom teacher, I operated from the ableist assumption that all my students were able-bodied and neurotypical. Later, I unintentionally took those same biases into my practice with adult learners.

My awareness grew and my approach shifted thanks to a conversation in 2020 with Judy Heumann, a disabled educator and activist who led the fight to ensure the passing, implementation, and enforcement of Section 504. In 1977, she and more than 100 disabled activists in San Francisco led the longest sit-in at a federal building in U.S. history. The sit-in lasted for 25 days, and when the phone lines were cut, the deaf activists in the building used sign language to communicate to their supporters outside. Their protest led to full support of Section 504.

The first question she asked me after we were introduced was, "So what is your disability?" I stammered, "Uhhh ... I don't have one." Heumann worked from the assumption that I had a disability. From her perspective, understanding my needs would allow her to make the



necessary adjustments to accommodate me. She valued my inclusion, perspective, and participation in the conversation.

Before I met Heumann, if you asked me if I valued the inclusion, perspectives, and participation of all adult learners, I would enthusiastically reply, “Absolutely!” However, her question demonstrated how one operates in their values and shifted my perspective. Over time, she became one of my heroes, and her legacy continues to help me improve my practice as I strive to continue growing in this area.

In that spirit, I ask myself and all of you: How would we design professional learning if we worked from the assumption that 25% of our attendees experienced a

disability? What are some things we, as facilitators, would do or say differently?

Maybe we could:

- Use a microphone instead of our teacher voice;
- Consider accessible fonts and slides for our presentations;
- Provide printouts or digital access so participants can follow along on their personal devices;
- Include captions on videos;
- Provide alt-text for all images; and
- Be thoughtful about community builders that involve movement.

What are other ways we can design professional learning that benefits all adult learners so they in turn can support all young people? Share them with me and each other on social media or by email.

In her book, *Being Heumann*, Heumann writes, “We can design our cities and our society in a way that fosters belonging and community rather than segregation and isolation” (p. 207). Let’s work together so we can also make our schools and professional learning places that reject isolation and foster belonging and community.

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THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

Announcing Changemakers

A new 2024 column in *The Learning Professional*

Changemakers is a new feature designed to showcase success stories about people making positive impacts through professional learning. Debuting in February 2024, this column will shine a light on the people behind the inspiring work of improving student outcomes, fostering collaborative cultures of improvement, and showcasing professional learning that supports success for all.

Nominate a changemaker today:





FOCUS ON WELLNESS

Julia Mahfouz

MEANING AND PURPOSE ARE KEY TO PRINCIPALS' WELL-BEING

One critical aspect of self-care is intricately linked with what psychologists and sociologists refer to as prosociality — extending our inner selves for others.

Burnout rates among principals are high, largely due to the immense pressure principals face in striving to achieve demanding academic standards for students, while simultaneously adapting to constant changes and effectively collaborating with a diverse range of stakeholders during strenuous times.

Lately, self-care and attending to one's well-being have become a topic of frequent conversation in and outside of schools. Principals are often reminded to prioritize their own well-being by managing their time and setting boundaries, using self-care strategies and stress reduction techniques, maintaining a work-life balance, and attending to their own mental, social, and emotional health.

While these practices are undoubtedly important, the focus on individual well-being can lead to a sense of detachment from the very people principals are serving and away from the core reason and purpose that make their work meaningful. When school leaders feel their job is meaningful, their job satisfaction is higher, which also alleviates emotional exhaustion and, by extension, burnout.

In our pursuit of self-care, we may have inadvertently overlooked a crucial element: ubuntu, a concept deeply rooted in African philosophy (Murithi, 2006), that translates to "I am because we are," emphasizing the interconnectedness of humanity and the importance of communal well-being. It focuses on the idea that our well-being is closely tied to the well-being of others and that, by supporting and nurturing our communities, we, in turn, nourish ourselves. Ubuntu is about development of one's "fullness of being" through our understanding of how we are "beings with others." In our Prosocial Leader Lab at the University of Colorado Denver, we consider ubuntu — marked by compassion, mutual support, respect, acceptance, care, and dignity — as one of the pillars of the community culture we try to live by (Nussbaum, 2003).

In the realm of school leadership, ubuntu offers a profound lesson: One critical aspect of self-care is intricately linked with what psychologists and sociologists refer to as prosociality — extending our inner selves for others. Prosociality encompasses three distinct facets: motivation, the individual's desire to promote the welfare of others beyond self-advancement or financial gains; behavior, individual actions intended to help others and the organization flourish without the expectation of being rewarded; and impact, the feeling of making positive difference in the lives of others throughout one's work (Brief & Motowildo, 1986; Grant, 2007, 2008; Grant & Sonnentag, 2010; Organ et al., 2006). Research shows that prosocial competencies, such as collaborating to help others, solve problems, and achieve goals, are an important element of effective school leadership (Benoliel & Somech, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Jäppinen et al., 2015), and that teachers highly regard principals who consider themselves servant leaders (Taylor et al., 2007).

This is exactly what my colleagues and I found in our research with the program Soul of Leadership: Courage, Presence, and Integrity. Soul of Leadership is a professional learning program that gives school administrators the opportunity to reflect on their lives and work



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through contemplative and reflective practices drawn from the Center for Courage & Renewal and the fields of mindfulness, social and emotional learning, neuroscience, the arts, and the work of Parker J. Palmer, author of *The Courage to Teach* (Massachusetts School Administrators' Association, n.d.; Palmer, 2017). Participating principals shared how principalship can be isolating and draining and emphasized the importance of relationships and networking with other principals who are going through similar experiences. We also found that principals were driven by a strong sense of mission, not by ego, career progress, or the pursuit of self-actualization. The meaningfulness of school leaders' work lies in their role to give back and actively participate in the educational community.

This sense of mission suggests that school leaders can benefit from embracing ubuntu, shifting from isolated self-care to prosociality. Prosocial school leaders actively engage in acts of kindness, gratitude, support, and collaboration. They cultivate a sense of empathy, compassion, and a genuine concern for the well-being of others. They understand that their role extends beyond administrative tasks. They are stewards of a shared vision for the betterment of students, teachers, and society at large.

When school leaders actively engage with the concept of ubuntu, they not only improve their own well-being but also create stronger, more resilient school communities and contribute to the collective success and thriving of the entire school ecosystem. If the

past years' events taught us anything, it is that our ability to navigate uncertainty, adapt to new challenges, and persevere in the face of adversity hinges not just on individual strength, but on our capacity to come together as a community. We've learned that our collective well-being depends on our willingness to extend compassion, empathy, gratitude, and support to one another. Thus, while sustaining one's self is crucial, it is serving our schools and communities that brings meaning and purpose to what we do. This purpose is what keeps us striving for betterment of ourselves and our societies.

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EXAMINE. STUDY. UNDERSTAND.

RESEARCH

WHY SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHERS CHOOSE TO STAY

A review of the research on retention and attrition among special education teachers found that a number of factors contribute to teachers' decisions to stay or leave. In the category of preparation and support factors, the review found that special education teachers were more likely to stay if they had more student teaching experience before their first position; were more likely to express the intention to stay when they felt administrators supported their professional growth; and rated professional learning opportunities more highly. The researchers call for more studies with rigorous methods to examine these and other aspects of professional learning in more detail.

Source: Billingsley, B. & Bettini, E. (2019). Special education teacher attrition and retention: A review of the literature. *Review of Educational Research*, 89(5), 697-744.



Overall, teachers who believed in the effectiveness of inclusive education showed higher levels of teacher self-efficacy than those who did not.

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RESEARCH REVIEW

Elizabeth Foster

STUDY EXAMINES TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY AND BELIEFS IN INCLUSION

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning call for professional learning that "results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students" (Learning Forward, 2022). The "all" part of that vision is woven throughout the 11 standards. For example, the **Equity Practices** standard encourages the development of classrooms where educators "create high-quality learning experiences for all students, honoring all aspects of identity students bring to the school" and "learn to recognize each student's strengths and personalize learning to maximize impact on a range of student outcomes" (Learning Forward, 2022).



To achieve this vision, it is important to understand how educators develop the mindsets and practices that prioritize every student's access to relevant and meaningful learning experiences. A recent Australian study contributed to that understanding by examining the relationship between teachers' beliefs in inclusive education and their levels of teaching self-efficacy, which previous research finds is correlated with more effective teaching practices. The researchers explain that Australia's approach to inclusive education comprises policies and structures that support "teaching practices that benefit all learners in response to a student's identity, sexuality, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic status, and disability." (They use the terms inclusive education and inclusion interchangeably.) Whereas inclusion in the United States usually refers to placing students with disabilities in general education classrooms, in Australia, inclusion is a more holistic approach that recognizes a broader diversity of student strengths and needs and applies to all. This broad definition can result in variations in implementation at the school and classroom levels, resulting in a lack of clarity for teachers and concerns about their ability and efficacy to implement inclusive practices.

Given this variation, the researchers sought to understand the extent to which teachers' beliefs about the effectiveness of teaching all students in an inclusive classroom and their beliefs about their own ability to teach all students contribute to their teaching practices.

The study builds on the literature about self-efficacy, particularly how the interaction of beliefs, environment, and behavior influence teachers' actions, effort, persistence, expectations, and classroom practice (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Teachers who have higher self-efficacy have been shown to be more persistent, more able to adjust teaching strategies, and more confident in their ability to positively impact students' learning and achievement. Teachers with low self-efficacy may feel they can only teach certain students, may use low-impact instructional strategies, or may not adjust for students achieving at different levels. These beliefs impact teachers' planning, lesson design, formative assessments, and responses to challenges in the classroom.

► THE STUDY

Woodcock, S., Gibbs, K., Hitches, E., & Regan, C. (2023, March 6). Investigating teachers' beliefs in inclusive education and their levels of teacher self-efficacy: Are teachers constrained in their capacity to implement inclusive teaching practices? *Education Sciences*, 13(3), 280.

► METHODOLOGY

The study involved 208 teachers in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, from 15 primary and 15 secondary schools that were chosen randomly. Participating teachers were 25% male and 72% female (3% chose not to state their gender); were from a range of age groups; and had a diverse range of experience (5% had been teaching for less than three years; 10% between three and five years; 27% between six and 10 years; 18% between 11 and 20 years; and 40% had been teaching for more than 20 years).

Teachers were administered a three-part survey, beginning with demographic questions. The second part consisted of the Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale: 12 statements of teachers' beliefs in their capabilities to engage all students in learning with a Likert scale of 0 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal) (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The items were grouped into three categories — student engagement, classroom management, and instructional strategies — and included questions such as: How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work? How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom? How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom? The greater the participant's score, the higher the level of teacher self-efficacy. The third part of the survey included questions about teachers' perceptions of inclusive education, including one that asked teachers if they believed that an inclusive classroom is an effective way to teach all students.

► FINDINGS

Overall, teachers who believed in the effectiveness of inclusive education showed higher levels of teacher self-efficacy than those who did not, including a higher belief in their abilities to engage and motivate students, help them value learning and believe they can do well, and engage with families. They also held a higher belief in their capabilities “to

instruct students by implementing alternative teaching strategies, providing alternative explanations, developing good questions for students, and using a variety of assessment strategies” (p. 7). These teachers also showed higher self-efficacy in their abilities to manage their classroom and student behaviors.

The study also looked at whether there were relationships between teachers' age and experience levels and their self-efficacy and belief in the value of inclusion. Tests showed there were significant (although small) correlations between teachers' experiences and their level of teacher self-efficacy: the more years of teaching experience, the higher the level of teacher self-efficacy in engaging students and in instructional strategies (but not in managing the classroom). There were no significant correlations between teachers' age and their self-efficacy, but teachers who were older generally reported less belief in the effectiveness of inclusion.

This correlational study was not able to look at whether the relationship between self-efficacy and valuing of inclusion are causally related. The researchers also acknowledge that observations of classroom teaching and some measure of student outcomes would add further dimension to this kind of study since these findings are based on teachers' self-reports about both belief in inclusion as a strategy to teach all students and indicators of self-efficacy.

► IMPLICATIONS

This study suggests that professional learning needs to both address the value of inclusion and build teachers' skills and therefore sense of self-efficacy in implementing effective teaching strategies. Making these connections explicit is important because, as the **Learning Designs** standard states, “Educators design professional learning that achieves improved leader, teacher, and student outcomes by understanding and articulating how the learning will lead to the intended changes” (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 44). Directly

addressing the purposes and goals of the inclusive strategy to engage students of all backgrounds and abilities could contribute to increasing teachers' self-efficacy, especially among older teachers who may not have had the opportunity to work or learn in inclusive settings over the course of their career.

This sort of intentional professional learning that supports teachers to examine and shift their beliefs speaks to the **Equity Drivers** standard, which calls on teachers to “learn about the beliefs and practices that support equitable learning, develop their understanding of the vision for equity in their school or system, and build their capacity to examine their own practices related to equity” (Learning Forward, 2002, p. 34). Professional learning that supports older teachers' beliefs in inclusion may also have a ripple effect on younger teachers, especially if the older teachers are serving in a mentor role, formally or informally.

This study is an example of learning from a variety of education contexts. The Australian approach to inclusion emphasizes the importance of teachers recognizing the unique strengths and needs of each student and thereby creating an environment of belonging for all students. The expansiveness of the concept of inclusion in this study goes beyond including students with disabilities in a general education setting to an emphasis on making all students feel understood and welcomed into the learning environment. Going beyond the presence or accommodation of students with differing abilities gets closer to the goal of excellent and equitable educational opportunities for all students.

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DATA POINTS

28% OF TEACHERS MOVED SCHOOLS

Teacher mobility is on the rise, according to an analysis by ERS. This includes teachers who move schools within districts, change roles but stay in the district, and those who change districts. All turnover has an impact on students, even if educators stay in the workforce. An average of 28% of teachers changed positions or left their school in the 2021-22 school year, compared to 24% prepandemic. High-poverty schools experienced the highest turnover, with 34% of teachers leaving between October 2021 and October 2022. In comparison, schools with the lowest concentration of need lost 21% of teachers. Additionally, about a third of new teachers left their schools in that time period. ERS recommends district leaders support teachers by creating schedules that allow more time for collaboration and reflection. bit.ly/45PdaFh

7% OF MICHIGAN'S BLACK FUTURE TEACHERS COMPLETE TRAINING

A 2023 study of Michigan college students revealed that prospective teachers of color are far less likely to complete the program than their white counterparts. Michigan has experienced a sharper decline in teacher preparation program enrollment than all but one other state. Though enrollment in teacher preparation programs has recently rebounded, fewer candidates are becoming certified to teach. 23% of Latino and 7% of Black future teachers who take initial education courses make it to the student teaching phase, while 30% of potential white teachers reach that milestone. A significant racial disparity exists between Michigan's teachers and students: 90% of teachers are



white, while 64% of K-12 learners are students of color. To address this disparity, more prospective teachers need to complete teacher preparation programs. A bright spot in the report found that upon graduating, Black teachers are more likely to enter Michigan's public school workforce and stay there for at least five years. bit.ly/45qP3wW

30 STATES PASS LAWS ON LITERACY INSTRUCTION

An analysis by FutureEd found that 30 states have passed laws on literacy instruction based on research known as the science of reading. The report highlights successes in Tennessee and Mississippi in engaging teachers in professional learning on effective literacy methods and implementing high-quality literacy curricula at scale. Mississippi first trained coaches in the program, who then worked with teachers on implementation. More than 20,000 Mississippi educators have completed the program. In Tennessee, over 99% of teachers passed the course assessments, and 97% agreed the courses prepared them to better support students in phonics-based instruction. Both states sustain the work through improvement networks, identifying mentor districts with demonstrated expertise, and ongoing practices such as professional learning communities, observation and feedback, learning walks, and targeted professional

learning. A survey of Mississippi K-3 teachers found that nine out of 10 agree they've improved their knowledge and skills of researched-based reading instruction and feel supported by their administration and literacy coach. "While initial training on scientifically based reading instruction is important, teachers need ongoing, on-the-job support if they are to make lasting changes to decades of ineffective practice," the report states. bit.ly/45RKmvM

2/3 OF AMERICANS THINK TEACHERS SHOULD HAVE A SUBSTANTIAL SAY IN WHAT'S TAUGHT

In the 55th annual PDK Poll, 66% of American adults report teachers should have agency in what's taught in public schools, more so than school boards, local residents, or lawmakers. Additionally, 67% of respondents support increasing teacher salaries by raising property taxes. Most Americans believe public school teachers are undervalued (73%), underpaid (66%), and overworked (58%). The public's views have changed regarding alternative school schedules, with 53% supporting four-day school weeks, while in 2003 only 25% expressed support for the shortened academic week. 62% of respondents support longer school days, school years, or both to improve student learning outcomes. bit.ly/3qUIDIC

INFORM. ENGAGE. IMMERSE.

FOCUS

REACHING ALL LEARNERS



LEARNING TO SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

General education and special education teachers all need and deserve support to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Only 30% of general education teachers strongly believe that they are prepared to support students with disabilities. In special education, teacher shortages are acute, and preparation experiences are varied. This issue's Focus section looks at how professional learning can address these gaps and improve teaching and learning for students with disabilities.



Targeted and collaborative learning experiences for educators can improve outcomes for all students, especially those with disabilities, in general education settings.

How all teachers can support students with disabilities

BY ALEXA QUINN, LINDSEY MCLEAN, AND SUSAN AIGOTTI

● **M**artin Green is a passionate 5th-grade teacher with four years of experience. He co-teaches with Tina Murphy, who supports students with disabilities. Despite their best efforts to improve all students' mathematics learning — including strategies using visuals and meeting with students in small groups — Green worries his instruction is not meeting the needs of all his students, especially students like Jeremy. Jeremy is a bright and charismatic student with mathematics and attention difficulties who tries his best but often becomes discouraged when facing most word problems. ● Jeremy gets support from Murphy for about 30 minutes a day,

but she and Green know that time is not sufficient to cover all the mathematics concepts in depth.

Green wishes he and Murphy could better support Jeremy and others who are experiencing difficulty, but he feels he does not have any more tools in his toolbox to try. His professional learning community (PLC) with Murphy and other teachers rarely focuses on mathematics, as reading is such a priority. When they do talk about math, the conversation focuses on the structure of the learning block, and there is no time left to talk about addressing students' challenges. Green is frustrated, but he doesn't know what to do differently.

Many teachers are underprepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Most have insufficient training and field experiences from their preparation programs, and once they begin teaching, they often lack collaborative professional learning about supporting students with disabilities. We need to do better.

TEACHERS UNDERPREPARED

Martin Green and Tina Murphy are not alone: Many teachers are underprepared to meet the needs of students with disabilities. Most have insufficient training and field experiences from their preparation programs, and once they begin teaching, they often lack collaborative professional learning about supporting students with disabilities.

This is a social justice issue. Students with disabilities make up 14% of all K-12 students, and they spend up to 80% of their time in general education classrooms (NCES, 2023). When teachers don't know how to meet their needs, students' skills remain underdeveloped and ultimately compound into larger challenges and feelings of inadequacy.

We need to do better. Schools should be consistently developing all teachers' knowledge and skills to support students with disabilities. The cornerstone of this development is a school culture that appreciates the rich contributions that students with disabilities bring to the classroom.

Additionally, schools should provide opportunities for teachers to practice and receive feedback on specific instructional moves that benefit all students, especially those who may need additional support.

School leaders often find it challenging to target professional learning about supporting students with disabilities to the entire faculty (general and special education teachers alike) due to scheduling and competing needs. But we believe that targeted and collaborative learning experiences for educators are possible within schools' current collaborative learning structures and that they can improve outcomes for all students, especially those with disabilities, in general elementary settings.

OUR RESEARCH PROJECT

To help general education teachers support elementary students with mathematics disabilities, a multidisciplinary team across teacher preparation and research communities set out to develop and test guidance and support materials. Our project, led by Julie Cohen and Nathan Jones and funded by a grant from the National Science Foundation (grant numbers 2010298 and 2009939), engaged dozens of experts from both general education and special education in collaborative work.

We determined focal teaching practices that could improve teachers' abilities to support students with disabilities in mathematics and

developed curriculum in the form of an online module. The software we used allowed us to ensure that participants (preservice teachers) engaged with the content before moving on through quizzes and other interactive content.

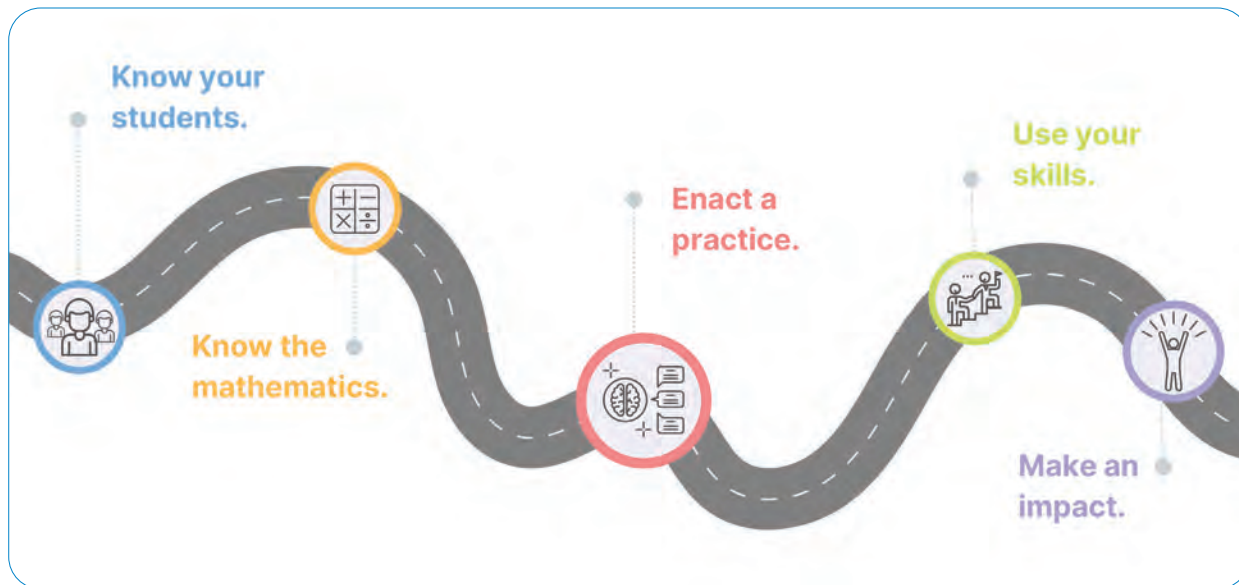
Preservice teachers also practiced these instructional moves in a simulated classroom. This structured practice allowed our team to give directed coaching to the teachers and quick feedback related to teacher clarity, teacher modeling with visuals, and scaffolding — areas that are of particular importance when working with students with disabilities.

We are still analyzing the results of the study, but we have already learned some important lessons about how professional learning can help teachers support students with disabilities in general education settings. While we focused on mathematics instruction, our project has implications across subjects.

We have identified the following key recommendations:

- Build bridges across general and special education.
- Target focal instructional practices.
- Build foundational knowledge about students and content.

SUPPORTING STUDENTS WITH MATHEMATICS DIFFICULTIES IN YOUR GENERAL ELEMENTARY CLASSROOM



This graphic illustrates an approach to guiding teachers through learning new instructional practices that will support all students, especially students with disabilities, in their instruction.

- Illustrate what the focal practice looks like.
- Build in time for practice and immediate, nonevaluative feedback.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Build bridges across general and special education.

We hypothesized that one reason for the lack of support for students with disabilities in mainstream classrooms is differing views about what high-quality instruction looks like in general and special education. If these groups are not on the same page about what should be happening in the classroom, teachers are unlikely to implement recommended practices, even when a supervisor or colleague recommends them, because those practices don't fit within their existing schema.

However, when we gathered experts from the fields of mathematics education and special education, we found there was common ground.

Experts from both fields agreed on big ideas such as holding high expectations for all students and responding to individual student needs. They also agreed on content-area specifics like providing concrete models alongside instruction about abstract algorithms.

These conversations helped us develop core values and home in on a focal instructional practice for our training module. We recommend that schools use a similar process of bridge building with general education teachers and special education teachers, positioning these educators to make decisions about which practices to focus on in PLCs.

It's important to build a team that includes members of different groups, including general education teachers, special education teachers, student support staff such as speech language pathologists and social workers, school leaders, and family or community members.

Through collaborative partnership,

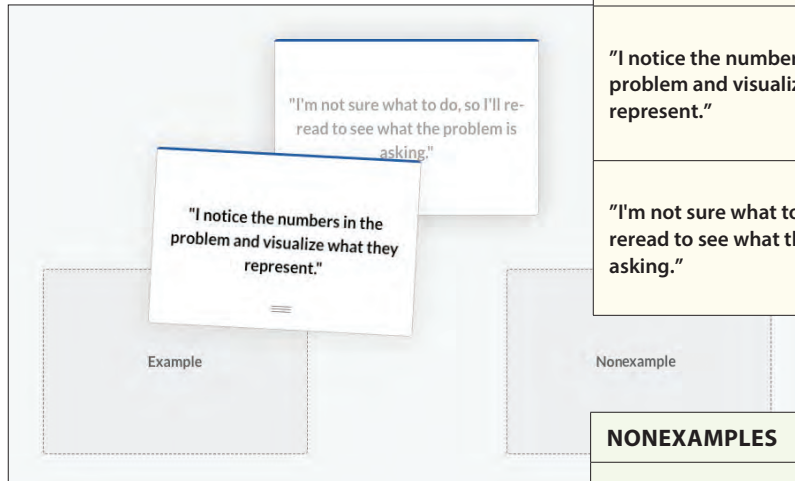
these parties can refine ideas and work toward consistent implementation, even if they aren't able to reach total agreement on every aspect. For example, general education teachers can anticipate potential challenges and work to brainstorm solutions before a school or districtwide rollout of practices recommended by special educators.

Target a focal instructional practice.

Based on the recommendations of our interdisciplinary team, we narrowed the focus of our professional learning module to a specific instructional practice and context: metacognitive modeling to make sense of word problems.

Metacognitive modeling is thinking aloud about thinking to make a strategy, task, or process more accessible to students. For example: "I read this problem, and now I'm asking myself, What's going on here? This will help me make a visual of what's happening in my mind."

EXAMPLES VS. NONEXAMPLES



EXAMPLES	
"I ask myself, 'What is this problem about?,' to make sure I understand it."	This is an example of metacognitive modeling because there is a demonstration of self-questioning and an explanation of why the strategy is helpful.
"I notice the numbers in the problem and visualize what they represent."	This is an example of metacognitive modeling because there is a demonstration of self-talk about a cognitive strategy to make sense of a problem.
"I'm not sure what to do, so I'll reread to see what the problem is asking."	This is an example of metacognitive modeling because there is narration of a self-regulation strategy .

NONEXAMPLES	
"I ask myself, 'Do the key words tell me to add or to subtract?'"	This is an example of self-questioning, but the question that is asked promotes an ineffective strategy for making sense of word problems, so this is a nonexample.
"The first thing I do is always circle the numbers in the problem."	This is an example of self-talk, but the strategy that is modeled is overly procedural and does not explain the "why," so it is a nonexample.
"If you are not sure what to do, just reread the problem."	This is an example of naming a strategy students could use, not modeling it.

We selected this practice because metacognitive modeling has been shown to improve learning outcomes for students with disabilities and enhance students' mathematical reasoning and problem-solving flexibility (McLeskey et al., 2017), and because it is widely applicable to other content areas beyond math. For example, Green and Murphy could develop their instructional practice of metacognitively modeling word problems, then use this approach across content areas and instructional goals.

Narrowing the focus of professional learning to a single practice has a variety of benefits. It prompts more depth

and clarity than a collection of broad goals and requires a clear specification of the target instructional practice. From the learner's perspective, more focused time per teaching practice increases the likelihood of adopting the practice. It will therefore likely result in outcomes that are easier to measure and more attainable than a broad focus and can lay the groundwork for future initiatives.

Once our team focused on metacognitive modeling, we took a variety of steps to specify this practice. We gathered related research literature, honed our definition, sought video examples from multiple settings, and

had each of our team members record themselves enacting the practice so that we could iterate, clarify, and build a shared understanding of what we were working toward.

This front-end work to specify the practice before sharing it broadly is vital to presenting a clear and well-developed plan with a wider group. The table on p. 28 lists resources to support the identification of a focal instructional practice.

Build foundational knowledge about students and content.

Even when focusing on a specific instructional practice, educators need

RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE SELECTION OF A FOCAL PRACTICE	
RESOURCE	DESCRIPTION
CEEDAR Center bit.ly/3sQRNFt	Resources on high-leverage practices for general and special education teachers in four categories of practice: collaboration, assessment, social/emotional/behavioral, and instruction.
CEEDAR Center bit.ly/3Peu2i3	A report on the high-leverage practices described above.
CEEDAR Center bit.ly/3PiNslU	Description of the benefits of combining high-leverage practices and evidence-based practices from special education to improve student outcomes.
Council for Exceptional Children bit.ly/45TyUQT	An outline of 22 high-leverage practices and a guide to support school leaders in developing these practices in their staff.
Institute for Education Sciences bit.ly/45NlyRv	Many guides to inform classroom practices. All guides are based on research and expert opinions.
IRIS Center bit.ly/48gmX9p	Online modules support teachers in learning about evidence-based practices and interventions to support all children, especially those with disabilities.
Project STAIR bit.ly/3PzAemm	University of Texas faculty members share strategies and resources for explicit instruction in mathematics, accessible through brief online videos.
Teaching Works bit.ly/3P8xv1K	The Teaching Works Resource Library includes online courses and resources about high-leverage practices that can be used across subject areas, grade levels and contexts to improve student learning.

critical foundational knowledge that includes knowledge about students with disabilities as well as knowledge about the mathematical content (Ball et al., 2008). This can be organized in various ways, but the key idea is to avoid focusing on an instructional practice in isolation of the information that establishes the purpose for using it and the knowledge that will allow teachers to implement it flexibly and strategically.

Although the goal of our project was to promote teacher enactment of metacognitive modeling, the interactive module we designed began by centering students with disabilities, including

characteristics, strengths, and needs. Then, we moved to foundational knowledge about word problems because students encounter them repeatedly across grade levels, they pose particular challenges to students with mathematics difficulties when students' access needs are not met, and there is a significant research base regarding word problem instruction that spans both the general and special education research literature (Common Core State Standards Initiative, n.d.; Parmar et al., 1996).

Illustrate what the focal practice looks like.

After scaffolding the foundational

knowledge, it is important to present clear information and illustrations of the target instructional practice. In accordance with Grossman et al.'s (2009) pedagogies of practice that provide a framework for training practitioners, we included representations of the practice in the form of a clear definition, an overview of the supporting research, and dozens of examples and nonexamples (or counterexamples), in short excerpts and longer vignettes and classroom video.

Importantly, we also provided a breakdown of what learners should notice about them. Throughout the interactive module, learners could check

their understanding in real time and access further illustrations of practice — for example, in an activity where they are asked to sort the examples from the nonexamples. Each section ended with a quiz that required participants to pass to move on.

Build in time for practice and immediate, nonevaluative feedback.

Although research shows the value of opportunities to practice instructional moves and receive feedback on them (Desimone & Pak, 2017), schools rarely provide those opportunities for teachers with a specific, structured practice in mind. In our project, we developed coaching cycles that were centered around our focal practice of metacognitive modeling. Evidence shows that written feedback has a minimal impact on a teacher, whereas live feedback from a qualified expert coach is beneficial (Kraft et al., 2018).

We used a simulation software called Mursion, along with live Zoom coaching calls. The coaches in the study were expert teachers who followed a structured feedback guide to ensure that all participants received similar feedback in an efficient order. Teachers practiced their instructional moves for seven minutes before receiving feedback from coaches on the specification of the practice, which was developed in their online modules. They also received feedback on components of teaching that are valued in the field of special education, such as teacher clarity, using visual supports, and explicit instruction. To improve their skills, teachers redid their lesson immediately after receiving feedback.

Many teacher participants told us that these sessions were the most impactful part of their learning experience and that immediately implementing the advice from the coach gave them a chance to approximate the practice more precisely.

Based on the success of this approach, we recommend that schools structure their coaching models to give feedback immediately after the observed

lesson and provide follow-up for teachers to refine the practice.

We have found that teachers respond and adapt to feedback more productively when the feedback is not evaluative and provided by someone who is not their supervisor. In our project, feedback came from coaches — trained experts who used a structured protocol to provide feedback about metacognitive modeling. Coaching was not connected to a score, grade, or observation report so that teachers could try new practices without fear and embrace opportunities for growth. We recommend this kind of nonevaluative feedback and support in all school settings.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING

Improving instructional practices for students with disabilities is a continuous process, and we encourage school leaders to implement these recommendations in an ongoing way. But that doesn't mean schools should try to change everything at once.

We recommend facilitating continuous knowledge-building opportunities about one evidence-based practice at a time. With this thoughtful and structured approach, teacher growth will be sustained and support all students — especially those who need the most support.

We envision that teachers like Martin Green and Tina Murphy will make collaborative learning a habit, homing in on focal instructional practices during PLC time, applying them, reflecting together on successes and challenges, consulting with their coaches, and modeling the practices for others. The time spent will be well worth it when students with disabilities, like Jeremy, begin to see academic gains.

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STEPS TO EQUITY FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

BY SARAH BRANDT AND AMY SZARKOWSKI

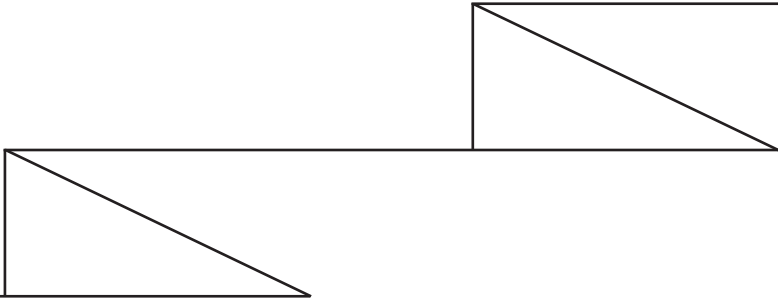
Designing professional learning that meets the diverse needs of special education professionals is exciting, challenging, and critically important. Special educators bring a wide range of job responsibilities and skills to the task of

addressing their students' needs.

At the Children's Center for Communication/Beverly School for the Deaf in Massachusetts, staff include teachers, teaching assistants, American Sign Language (ASL)/English interpreters, and related service providers such as speech-language,

occupational, and physical therapists.

Collectively, these professionals support deaf, hard of hearing, and hearing children from ages 3 to 22 with a range of communication and developmental challenges. We use the term "deaf" to include all deaf or hard-of-hearing individuals, while "Deaf" is



used in reference to those who identify with Deaf culture, participate in the Deaf community, and typically use sign language for communication.

Equity is key to meeting the needs of diverse special educators and their students. Indeed, equity is included in the definition of effective professional learning (Carter Andrews & Richmond, 2019), and this is reflected in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022). But schools do not always connect these dots for special educators.

To ensure that equity is at the core of our work, we developed a framework to support the design and implementation of standards-based, equity-centered professional learning for special education professionals in our school and beyond. We aim to provide a road map for educators from all disciplines as well as cultural, linguistic, and professional backgrounds. This road map can be used to examine the professional learning they lead or engage in and identify opportunities to embed equity.

We know that high-quality professional learning improves teacher instruction, advances student achievement, and strengthens the teaching profession by supporting

educators' personal and professional growth (Garrett et al., 2021; King & Holland, 2022). Special education professionals need access to professional learning to foster their own practices and help their students thrive.

GROUNDED IN STANDARDS

We work at The Institute at the Children's Center for Communication/ Beverly School for the Deaf. The Institute was established in 2019 as a research-and-practice arm of the school, with a mission to generate and disseminate transformational ideas and practice. We engage in scholarly activities and partnerships to improve outcomes for children and youth who are deaf or deaf with disabilities and those with complex communication needs.

Among our responsibilities is the design and implementation of professional learning for the school's faculty. This provides an opportunity to ensure that our special education professionals – and their students – have access to evidence-informed practices (McLeskey et al., 2017). We also strive to capture and disseminate the outstanding teaching and service provision modeled by our school colleagues to ensure these

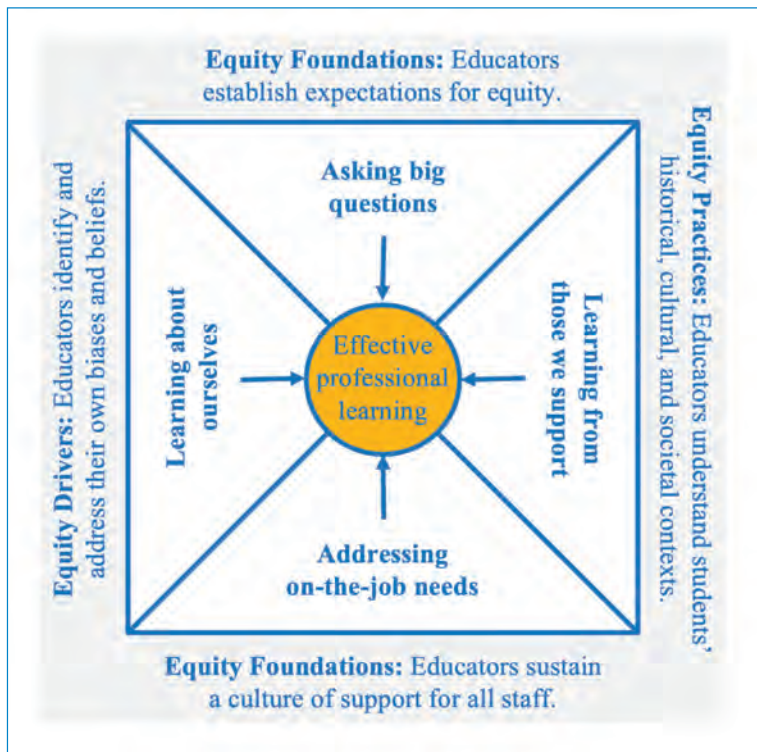
approaches are more widely available to professionals in the field.

Designing professional learning for the school requires that we consider diversity across both our faculty and student populations. Our faculty, some of whom are Deaf themselves, hail from many professional disciplines, and their students experience different levels of hearing loss and disability type. In addition, all individuals have unique familial, cultural, and linguistic experiences. This diversity, which we consider a benefit to our whole community, calls for multifaceted professional learning.

Until 2019, professional learning at the school was not the responsibility of a single team; rather, it was designed and implemented in piecemeal fashion. Faculty feedback indicated that the "one-and-done" approach was not working. We needed to centralize professional learning planning and implementation. At The Institute, we were eager to apply research-informed best practices to this process.

Early in our transformation of professional learning, we aligned our approach with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, focusing especially on how equity is embedded in the Leadership standard

FRAMEWORK FOR STANDARDS-BASED, EQUITY-CENTERED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION PROFESSIONALS



Source: Sarah Brandt and Amy Szarkowski

(Learning Forward, 2022). We centered two constructs of that standard that we saw as essential for transforming our professional learning: Establish a compelling and inclusive vision for professional learning and advocate for professional learning with impact.

With these standards as a foundation, we began constructing a framework to guide our next steps. This was an iterative process, impacted by research-informed developments in best practices for professional learning along with feedback from our diverse school faculty.

For example, we asked questions about equity that are specific to Deaf individuals who communicate using ASL, such as: Is the content and delivery of professional learning Deaf-friendly and visually accessible? Are Deaf faculty afforded equitable opportunities for participation in

professional learning? How can we make the professional learning experience better for Deaf faculty?

While these considerations are specific to our school, professional learning designers in other educational settings should consider equity for all members of their particular communities.

ABOUT THE FRAMEWORK

As shown in the figure above, the resulting framework is composed of four quadrants, each of which represents important professional learning components and programming that we want to address: asking big questions, addressing on-the-job needs, learning about ourselves, and learning from those we support. Equity is central to all of them, so each quadrant is connected to one of the three equity standards in

Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022).

ASKING BIG QUESTIONS

The upper quadrant of the framework includes professional learning that facilitates asking big questions. This involves identifying a problem of practice, exploring relevant resources, and developing an action plan or solution. Professional learning of this nature requires significant time commitment, active engagement, and willingness to participate in co-creation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

At The Institute, we design professional learning for our school faculty that encourages asking big questions about equity at individual, school, system, and societal levels through a program called the Deep Dive. This approach aligns with the Equity Foundations standard by

HOW TO IMPLEMENT THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING FRAMEWORK	
Quadrant	Examples for implementation
Asking big questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional learning communities • Communities of inquiry • Action research
Addressing on-the-job needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educational technology trainings • Instructional tool demonstrations • Problem-solving sessions
Learning about ourselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Book/film club • Self-guided learning and reflection • Facilitated dialogue training
Learning from those we support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Invited speakers • Panel presentations • Family-guided programming

establishing expectations for equity (Learning Forward, 2022).

A Deep Dive is a long-term opportunity to engage in structured learning, professional-guided examination of resources, and development of action steps. For example, the Diversity & Equity in Special Education Deep Dive involved broad discussion and exploration of equity at the school, while the Leadership Through the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Lens Deep Dive contextualized leadership skills within the diversity, equity, and inclusion framework.

An example of impact from asking big questions followed the equity-focused Deep Dives described above and resulted in tangible changes. For example, the Deep Dive process included discussion about the term inclusion, which has different connotations for the Deaf community and its allies than in many other contexts. For some, this term is associated with historical repression and the forcing of Deaf individuals out of

Deaf spaces and into those designed for hearing people (Kusters et al., 2015).

Our Deep Dives explored some big and important questions about terminology, and, as a result, The Institute has shifted from using diversity, equity, and inclusion to diversity, equity, and belonging. We recommend that other special educational professionals examine their language use to ensure they are promoting equity.

ADDRESSING ON-THE-JOB NEEDS

Another quadrant of the framework is addressing on-the-job needs. This involves learning and practicing skills necessary to support students' daily learning, such as the use of specific software, communication tools, or curricular resources. As an example, The Institute developed the Hands On Learning program to help faculty make moment-to-moment informed decisions and take actions that increase student accessibility to their learning and environment. This may involve adapting the background color and

font size in a digital book for a student with low vision or using a student's sensory regulation tool kit to support participation at a whole-school activity.

The Hands On Learning program embodies the Equity Foundations standard to sustain a culture of support for all staff (Learning Forward, 2022) because the on-the-job skills addressed promote accessibility, and thereby equity, for students with disabilities. We also facilitate this and other programs in an equitable way to provide accessibility to all faculty.

For example, topics are offered in both spoken English and ASL, ensuring that all faculty have access to training in their first language. Faculty have reflected on the benefit of the program, saying that it provides excellent instruction in a functional, practical format, and they appreciate that it has application to real life.

LEARNING ABOUT OURSELVES

Over time, we recognized that faculty also needed opportunities to look inward at their own practices,

beliefs, and biases. This led to the addition of the left quadrant of the framework: learning about ourselves. An important component of this is identifying and addressing biases and beliefs, which is part of the Equity Drivers standard (Learning Forward, 2022).

Professional learning relevant to this quadrant is organized by the school's Diversity Committee. Established by The Institute but facilitated by faculty members, this committee meets regularly on a voluntary basis to engage in diversity, equity, and belonging work. Members select content to spark conversations, such as a video on implicit bias or an article on the impact of ableism.

Through open discussion, members have the opportunity to identify their own biases and beliefs and examine the impact of those biases and beliefs on practice. For example, following a deep exploration of language related to neurodiversity and autism, Diversity Committee members created a bulletin board that displayed neurodiversity-affirming terminology and led small-group discussion with related service providers and teachers regarding neurodiversity-affirming practices.

Committee leaders, with support from The Institute, also plan programming such as a book club, film discussions, and topic-driven diversity discussions, such as allyship in the workplace. This type of learning provides opportunities for special education professionals to examine how their own perspectives impact their practice and how they engage in the workplace with their colleagues and students.

LEARNING FROM THOSE WE SUPPORT

In addition to looking inward, the framework also recommends looking outward. Special education professionals should learn from those representing the communities they serve. At our school, these include the Deaf and Disability communities.

On the right side of the framework is the quadrant learning from those we support, which helps to ensure that educators and professionals learn from others' lived experiences. This fosters Equity Practices, such as understanding of students' historical, cultural, and societal contexts, as described in Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022).

For example, The Institute created the Deafness, Disability, and Diversity Representation series. This program features individuals with valuable lived experience across Deaf and Disability communities sharing their stories with faculty. Presenters have included disability self-advocates, young adults with complex needs along with their families, as well as leaders from the Deaf and Disability communities from marginalized backgrounds.

Because the individuals invited to present in the Deafness, Disability, and Diversity Representation series are not typically directly affiliated with our school, there is an opportunity for open and honest dialogue.

This element of the framework has provided opportunities for authentic engagement with the individuals we support. Faculty have generally provided very positive feedback on this series. A teaching assistant noted, "For me, [Deafness, Disability, and Diversity Representation presenters] have impacted how I interacted with the students in such a positive way, but they also impacted my personal life, too. To have professional learning that can do both at the same time is very special and makes me a better person inside and outside of the classroom."

LOOKING AHEAD

The framework represents our progress toward the aim of standards-based, equity-centered professional learning for special education professionals. It will grow and change based on the needs of the professionals and students for whom it was developed. We encourage other educators and professional learning

designers to use and adapt it to their specific special education setting.

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- PC12 | Coaching Matters
- PC17 | Becoming a Learning Team
- PC20 | A Pathway to Continuous Improvement: Becoming a Learning System
- 1104 | Leveraging Coaching for School and District Improvement
- 1209 | Becoming Learning Principals: Maximizing Capacity and Engagement of Campus Principals
- 1213 | Increasing Student Agency and Shifting Mindsets Through Blended Learning
- 1229 | Continuous Improvement for Equity: Characteristics of Successful Networks
- 1429 | Bring Intentionality to Instruction and Teacher Leadership Teams
- 2101 | Strengthening Instruction through Integration of Personal Relational Competencies (SEL)
- 2206 | Practicing Math Instructional Routines: Research Evidence in Action
- 2408 | Conversational Skills for Fostering Growth in Others
- 2413 | Maximizing Impact Through the Standards Assessment Inventory
- 2416 | Elevate School-Based Professional Learning
- 3220 | Autoethnography as a Form of Professional Learning Research
- QA02 | Tuesday Keynote Q&A with Sharron Helmke and panelists
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What special education teachers want to know

BY DENISE HEPPNER

What do special educators want and need to learn more about? In a recent study, I addressed this question by examining the capstone literature review projects of practicing and aspiring special education teachers enrolled in post-degree studies in special education in Saskatchewan, Canada. These research projects offer insight into the areas that teachers were motivated to explore and indicated what themes of professional learning they were seeking.

I examined the literature review topics of 457 special education teachers from 2009 to 2022. Teachers had been asked to choose an area of study they wished to learn more about or an issue they found challenging, with the ultimate goal of positively impacting their teaching.

THE TOPICS

The top five main themes teachers selected were:

1. Emotional and behavioral difficulties/ disorders.
2. Autism.
3. Reading.
4. At-risk students.
5. Student mental health.



Challenging student behavior has been linked to teacher frustration and stress (Strickland-Cohen et al., 2016). Special educators working with students with challenging behaviors or emotional disturbance experience burnout at crisis proportions (Brunsting et al., 2014), which in turn results in poor student outcomes (Brunsting et al., 2014; Moats, 2020).



Students with disabilities are at a particularly high risk for experiencing reading challenges. Only 12% of students with disabilities read at or above proficient levels in 4th grade, compared to 35% of their peers (Toste & Lindstrom, 2022).





PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IMPLICATIONS

Special educators have specific professional learning needs to support students with special academic and behavioral or emotional needs.

Increasing teacher knowledge, skills, and self-efficacy for dealing with challenging behavior improves student outcomes and mediates the relationship between students' behavior and special educators' burnout (Brunsting et al., 2014).

High-quality professional learning grounded in Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022) gives special education teachers the knowledge and tools needed to meet the needs of all students.

System and school leaders and facilitators of professional learning can embody the standards in the following ways:

- **Evidence:** Proactively provide evidence-based learning opportunities on the topics of behavioral and emotional management and reading intervention strategies;

- **Professional Expertise:** Deepen special educators' discipline-specific expertise in management of behavioral and emotional challenges, trauma-informed strategies, and neurodiversity-affirming models of care;
- **Equity Foundations:** Help special educators focus on identifying the underlying problems causing the concerning behaviors and working collaboratively and proactively to solve the problems so all students can achieve (Lives in the Balance, 2023);
- **Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction:** Scaffold special education teachers' knowledge of reading strategies at all levels of student mastery (Moats, 2020); and
- **Culture of Collaborative Inquiry:** Foster effective communication skills in and out of the classroom with all parties involved in educating students with special needs to develop a culture of "we," where all stakeholders are involved (Rock et al., 2016).



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Novice special education teachers benefit from mentoring

BY DANA CURTON AND LAURA HESS

St. Vrain Valley Schools, in Colorado, serves over 33,000 students and has a diverse population, including 4,100 students with disabilities. As the district has grown in recent years, the number

of students with disabilities has been steadily increasing, resulting in a growing demand for special education teachers.

Simultaneously, and as in many districts, the pool of candidates for special education jobs in St. Vrain has

been decreasing. In fact, the Colorado Department of Education identified special education teachers as one of the top areas with unfilled positions in nonrural districts across the state.

In response to these challenges, the district established the Special

Education Alternative Licensure Cohort in 2019. It started with five teachers teaching elementary and high school special education and has grown to serve 55 teachers. To support these new special education teachers, the district developed an induction and mentorship program tailored specifically for alternative and temporary license special education teachers. Now in its fifth year, this program plays a pivotal role in the special education workforce.

For the past two years, the retention rate for cohort teachers has been 85%. That is higher than the average percentage (78.5%) of all Colorado teachers who return to the same school after their first year (Colorado Department of Education, 2023).

It is particularly notable because research shows that alternatively certified teachers tend to have double the attrition rates after their first year than traditionally certified teachers (Podolsky et al., 2016). Not only is this not the case in our district, but, most importantly, our alternatively certified teachers are thriving in their schools.

PROGRAM COMPONENTS

The induction and mentorship program arose from several key observations and challenges. We noticed that our district's most successful alternative licensure teachers had asked to attend our new teacher induction, even though, in Colorado, induction isn't required until after a candidate finishes their alternative licensure program.

We were happy to honor

this request. However, it became evident that the content designed for the entire group of new teachers did not address the specific needs of the alternatively certified and temporary licensed special education teachers. These teachers had not yet had the opportunity to practice writing Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), analyzing assessments, or adjusting lessons within their university programs. They needed the opportunity to ask questions and see concrete examples without any apprehension in the presence of their more experienced peers.

We designed the program with the following components.

Cohort meetings for professional learning

New teachers participated in a two-year professional learning cohort. Using a cohort model allowed these early career teachers to be with other people at a similar place in their knowledge and experience, which created a safe and supportive atmosphere to ask questions and learn.

The classes focused on case management, including family involvement, instructional design, classroom management and behavioral support, as well as understanding disabilities. The discussions wove together content from each individual's university classes with district expectations and best practices for students with disabilities.

Consistent support from an instructional coach mentor

Each teacher engaged in 24 hours of supportive mentoring with an instructional coach

Alternative certification in St. Vrain Valley Schools

In Colorado, there are two types of temporary licenses that allow individuals to work as special education teachers while working toward their endorsement. Both of these licenses require prospective teachers to have already completed a bachelor's degree.

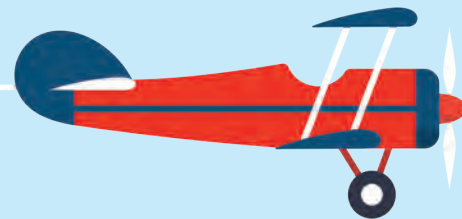
The first license is a Temporary Educator Endorsement for individuals who are currently enrolled in a traditional teacher preparation program for special education. The second type is an Alternative Teacher License, where individuals are hired for a teaching position and start an alternative teacher licensure program at the same time.

Our district began employing temporary licensed teachers from both of these categories who demonstrated a passion for teaching and learning, passed their prerequisite exams, and were already in or ready to start a licensure program. Fifty-eight percent of these teachers were in an alternative licensure program while teaching, and the remainder completed a traditional program with a Temporary Educator Endorsement.

Many of our teachers who are completing their alternative teacher license attend programs at University of Colorado Denver and Metropolitan State College of Denver. These programs include graduate-level coursework as well as a relationship with a university mentor.

While these programs provide theoretical frameworks and foundational principles of teaching and learning, our new special education teachers still had immediate needs regarding the support and instruction of students within their classrooms. Those needs gave rise to the Special Education Alternative Licensure Cohort, which now serves teachers in both the Temporary Educator Endorsement and alternative licensure pathways.

NEW TEACHER SUCCESS STORY



Ali Thomas is a third-year teacher at a high-needs K-8 school with 57% of students on free and reduced lunch and 65% minority students. Before Thomas started, the middle school special education teacher position had turned over four times in five years. She came to the school through the Special Education Alternative Licensure program and has brought some much-needed stability. Thomas describes the impact of this increased consistency for students: “They know what to expect and know that I am here to help them and not just here to get my hours and then leave [which would have been the case with student teaching].”

Thomas has been able to shift the instructional model supporting many of the 6th graders and 8th graders in English language arts class, where she is co-planning and co-teaching with the general education English teachers. This co-teaching model has increased students with disabilities’ time in general education classes and provided more authentic access to grade-level curriculum. And Thomas’ knowledge of differentiation and her presence in the class benefits all students, not just those with IEPs.

Thomas has now finished her master’s in education along with her special education endorsement. Her advice to new teachers is: “Lean into your people and your building. If you don’t ask the questions, you will never get the answers.”

within their first year of teaching. The support was designed to emulate the support a cooperating teacher would provide during student teaching in a traditional teacher education program and build the new teachers’ toolboxes.

The coach and new teacher worked together co-planning, co-developing IEPs, and co-designing progress monitoring. Our new temporary endorsement teachers continue with coaching for a flexible amount of time in their second year to have the same opportunities to reflect and grow as our new traditional teacher candidates, who work with coaches to examine and reflect on their own thinking and practices.

Gradual release of case management and IEP development

Through a model of gradual release, the new teacher gains confidence and mastery of skills. Our new teachers complete their first several IEPs and evaluations with the support of the instructional coach mentor until they feel confident with all aspects of the

IEP. This allowed the new teachers to develop exemplar IEPs that they could use as models when they moved into developing the IEPs on their own. While the mentoring spans the entire two-year duration, its emphasis transitions from co-development to providing valuable feedback and fostering opportunities for reflective practice.

Relationship with peer support mentor in their building

We have structured the peer support mentors’ roles in a variety of ways. These peers can be other special education teachers or general education teachers. Since the instructional coach mentor is already involved, the peer support mentor does not have to have an in-depth knowledge of special education or the content that the new teacher is teaching. Instead, the peer mentor focuses on sharing their knowledge of the school and can provide support and encouragement while sharing their passion for teaching.

SUPPORT FOR TEACHER CANDIDATES

The program has helped us recruit special education teacher candidates who might not otherwise pursue their credential because it gives candidates a point person to ask questions, a clear understanding of the support provided, and the reassurance that they would be part of a cohort of teachers. This has encouraged more people to become special education teachers, including many who already worked in our district. Over 75% of the early career teachers who have obtained their alternative licensure were working for the district already as para educators, substitute teachers, or office staff.

New high school teacher Lisa Kelty said, “I think what helped me make the decision to pursue my teaching degree through alternative licensure was having someone show me there is a clear and accessible path to my license with a lot of support. Each time I have had questions, concerns, or doubts about my next steps, I

have been able to reach out for help, support, and encouragement.”

The two-year cohort model also contributed to principals’ confidence in hiring alternative pathway candidates, assuring that these candidates would have the support needed for a successful start in their first couple of years.

The previous candidates now have successful teaching careers and many have obtained master’s degrees. They have become integral parts of their school communities from serving as department chair, volunteering to pilot curriculum, participating in committees, coaching sports, and leading clubs.

ADVICE FOR ADMINISTRATORS

To make this program successful, the support of district-level administration and school principals

is key. Once we implemented the coaching model in 2019, we worked with principals to show them how they could hire a teacher with an alternative license and how the district would support that teacher.

To implement a program such as this, district-level administrators must be open to the possibilities of shifting current resources to be able to meet the needs of teachers entering into the field of this type of licensure. Also, there must be a partnership between various departments such as human resources and professional development.

St. Vrain Valley Schools has found a way to change the outlook for hiring special education teachers and has created a model of success to impact the workforce with qualified professionals that are passionate about serving students with disabilities. We work across departments and buildings

to support this particular group of educators who have chosen teaching special education as a second career.

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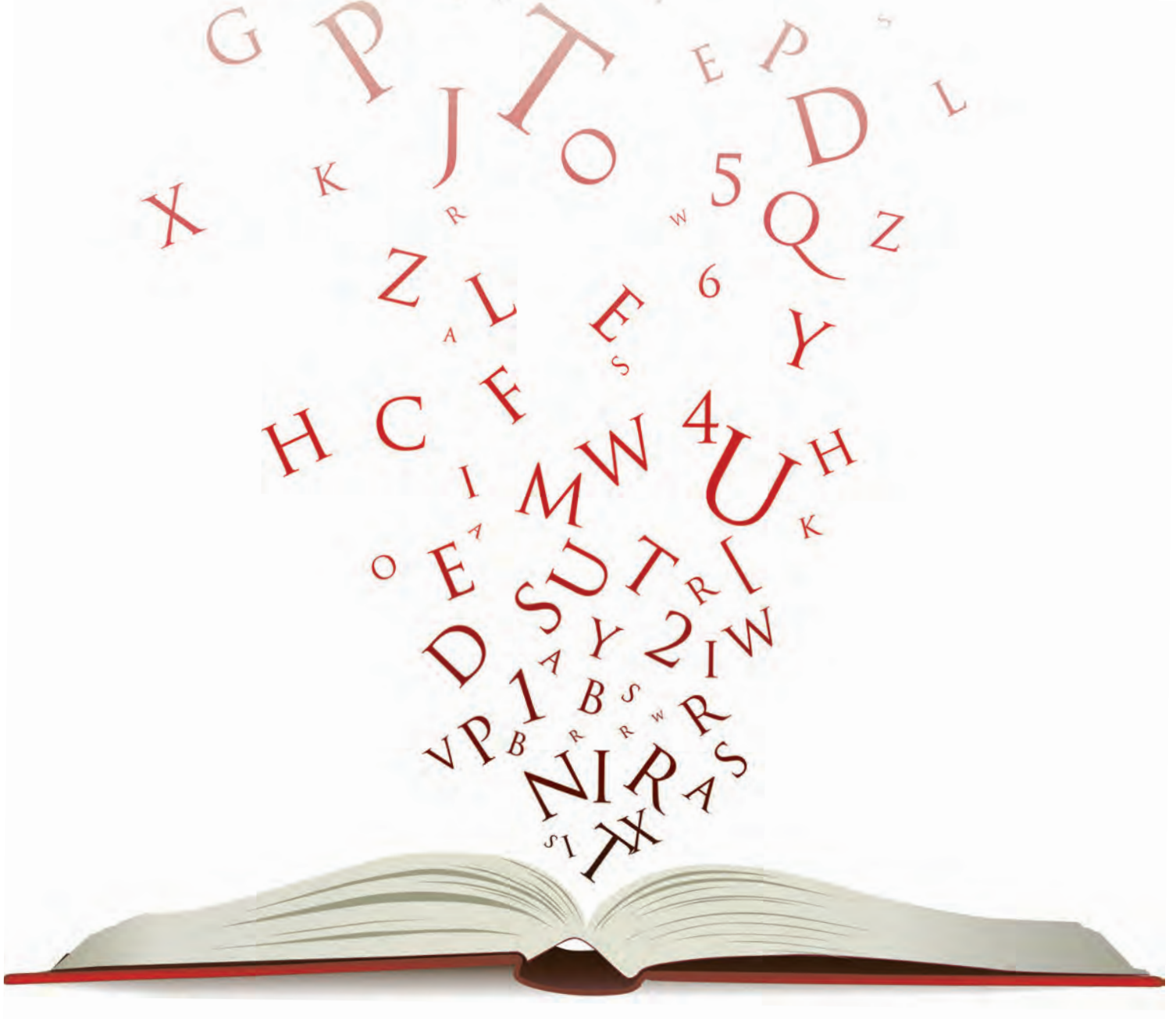
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Maryanne Wolf

Unraveling the myths of dyslexia: Q&A with Maryanne Wolf

BY JEFNA M. COHEN

Maryanne Wolf is a scholar, teacher, and advocate for children and literacy. She is the director of the Center for Dyslexia, Diverse Learners and Social Justice at the UCLA School of Education and Information Studies. Her most recent book is *Reader, Come Home: The Reading Brain in a Digital World*.

In this interview, Wolf shares what she wants educators to know about dyslexia and how schools should teach to the strengths of students' widely varying brains to better reach all of them. She also happens to have personal experience with learning differences after raising her two boys, one with dyslexia and the other with dysgraphia.

What do you want educators to know about dyslexia?

There is no one dyslexia. There is, rather, a constellation of factors that can be rearranged in different ways, in different children, leading to the word *heterogeneity* [meaning that there is variation among people with dyslexia].

This is really important for every teacher to understand. It's not one thing. It is a difference in the brain organization that is usually genetically based and passed on. Teachers should be aware of the child's genetic history. The genetic component is usually there, but it is not always diagnosed.

There's no magic bullet that can "cure" or "overcome" it — words I hate. It is not a disease. It is not a handicap. It is not to be cured or overcome. It is to be addressed based on knowledge about the strengths and the weaknesses of the individual child that should be ascertained as early as possible.

It is also not the case that you can identify children with dyslexia because they make letter reversals [for

example, writing a "P" with the loop to the left instead of the right]. All children make reversals. Some children with dyslexia make them longer than others. You can find many children who make reversals, and the last thing they need is a diagnosis of dyslexia [when what they really have is] a developmental slowness to their maturing processes.

The failure to learn to read has so long been associated with a weakness in either intelligence or industry, and by that I mean [it is] most frequently said people with dyslexia are just not smart enough to learn to read or they are not working hard enough. That is the most pernicious myth out there.

The reality is that this difference in brain organization came in our species long before literacy was invented. This is really important to understand. For us to survive as a species, nature or the creator gave us variation — people who have different strengths. This variation in the brain's organization is usually called something like "cerebral diversity."

What do schools need to do to identify dyslexic students?

You should be screening before the child enters 1st grade. At around [age] five, you should have as much information as possible. There are mandates now for this with a universal screener given at ages five and six. Importantly, it is not to be seen as a diagnostic but rather as a helpful profile of strengths and weaknesses for every child.

You can be multilingual and dyslexic, but we have to be able to tease those things apart by the strengths and weaknesses. In California, members of our UC/CSU Collaborative for Neuroscience, Diversity, and Learning are developing modules/videos that help train teachers to use these data to provide more targeted instruction and intervention.

We need differential intervention that matches the particular strengths and weaknesses of the child. We know that about 20% of kids, more or less, have pure phonological weaknesses (Ozernov-Palchik et al., 2016). For another 20% (approximately), their fluency — the speed with which the brain circuit gets its act together — is impeded in different possible ways. Yet most children with dyslexia have both of these issues and sometimes other impediments as well.

Heterogeneity is the reality. That said, some children have just a vocabulary issue. If you look at the whole language history of that child, you might see that it's not dyslexia, but a language impoverishment

or a language impediment due to the fact that the child speaks three languages.

So at a minimum, every screener needs a phoneme awareness task, a rapid automatized naming task that predicts later fluency, and a vocabulary task as part of an entire screener that gives you data reflecting the different aspects that are precursors to reading — that may or may not indicate a risk for dyslexia (Norton & Wolf, 2012). Then you use that information in intervention and instruction in 1st grade for *all* children. Everyone benefits from this information.

Intervention is my particular area of expertise, and interventions are best when they're differentially going after the areas of weakness and when they are connecting the processes the reading brain is doing when making a circuit. That means our interventions have to be multicomponential. In this way, you are connecting the knowledge of phonemes to the knowledge of letter patterns, to the knowledge of the meanings of the words, to the knowledge of the functions of the words — to their syntax or how they are used in a sentence.

Many educators, though well-meaning, don't understand the reading brain requires multicomponents to be addressed in a connected fashion. You should not just address phoneme awareness in isolation without connecting it to the other pieces.

What are your thoughts about the science of reading?

The science of reading has been misinterpreted by some people. It's another myth that it is just about phonics or phoneme awareness. Yet another myth is that fluency is only about speed, rather than the sum of how automatic many underlying processes are. Thus, addressing fluency issues requires working on and connecting many aspects of language: e.g., semantics, syntax, and morphology.

Kids need help connecting the parts of the circuit. That's why you need both the systematicity of instruction in certain skills and the multicomponential, explicitly taught connections.

Another thing that's really important: You have to have evidence for the program used, and the evidence cannot be a publisher saying, "We are aligned with the science of reading." That's not evidence. I know this is going to be hard for some teachers to hear, much less the publishers.

We need randomized control treatment studies, if possible. I created a program called RAVE-O,

which is multicomponential, and has evidence from randomized control treatment studies. Another program called Empower does as well.

Robin Morris, Maureen Lovett, and I compared a pure phonics program to what happens when you add RAVE-O to the phonics, and then what happens when you put RAVE-O and Empower together at 1st grade. The results show how multicomponential approaches help address the heterogeneity of readers with dyslexia by emphasizing the many processes in the early reading brain and aiding the speed of their connections.

The fact that the data for RAVE-O and Empower were better than with a phonics-only approach shows something wonderfully simple and complex at the same time: The more you know about a word, the better you decode and understand it. Our results are still overwhelming to me — effect sizes of 0.99 (Lovett et al., 2017). You can't get higher than that.

Do you have any final thoughts for our readers?

For the balanced literacy teachers who have such expertise in vocabulary and literature, I hope that you will not be on the defensive; you have not wasted your life. For some of the science of reading advocates, they need to expand their excellent work on phonics to understand that all of these components are foundational, not just phonics and phoneme awareness.

In other words, we all have much to learn. Our

interventions need to be not just foundational, but also involve stories, text, and vocabulary. The science of reading teachers need to expand, be systematic, and be just as good as they are, but also use the expertise of the balanced literacy people to develop what I call "deep reading" as the foundational processes become more automatic. The [goal is to] "expand systematically and connect." That's what I want everybody to do.

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Is your school welcoming to neurodiverse students?

BY AMANDA MORIN AND EMILY KIRCHER-MORRIS

What words would you use to describe the way students feel in your classroom or school? Would students use those same words? And would some students feel differently than others about their experience?

As educators, we work hard to create a culture of care and inclusion in our classrooms and schools. The ideal we strive for is a culture where all students feel safe to take both academic and social risks, one where students feel they can be authentic, they can ask for help, and they'll be treated with respect and kindness. Schools have made

strides in the last decades to create more inclusive environments for students from diverse backgrounds and with diverse needs, and many continue to do this work today.

But we still have work to do, especially to understand and support neurodivergent students, whose brains operate a bit differently from what's

considered “typical” — for example, due to autism, ADHD, or dyslexia. These students frequently must bend their identities to fit within a system that wasn’t created with their needs in mind. They spend a lot of time and energy masking and camouflaging their differences to engage in what we often refer to as “expected” behaviors to experience belonging.

Professional learning about neurodivergence and how to create environments that are supportive has traditionally only been required or provided for special educators. Changing that pattern to ensure all educators have the opportunity to be knowledgeable about the full spectrum of learners in their classrooms is an important step toward achieving equity for all students.

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERSITY AND NEURODIVERGENCE

For educators, the word “neurodiversity” might have cropped up in professional learning or perhaps in conversations among colleagues. But it’s more than just a buzzword; it speaks volumes about the vast range of cognitive experiences in our classrooms. The term “neurodivergence” refers to the variation in the human brain regarding socialization preferences, learning, attention, mood, and other mental skills that differ from the societal standards and norms.

Every day, we encounter students whose neurodivergent experiences shape how they communicate, engage, and learn. Sometimes, these differences

Ensuring all educators have the opportunity to be knowledgeable about the full spectrum of learners in their classrooms is an important step toward achieving equity for all students.

might be apparent, while at other times, they might quietly influence a student’s daily school life.

By understanding that there is natural variation in human cognition and recognizing students for whom typical teaching and learning structures may not be effective, educators are better equipped to meet students where they are and facilitate learning environments that honor the diverse ways in which all students experience the world.

CONFRONTING THE INCLUSION PARADOX

Schools’ efforts to welcome and support students with disabilities have come far in the past few decades. We’ve moved from talking about how to mainstream certain students into “regular” classrooms to talking about how to build inclusive general education classrooms. The change in vocabulary reflects bigger changes in the way we think about inclusion.

Mainstreaming is the practice of placing students with disabilities into general education classrooms for some or all the school day, rather than segregating them into separate special education classrooms. It’s a practice that is grounded in the philosophy that students with disabilities benefit from being around their peers, rather than

a philosophy of helping those students learn alongside their peers.

Fortunately, many schools have moved toward the latter philosophy, from talking about and practicing mainstreaming to talking about inclusion and belonging for students with disabilities. Inclusion classrooms are deliberately made up of a balance of students with a wide range of abilities, including students with disabilities and those without.

Research suggests that environments that are inclusive of the spectrum of neurodiversity benefit everyone. We know that neurodivergent students benefit from spending time in classrooms with peers who aren’t neurodivergent. They have lower rates of absenteeism and higher graduation rates than students who spend most of their time in special education classrooms (Hehir et al., 2016). The same research shows that neuro-normative students also gain benefit, not the least of which is being more comfortable with differences.

Inclusive classrooms are a good start to making change, but we’d challenge you to think about inclusion differently. When we talk about inclusion, there’s something key missing from the conversation — the uncomfortable fact that inclusion couldn’t exist without exclusion. True belonging isn’t about being included in spaces you’d otherwise be excluded from. It’s about feeling welcome from the start.

So we encourage you to consider: What would happen if we focused more on belonging by creating classrooms that affirm the identities of and

the communication and learning preferences of all the students in the room?

CREATING NEURODIVERSITY-AFFIRMING CLASSROOMS

Neurodiversity-affirming spaces honor the whole student by reducing the need for them to mask, encouraging acceptance, and providing ways to reduce struggles that come from differences.

They start from the place of assuming all students belong and embody a culture that honors and accepts differences (Kircher-Morris & Morin, in press). Here are some ways to build that belief system and affirming cultures with your colleagues. These strategies can be woven into many professional learning approaches, including professional learning communities, one-on-one coaching, and collaborative data meetings about students.

Stop fearing labels and call things what they are.

Encourage teachers to stop using euphemisms like “quirky” or “thinks a little differently.” Using those phrases sends the message that being neurodivergent is something to be ashamed of and not named.

When we don’t talk to students and each other about the actual labels of things like autism, ADHD, or dyslexia, we miss the opportunity to normalize the fact that there are reasons that a skill is so hard, help students understand that the neurological differences in their brain make it harder to learn the skill, and assure them that we have specific tools that can help and work specifically for brains just like theirs. Coaching is a great way to observe and work with teachers on their use of language that promotes belonging.

Normalize accommodation for all students.

The school setting is the perfect opportunity for all students to learn what accommodations work for them, how and where they can access them, and what to expect when they

request an accommodation. All students can benefit from having information presented in different modalities, being given more than one way to show what they know, and having the tools available to support them in learning.

For instance, a student having a particularly grouchy day might appreciate an opportunity to work in a quiet environment, a student feeling stressed about family difficulties might find using fidgets calming, and many students might benefit from the availability of speech-to-text when completing a writing task.

Making this shift takes schoolwide and systemwide expectations and effort. Professional learning for leaders can help schools establish guidance and support structures. Professional learning for coaches and other professional learning facilitators can help bring those changes to fruition. And professional learning for teachers can help teachers shift their mindsets and learn how to access or create accommodations for students.

Encourage collaborative team

teaching. Integrated collaborative team teaching (also known as co-teaching) has multiple benefits for neurodiverse students. In the best of circumstances, collaborative team teaching pairs general education teachers with special education teachers in a general education classroom.

Team teaching can help teachers get the support they need to educate diverse learners by doubling the number of adults who can work with students to meet specific needs, providing an opportunity for peer modeling and collaboration, and enabling one teacher to sometimes leave the classroom for professional learning, such as observing other classrooms.

Co-teaching can also help educators move away from models in which neurodivergent learners are pulled out of the classroom for specialized support and toward models where one teacher provides targeted support within the classroom. Studies show that

when co-teachers who take the time to build trusting relationships with each other and respect and tap into each teacher’s expertise, collaborative team-teaching can successfully meet the diverse learning needs of students (Cook et al., 2017). This is one of most effective ways of providing instruction to support the academic and social-emotional needs of all learners, not just neurodivergent students.

Creating neurodiversity-affirming classrooms requires close collaboration and a shared commitment among school staff. It’s a shift that will not happen overnight and that will not always be smooth — for educators or for neurodivergent students.

Even as we honor neurodiverse ways of thinking, we should also acknowledge students’ and teachers’ challenges. But remembering that neurodiversity-affirming classrooms view both struggles and strengths as valuable allows teachers the space and grace they deserve to shift their mindsets and make gradual change.

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THE IMPACT OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Learning communities grow educators' knowledge and practices. Whether collaborating within a school (p. 50), across a local region (p. 60), or nationally and internationally (p. 56), educators can do more together for the benefit of students.



Lesson study can build teachers' confidence in their practice

BY DAISY SHARROCK AND CATHERINE CHALLEN

Lesson study — a type of inquiry cycle used by educators seeking to improve instruction and student learning — has long been a mainstay of professional learning and curriculum design in Japan, where students ranked sixth on

the most recent OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA).

In lesson study, educator teams collaboratively study student thinking, design lessons, observe student learning during a live classroom lesson, and conduct data-driven analysis and

reflection on evidence of success. When educators engage in this process together, they build self-efficacy and create a culture of continuous improvement in support of improved instruction.

The use of lesson study in the U.S. has been relatively rare. While some

teachers do observe other classrooms, this practice is not common and often lacks the sequence of pre- and post-events that uniquely define the process of lesson study (Lewis, 2002). In an exception to this trend, the High Tech High Graduate School of Education has been supporting lesson study through its networks for school improvement for the last six years.

In our networks, lesson study grew out of a desire to explore more student-centered teaching practices that have been shown to increase student understanding and achievement (Boaler, 1997, 2006; Campbell, 1996; Cross et al., 2012; Gutiérrez, 2000; Kisker, et al., 2012; McKenzie et al., 2011). Since 2018, we have involved 85 educators from 25 schools in six public research lesson studies and more than a dozen smaller lesson studies where teachers actively engaged in inquiry cycles to improve pedagogy. Educators in this network were primarily mathematics instructors from a range of public middle and high schools in Southern California.

The results have been positive. For example, 94% of network participants reported that lesson study helped them collaborate more effectively with colleagues to refine instructional practices. In addition, we found that lesson study fosters teacher self-efficacy, the confidence an individual has in their own ability to achieve a particular goal — in this case, confidence in the ability to improve student outcomes. Our

experience suggests that lesson study is a worthwhile investment and points to ways other schools and networks can implement it.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SELF-EFFICACY

We explored how participating in lesson study impacts teacher practice and self-efficacy as well as how teachers used data within the context of lesson study to assess student thinking and drive instructional next steps. In this article, we describe the theory and practice of how lesson study promotes self-efficacy, then show the results of a survey in which participating teachers overwhelmingly reported that participating in lesson study through our network supported their practice.

There are four factors that contribute to self-efficacy: *mastery experiences*, *vicarious experiences*, *social persuasion*, and our *physiological responses* to these experiences (Bandura, 1977). In our experience, lesson study influences all four.

Mastery experiences

Mastery experiences are success experiences — moments when we feel that our actions have led to a desired outcome. Lesson study provides an opportunity for teachers who are being observed to experience a sense of mastery, especially when observers provide them with data that concretely connects their pedagogy with student learning.

Two avenues for doing so are

analyzing data from observing focus students and inviting feedback from expert commentators. Analyzing student data is a practice that is highly encouraged but often underdeveloped in a lot of educators. The lesson study structure supports teams to set specific goals and carefully analyze student work to determine if those goals were met.

Our lesson study teams experienced mastery when they could clearly demonstrate that students were making progress toward the identified goals based on their collaboratively designed lessons. One lesson study team, for example, quantified that four out of five students selected as the focus for observation were stating an understanding of the mathematical goal for a lesson at least once, either in small-group conversations or with the whole class. Furthermore, data on student participation showed that every student in that class contributed to the whole-class discussions, a rare occurrence in many high school math classrooms.

Mastery experiences can also result from external experts acknowledging success. Indeed, expert commentary often makes public the micro teacher moves that may not have been obvious to a broad audience and can elevate the professional status of teachers and foster feelings of mastery.

Vicarious experiences

Seeing someone similar to ourselves achieve a goal through

sustained effort makes us more likely to believe that we could achieve a similar outcome. When teachers observe other teachers facilitating tasks that elicit student learning and experience an “I can do that” moment, their self-efficacy is heightened.

Teachers in our lesson study teams had a strong desire to see how other teachers were implementing specific practices, how students responded, and how the practices impacted student learning. Then they wanted to talk about it so that they could find out what worked and for whom. Lesson study emerged as an excellent structure for these vicarious experiences.

As teachers watched students in each other’s classrooms during lesson study events, they were more willing to test out practices in their own classroom and teach a lesson in front of their team. Furthermore, as teachers became comfortable with having observers in their classrooms, they began to open up lesson study events to the broader community through public lesson study events. In a public lesson study, colleagues and community members observe a live lesson and learn alongside the lesson study team.

A high school teacher on a lesson study team in our network said, “The thought of conducting a lesson in front of a live audience was initially daunting and something I never thought I could do. After seeing two of my colleagues conduct public lessons, I learned so much from the experience and started to think I could do the same.”

Social persuasion

When others believe that we can achieve our goals, we are more likely to take the first steps to make them happen. Have you ever been reluctant to try something, but then a trusted friend, colleague, or mentor said, “You would be really good at that — you should try it”? Even in the face of immense self-doubt, positive feedback from peers, supervisors, students, and

As teams work together to explore content and possible lesson structures, they push each other’s thinking, support each other to try new things, and develop comfort in shared risk-taking.

parents can all influence a teacher’s sense of self-efficacy.

Being part of a team lowers the activation barrier for engaging in any activity. As teams work together to explore content and possible lesson structures, they push each other’s thinking, support each other to try new things, and develop comfort in shared risk-taking.

One structure that helps reduce the anxiety of having colleagues in the classroom observing student thinking is the fact that in lesson study, the lesson is designed and owned by the entire team. Regardless of who winds up teaching the lesson, if it goes off the rails, it is a learning experience for the team and not the failure of an individual teacher.

In our networks, we discovered that shifting from telling students what to think to facilitating a student-centered discussion is very challenging, and teachers didn’t always feel successful. But the more teachers observed a colleague conducting a lesson and supported each other to do so, the more teachers were willing to be vulnerable and have colleagues observe student thinking in their classrooms.

By exploring new practices together, teams engaged in positive social persuasion and built their collective efficacy to engage in lesson study practices. A 6th-grade teacher reflected on the need for vulnerability: “It has allowed me to be vulnerable in my practice with colleagues. Through the lesson studies, it allowed for us to really think about our practice as a team (without judgments) to provide richer experiences for our students.”

Physiological states

The way we interpret our physiological response to our experiences also influences self-efficacy. If we interpret the anxiety produced from trying something new as debilitating or a sign of future failure, it is more likely that we will shut down and fail to persist. However, if we interpret our anxious feelings as nervous excitement for trying something new, they are less likely to derail our efforts to improve.

Teaching is an inherently vulnerable activity, and anyone who has taught students has felt this on a visceral level. Often a fear of being judged or failing stops us from gathering the critical information that could help us teach well. For example, a fear of hearing that one of our lessons could have been better may prevent us from asking our students for feedback on how a lesson supported their learning. By starting from a learning stance, lesson study acts to lower some of the cognitive and physical anxiety inherent in teaching.

Each lesson study inquiry cycle starts with getting to know your students — as humans with varied interests and strengths and as learners with diverse understandings and skills. Through student empathy interviews and studying student work, teachers create connections with their students and build trust. When we forge connections with our students, it is easier to design lessons that connect to their interests and build on their strengths and learn from our missteps without getting defensive.

Embracing a learning stance and building connections with our students therefore allows us to reframe some of the anxiety of teaching as a natural part of learning together and supports the creation of a positive learning environment for both students and teachers.

One barrier to engaging teachers in lesson study can be fear of judgment and critique. However, teachers in our network felt that lesson study made opening up their practice to others less intimidating. Since the whole team owns the lesson, it promotes

RESULTS OF LESSON STUDY SURVEY	
To what degree has participating in the lesson study network helped you to:	
<i>Engage in lesson study structures</i>	
Survey item	Agree/strongly agree (n=56)
Use lesson study to refine my practice.	88%
Determine mathematical understanding goals for my lessons.	85%
Determine equity goals for my classroom.	92%
Anticipate student thinking and misconceptions.	98%
<i>Implement student-centered instructional practices</i>	
Survey item	Agree/strongly agree (n=56)
Create a learning culture where students grapple with mathematical ideas.	100%
Become more confident facilitating whole-class discussion.	94%
Create a learning culture where multiple approaches are expected.	98%
Create a learning culture where mistakes and misconceptions are valued.	96%
Become more aware of status issues in my classroom.	94%
Provide status interventions to students who need them.	86%
<i>Collaborate</i>	
Survey item	Agree/strongly agree (n=56)
Collaborate more effectively with colleagues to refine our instructional practices.	94%
<i>Use data</i>	
Survey item	Agree/strongly agree (n=56)
Use observational data and student work to determine how well a lesson met my mathematical understanding and equity goals.	91%

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collegiality and creates a safe environment to learn together.

In addition, lesson study gives teachers a means of providing context. They can explain what they are trying to do and why. By sharing the research and thought behind a research lesson, teachers bring others into the complex work of teaching and elevate the profession to the status it deserves.

ANALYZING LESSON STUDY'S IMPACT

To analyze the impact of lesson study across our network, we conducted semistructured interviews with teachers once a year, teacher surveys three times a year, lesson study observations, and regular analysis of student learning through student work samples.

In survey responses and interviews, educators reported that participating in lesson study supported their implementation of student-centered practices, their collaboration with colleagues, and their use of evidence of student learning to inform instruction.

Fifty-six teachers in the network took a final five-point Likert scale survey in May 2020 and overwhelmingly reported positive impacts of lesson study (see table on p. 53).

IMPLEMENTING LESSON STUDY

Our experiences with lesson study leading to greater self-efficacy among educators suggest that this method of professional learning is worth investing in. Making a meaningful commitment to lesson study and incorporating it into school culture takes time and intentionality. Our experience points to some action steps and tips for other schools that wish to make this commitment.

To change culture, it helps to change habits. Habits come from routines, and school leaders have an important role to play in establishing school routines. The most successful implementation of lesson study happens when specific and intentional time is carved out for it to happen. It might be within a professional learning

community (PLC) or during discipline meetings — any time when teachers are gathering to look at student-level data. What's important is that the time is protected.

One way to protect the sanctity of lesson study meetings and prevent them from turning into a discussion about daily logistics is to provide initial facilitation to build capacity. Nominate a department head, administrator, or instructional coach to facilitate the first lesson study cycle and invest in professional learning for that person so that they can develop their own self-efficacy first.

Once a team has engaged in the full cycle, rotating facilitation can be an effective way to build collective capacity for engaging in ongoing lesson study cycles. Agendas and other resources for supporting lesson study teams can be found at www.mathagency.org/lesson-study.

Finally, remember to celebrate the learning! It takes courage and passion to teach a lesson in front of colleagues, even a co-designed one. Make sure to celebrate the event with school staff and the community.

Many schools that engage in schoolwide lesson study will conduct public lesson study events where parents and community members are invited to watch the lesson, too. These events feel like public celebrations of learning and build a shared vision of teaching and learning for the whole community. The collective belief in success will drive even more success.

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[NEW]

Standards Assessment Inventory

Learning Forward's Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) is a valid and reliable survey administered to school-based instructional staff that measures alignment of a school's professional learning to Standards for Professional Learning.

The SAI measures teachers' perceptions of the professional learning they experience in their schools and systems. The tool provides important data on the quality of professional learning at both the school and system levels.

THE STANDARDS ASSESSMENT INVENTORY:

- Provides data on teachers' perceptions of the professional learning they experience in their schools.
- Reveals the degree of success or challenges systems face with professional learning practices and implementation in the system as a whole and in individual schools.
- Provides data on the quality of professional learning as defined by Standards for Professional Learning, a system's alignment of professional learning to the standards, and the relationship of the standards to improvements in educator effectiveness and student achievement.
- Elicits extensive collegial conversations among teachers and administrators about the qualities of professional learning that produce results for students.
- Connects Standards for Professional Learning (vision) with educator Action Guides, Innovation Configuration maps, and other planning and implementation tools.
- Helps schools focus on particular actions that contribute to higher-quality professional learning as guided by the questions on the inventory.

SAI PRICING:

One school	\$500
Systems with fewer than 15 participating schools.....	\$750 plus \$70 per school
Systems with more than 15 participating schools	\$1,000 plus \$70 per school
State/provinces with 30% of all schools participating.....	\$60 per school
States/provinces with less than 30% of all schools participating	\$1,000 plus \$70 per school
Regional service centers.....	\$1,000 plus \$70 per school

Projects that do not fit into the categories above will be priced on an individual basis. Prices includes two administrations of the survey in one school year, detailed district and school reports available on the SAI website, additional resources and support materials, and a 45-minute data analysis consultation with Learning Forward.

For more information on the SAI, contact Tom Manning at tom.manning@learningforward.org.



Professional learning helps principal address achievement gap

BY JEFNA M. COHEN

Rodney Walker, a member of Learning Forward's Academy Class of 2022 and principal of Brooklyn Park Elementary School in Baltimore, Maryland, was named 2023 National Distinguished Elementary School Principal of the

Year by the Maryland Association of Elementary School Principals.

As a part of Walker's efforts to advance schoolwide excellence, he and his team have focused on closing achievement gaps, particularly for Black male students. A facet of that work was Walker's creation of Boys of

Distinction, a mentoring group that provides educational and experiential opportunities for Black males. Walker attributes his school's success to his dedicated staff and his work with Learning Forward on ongoing, high-quality professional learning.

Learning Forward talked with



Rodney Walker

“There’s been a gap between African American boys and their white male counterparts that’s existed for a long time,” says Rodney Walker, Maryland’s 2023 National Distinguished Elementary Principal. “Nationally, when you look at test scores, that gap is approximately 30%, and it’s growing. To close that gap, African American boys’ academic growth needs to accelerate.”

Walker about the impact of his work with the Learning Forward Academy. This article has been edited and condensed.

HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED WITH LEARNING FORWARD?

Learning Forward always has great articles, which I have put in my weekly newsletter and I use for professional learning for my teachers. At one point, I found information about the Learning Forward Academy, applied, and was accepted. I’m a part of the group that got extended time because of COVID-19, and it’s been wonderful to have this additional time.

Being able to go to the conferences has been amazing. I’ve been to other professional conferences, and no one does it like Learning Forward. The level of professional learning is aligned to the daily work of a principal. The diversity of the sessions is really awesome. These include wellness or health,

equity, instruction, data analysis, and community. If you’re going into equity, you can do that. If you’re going into emotional well-being, you can go to those sessions.

HOW HAS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SHAPED YOUR CAREER AND WORK?

The academy has shaped a lot of my work. When my academy group was together recently, we reviewed each other’s problem of practice, discussed our problem of practice, and discussed conflicts and pinch points we faced with it. As a group, we were talking about attendance, and the issues our respective districts faced after COVID, and I shared that my school has struggled with chronic absenteeism. Later, I got an article [on that topic] from my colleagues. The professional community and support have helped all of us shape our problems of practice.

WHAT WAS YOUR PROBLEM OF PRACTICE IN THE LEARNING FORWARD ACADEMY?

My problem of practice was about closing the achievement gap between African American and white male students, and it wasn’t just a problem of practice on paper for me, as an African American male. This is also the focus of my dissertation work. There’s been a gap between African American boys and their white male counterparts that’s existed for a long time. Nationally, when you look at test scores, that gap is approximately 30%, and it’s growing. To close that gap, African American boys’ academic growth needs to accelerate.

We have been able to close that gap in our building, where about 25% of the student population is Black. From the 2021-22 school year to 2022-23, the percentage of African American boys scoring proficient or above on the state assessment rose

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from 28% to 34%, showing a high rate of growth. During the same period, that percentage also rose somewhat for white boys, from 21% to 25%.

Similarly, in math, the percentage of students scoring proficient or above remained fairly constant, especially for African American boys (25% in 2021-22, 24% in 2022-23), despite the fact that math scores have been decreasing at the national level. Many of our students, including African American boys and economically disadvantaged white boys, continue to struggle, so we still have work to do. But we are improving and closing gaps.

Part of the way we did that was through the protocols, procedures, and feedback I learned in the Learning Forward Academy and through collaborating with other academy educators from around the country. Some of their suggestions and feedback were instrumental and allowed me to plan professional development, structures, and support to close the gap.

Now I'm continuing that same problem of practice and working to not just keep that gap closed, but I'm pushing for advanced rigor, because many times African American students are not identified for gifted education. This year, I'm offering additional professional development for my teachers to identify traits of giftedness.

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROTOCOLS THAT INFORMED YOUR WORK?

One of those is the teaching point of view, a document that summarizes our work and our why. For our cohort, our work is not just professional, but personal for many of us. The personal connection gives a different perspective, focus, and dedication to the problem of practice. When you go to work, you really need to know your why.

For me, closing that achievement gap goes back to my dad, who grew up in rural Alabama. Dad was not able to

finish his education past the 5th grade. He provided educational opportunities for me, and I wanted to give back when I returned to Baltimore. I started teaching 22 years ago in Baltimore City, after changing careers.

I witnessed the poverty, knew some of the constraints that Black boys face in the inner city — it's so hard to get out of it. This work is important to me because I want to give kids two things: hope and a chance. Education is really the way to do that. For me, it's personal. It's your purpose that drives your work, about giving your very best.

HOW DID BOYS OF DISTINCTION COME ABOUT, AND WHAT ARE SOME OF THE PROGRAM FEATURES?

The state of Maryland came out with two different reports about the disparities between African American boys and their peers, including lower academic performance, higher referral and suspension rates, and higher referrals to special education. Based on the report *Transforming the Culture of Maryland's Schools for Black Boys* (Maryland State Board of Education, 2021), there was an opportunity to start an African American boys' mentoring club, which was a statewide initiative. We got the funding in January 2021 and started with grades 3-5. This last year we brought in some 2nd graders.

It's an hour after school twice per month. We start off every Monday with a chant. We have a poem that we read that's about saying, "I am strong, I am successful, my hair is curly and that's OK." The boys love it. We start the daily program with personalized instruction through i-Ready (a digital platform that tailors tasks to students' needs based on a computerized assessment). We've done some team-building activities and some community service work that's been great.

A large portion of the funds [for it] goes toward paying the teachers, and it gave us the opportunity to do some really creative, out-of-the-box things. For instance, I brought in a police officer and had them talk to the boys about careers in law enforcement. The only way we're going to be able to heal is to have police departments understand what African American boys are facing.

But also, how about these boys becoming change makers and agents for change in their communities by going into law enforcement? That was really impactful. We also had some central office folks come out so they could explore careers in education. And we are building in college experiences, like attending sports games.

HAVE YOU SEEN ANY CULTURAL SHIFTS IN YOUR SCHOOL AS A RESULT OF THIS MENTORING PROGRAM?

Students are getting experiences that parents wouldn't be able to provide for them. Staff are giving up time after school and on the weekends, and the boys are benefiting from that. They see folks that look like them — but also people who don't look like them — who care about them being successful. That's impactful.

There were some people in our building who didn't want this program, some teacher pushback. [The message was,] "You're not doing this for everyone." I had to have some really courageous conversations about it. Some staff members didn't understand the true meaning of the program.

WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO NEXT?

This year will be our third year of the Boys with Distinction program, and I want to continue to build on that same success. Our population is shifting

ABOUT THE LEARNING FORWARD ACADEMY

The Learning Forward Academy is Learning Forward's flagship deep learning experience, committed to increasing educator and leader capacity and improving results for students in the ever-changing landscape of education. For over 30 years, the academy has supported the problem-based learning of teachers, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, principals, regional leaders, superintendents, and others whose jobs involve supporting the learning of other adults and students.

Every year, educators from around the world form an academy cohort and engage in learning together to align a problem of practice to cutting-edge, equity-centered professional learning standards that incorporate evidence from research and practice about critical topics for educators. This includes culturally sustaining instruction, social and emotional learning, and personalized learning.

The 2½-year experience includes five in-person learning sessions totaling 10 days and continues with four virtual learning events, as well as registration for three of Learning Forward's Annual Conferences. To learn more about the academy, visit learningforward.org/academy.

Applications for the 2026 cohort are due March 15, 2024.

and 40% is Latinx, so I want to do something similar for Latinx boys. Second, we want to build on the work in 2nd grade and then go down to kindergarten and 1st. Some of the data show the highest suspensions are in pre-K. We also want to build capacity in our teachers and identify primary students to support.

A huge part of this work is inclusiveness, the feeling that “my school cares about me.” We are a community school this year, so we’re looking at using some of that funding for some of these groups, but also for all of our families. The goal of community schools is to end generational poverty, and our school goal is similar — it’s to end generational poverty for African American boys.

WHAT ELSE IS ON THE HORIZON?

Attendance. Our big thing is getting the kids to school. We’ve been struggling with parents on seeing the importance of sending their kids to school. Last year, we were averaging 40 late kids per day, so we will be attacking that this year. We will have someone call parents to let them know instruction starts at 8 and that we need them here at 7:40 for breakfast. And then we have community-building circles to build communities. When your child is late, they’re playing catch-up, and that is anxiety-producing.

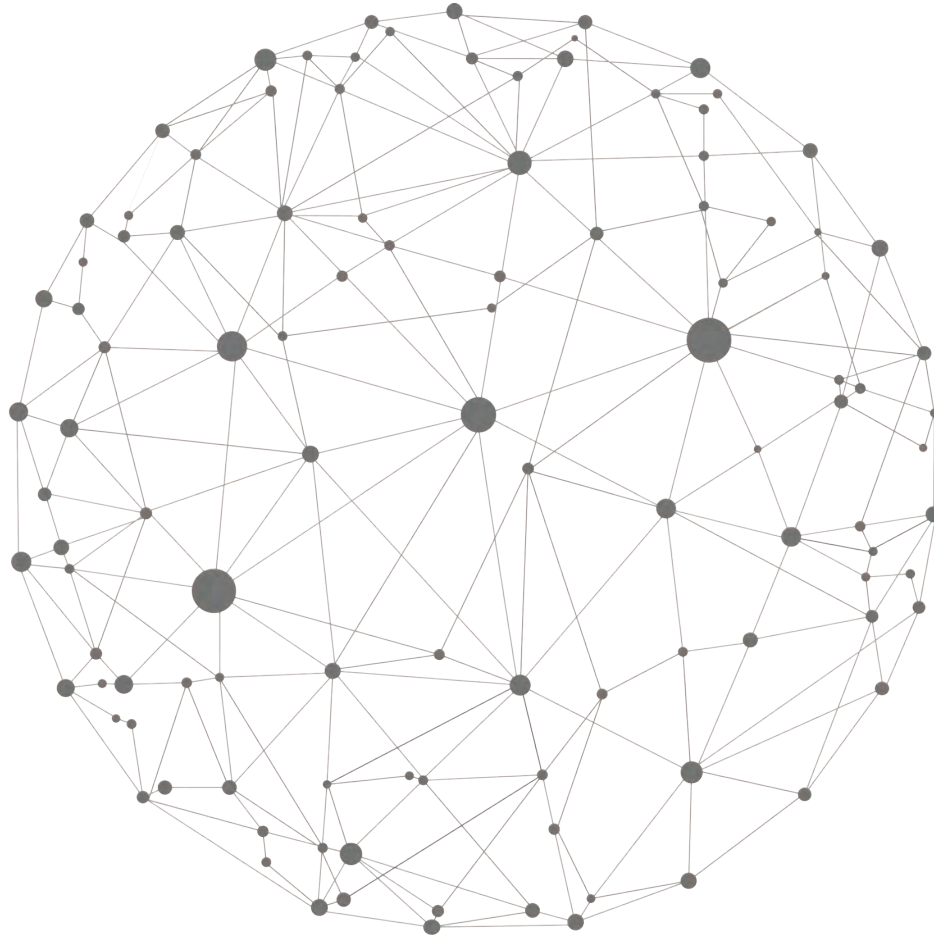
IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU'D LIKE TO SHARE WITH THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL'S READERS?

It’s not about me, it’s really about our students and the staff that has supported this work. I’m appreciative of Learning Forward and for having the professional learning opportunities I’ve had. The Learning Forward Academy was a key reason my school was able to close the achievement gap.

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Regional agencies are a hub for teacher learning

BY NICOLE N. WASKIE-LAURA

High-quality professional learning guided by Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning provides educators with the opportunity to develop and hone their discipline-specific expertise (Learning Forward,

2022) through collaboration, active learning, and sustained opportunities for feedback, expert support, and reflection (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017).

But districts may have limited internal capacity to provide teachers with sustained, systemic professional

learning that is relevant to every teacher due to a lack of funding, inadequate staffing, insufficient time, and competing demands. Educational service agencies, which work at the regional level to support multiple districts, can address those constraints and provide cooperative, consolidated



services with access to specialized knowledge that may be lacking in a single school.

In a recent case study, I explored the role of educational service agencies as professional learning providers, highlighting a community for special education teachers facilitated by an educational service agency in which members from 10 different districts gathered in a combination of virtual and in-person meetings over the course of a school year. As participating teachers reflected on how their involvement influenced their practice, they noted the value of collaboration, networking, and access to expertise.

The study showed that this structure enabled professional learning that is aligned to the standards and that reached and connected educators across districts. At the same time, the study showed how a lack of collaboration between educational service agencies and district administrators can limit the translation of new learning into classroom practice and highlights important action steps for agencies and districts to take together.

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

When I began my career as a professional learning specialist at a regional educational service agency a decade ago, I had no idea what the

agencies really did. My understanding was minimal at best, limited to their cooperative services for students with special needs and career and technical education.

In the years since, I have not only broadened my own knowledge about how educational service agencies support all aspects of the educational system, but I have also realized that my prior lack of understanding is reflective of a widespread pattern. In their book *The Educational Service Agency: American Education's Invisible Partner*, Stephens and Keene (2005) categorize educational service agencies as a major, but hidden, force in the improvement of teaching and learning in American schools.

Behind the scenes, these agencies are quietly impacting the quality of educational programs by developing teacher expertise, supporting access to specialized programs, and enabling strategic, efficient uses of time and money.

In 2021, the Association of Educational Service Agencies reported that there are over 553 service agencies operating in 45 states. These agencies are known by different names: boards of cooperative educational services, cooperative educational service agencies, county offices of education, educational consortiums or cooperatives, educational resource centers,

educational service units, intermediate units, and regional offices of education.

No matter what they are called, educational service agencies provide shared services to school districts in a specific geographic region with the aim of supporting a high-quality education system (Association of Educational Service Agencies, 2021).

Educational service agencies play an essential role in professional learning, especially for schools that are isolated geographically and teachers who are isolated in their specific subjects. Teachers in arts, special education, foreign language, and other unique subject areas are often the sole teacher of that subject in their buildings or districts.

Teachers in specialized roles have their own content-area standards and practices, as articulated in the Professional Expertise standard of Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022). However, it can be difficult to offer the range of subject-area knowledge and expert support needed to promote growth for all teachers within the bounds of a single district.

Although districts may address the challenge of limited internal content expertise through interdisciplinary or vertical teams (Hansen, 2015), this discounts the collegiality and specificity that is gained from continuous,

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collaborative learning among teachers in the same specialized role and grade level.

By developing regional learning communities led by specialists with subject-specific expertise, educational service agencies can serve as a hub for these teachers. The combination of centralized content knowledge, effective professional learning design, and the spirit of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998) enables substantial, responsive professional learning that honors and develops teacher practice and skill.

Educational service agencies also enable access to external providers — for example, from businesses, community agencies, government entities, and higher education (Stevens & Keane, 2005). Corbisiero-Drakos et al. (2021) recently highlighted an example in which a local educational service agency served as a multiagency hub, connecting cultural organizations and high-poverty districts. By mobilizing the agency’s collective resources, this partnership provided student field trips, supported in-district artist residencies, and facilitated artist-teacher collaborations.

BENEFITS OF NETWORKS

In 2021, I conducted a qualitative case study on the educational service agency where I currently work, Broome-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), which serves school districts in a region of upstate New York close to the Pennsylvania border. Broome-Tioga BOCES is home to a professional learning team that facilitates over 30 regional learning communities for a wide range of subjects, from physics to physical education, world language to library media, computer science to family and consumer science.

In these communities, teachers from over 15 school districts discuss successful practices and common challenges, consider current educational research, prioritize content-area standards, analyze regional data, and share resources and strategies.

This case study revealed how a regional group can be a powerful mechanism for teachers to create professional networks and access role-specific professional learning.

In this case study, I focused on a newly formed regional community for special education teachers. My study was guided by two research questions: How do teachers translate and implement their learning from an educational service agency-facilitated learning community in their individual districts and schools? How do participants make sense of their identity as members of a regional group and within their districts?

Using a combination of observations, interviews, and document analysis (e.g., written participant reflections and workshop materials), I was able to glean comprehensive insight into how teachers navigate and negotiate identity and practice between external professional learning experiences and the contexts of their home districts.

This case study revealed how a regional group can be a powerful mechanism for teachers to create professional networks and access role-specific professional learning. First, through previously inaccessible connections with other educators from the same teaching context, the regional group validated current practices, provided fresh insights and perspectives, and encouraged joint problem-solving.

During sessions, members of the group identified common challenges, discussed effective instructional strategies and co-teaching practices, explored emerging educational technology tools, and collaboratively created resources. For example, during one session, small groups engaged in a jigsaw strategy to read and discuss an article about Universal Design for Learning principles, then applied these strategies to modify an existing lesson plan.

Second, an unexpected benefit of the regional group was the opportunity for participants to connect with their own district colleagues. Across multiple districts, teachers said that they did not have access to collaborative time specific for special education teams. District structures (schedules, start/end times, geographic distance) did not allow for regular vertical conversations to occur. In fact, several members of this regional learning community met their district colleagues for the first time at the regional sessions, resulting in new collegial connections that could be leveraged in the future.

Third, facilitators were key to achieving the positive connections and increased knowledge described above. The facilitators in this group played a significant role in supporting participants’ productive discussions, implementation of learning, and access to the most current information in the field through their intentional professional learning design.

Each session was grounded in high-leverage practices for special education (Council for Exceptional Children, 2022) and structured around paired, small-group, and whole-group activities. Each session ended with a commitment to try one new thing, then each subsequent session began with reflection regarding how it went (Waskie-Laura, 2022).

Facilitators supported the deliberate, systemic change outlined by the Implementation and Learning Design standards (Learning Forward, 2022) by intentionally structuring opportunities for members to consider their current practice, explore new approaches, and engage in iterative cycles of application and reflection with their peers.

CONNECTING TO DISTRICT GOALS

The study also illuminated challenges that must be addressed to ensure a positive influence of learning on teacher practice. For educational service agency-provided professional

REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR DISTRICTS AND EDUCATIONAL SERVICE AGENCIES

These reflection questions build off Barnett et al.'s (2010) typology of partnerships, Learning Forward's Action Guides and Standards for Professional Learning, elements of effective professional learning, and the lessons learned from both the case study and my ongoing work as a professional learning specialist.

Questions for educational service agencies:

- What are the targeted outcomes for this professional learning experience?
- How will we communicate these outcomes to participants and district or school leaders?
- What data have we consulted while planning (e.g., needs assessments, regional and statewide data)?
- How will we support participants and leaders with implementation and continuous learning (e.g., coaching, multiple sessions, check-ins)?
- How will we assess the effectiveness of our professional learning?

Questions for district and central office leaders and staff:

- How does this professional learning opportunity align with our district goals and needs?
- What support will we offer to sustain learning and support implementation for teachers (both internally and in partnership with external facilitators)?
- How will we provide timely and meaningful feedback to teachers as they implement their learning?
- What internal structures do we have in place, or might we need to put in place, to facilitate collegial sharing?
- How will we assess the effectiveness of this professional learning?

learning to be effective, corresponding district structures need to support enactment in-district. In this case, that connection was not strong enough to lead to changes in practice.

While the facilitators encouraged application and reflection, participants were limited by lack of administrator support, resistance from general education counterparts, and limited opportunities to distribute their knowledge. Participants felt responsible to navigate boundaries, advocate for support, and disseminate information all on their own. This led to frustration and inconsistent implementation.

For future efforts to be successful, there needs to be strong partnership from the beginning. Guskey (2014, 2016) emphasized the importance of backward design in planning for effective implementation. When we consider student outcomes, the new practices needed to achieve these outcomes, and the necessary organizational support for implementation, we can then pinpoint

the related educator knowledge and skills and the professional learning needed to attain them.

Correspondingly, we can gauge the impact of professional learning across similar levels. Although there is considerable complexity in translating teacher professional learning experiences into measurable student outcomes, beginning with the end in mind is essential to reaching this goal.

In educational service agency and school professional learning partnerships, this planning needs to be collective. As agency facilitators plan for the outcomes of the session, district and building leaders should also plan for application outcomes in the district. In the absence of this connection, professional learning by outside entities like educational service agencies can fall into the trap of one-and-done, which is ineffective at improving instructional practice (Darling Hammond et al., 2017).

Learning Forward's Action Guides and Innovation Configuration (IC) maps are a good resource for collective

planning and capacity building. (For more information, visit **standards.learningforward.org/action-guides**.) They clarify how external providers, principals, central office administrators, and coaches can meet Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022).

Considering the format and outcomes of a regional learning community through the lens of the IC maps by specific role provides a guide for how to effectively leverage educational service agency-provided professional learning to improve instruction.

In forging these partnerships, it is important to acknowledge that leaders and teachers from different districts bring a range of institutional cultures and systems to the collective table. This can at once promote expansion and create tension. For example, in the regional special education community, connecting with cross-district peers revealed regional differences regarding curriculum, scheduling, and structures for ongoing collaboration (or lack

thereof). These discussions offered insight into new possibilities while simultaneously generating discontent among members of the group.

Professional learning facilitators must skillfully steer these conversations toward productive outcomes within the group as well as with district leaders. As a corresponding action, educational service agencies might bring district leaders together in the same community structure, facilitating cross-district dialogue, idea exchanges, and collaboration.

The external provider IC map for the Implementation and Leadership standards emphasizes the importance of facilitators' contribution to ongoing planning, capacity building, and system-level change. By attending to both the regional professional learning context and district-level systems, regional facilitators can be a significant driver of instructional improvement.

For their part, school and district leaders should be clear about the goals and knowledgeable about the opportunities teachers are engaging in. Simply allowing teachers to participate in professional learning is not enough to shift practice on a systemwide scale. The goal of teachers' participation in regional professional learning should go beyond improving the practice of one or a few teachers toward strategic dissemination of individual learning with peers to spread the knowledge.

In many cases, administrators may want to be strategic, but competing priorities, a vast array of initiatives, and attending to day-to-day minutiae can hinder the available time and attention needed for effective implementation. The district/central office and principal IC map for Implementation point to distributed capacity and understanding of change management cycles as an essential piece of solving this puzzle. By engaging stakeholders across the organization, as well as leaning on partnerships with educational service agency facilitators, district leaders don't have to go it alone.

ENSURING EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

Educational service agency professional learning facilitators and district leaders must work together as a team. Access to the specialized expertise, collaboration, and cost-effective resources provided by educational service agencies in conjunction with thoughtfully designed and implemented systems of in-district support creates opportunities for effective, equitable professional learning for all teachers.

Open communication, trust, and clarity of common goals are essential to the success of these partnerships (Buchanan et al., 2022; Stephens & Keane, 2005). By engaging in planning before, ongoing communication during, and reflective practice throughout, educational service agency facilitators, district and building leaders, and teacher participants can maximize the benefits of this professional learning approach. (See sidebar on p. 63 for reflection questions to help with planning and reflection.)

Combining access to specialized expertise and regional collaboration via an educational service agency with intentional district implementation planning can result in powerful learning for teachers, especially those in an isolated environment or subject area.

When educational service agencies and school districts join in partnership, the result is effective and efficient professional learning that multiplies capacity, transcends limitations, and results in improved instructional practice to advance learning for all.

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DISCUSS. COLLABORATE. FACILITATE.

TOOLS



POWER UP YOUR CONFERENCE LEARNING

Can a conference lead to sustained and meaningful learning? Yes, if you plan with purpose and intention. Use the tool on the following pages to get ready for the Learning Forward Annual Conference and make the most of it while you're there. Look for post-conference follow-up actions in the December issue of *The Learning Professional*.

TOOLS



EVIDENCE INTO **ACTION**

WASHINGTON, DC | *learningforward*
**2023 ANNUAL
CONFERENCE**
DEC. 3-6, 2023

MAKE THE MOST OF CONFERENCE LEARNING

BY LEARNING FORWARD

At Learning Forward's Annual Conference, educators engage in rich conversations with like-minded colleagues, learn new strategies, and access resources and materials relevant to their role. Participants often experience excitement, hope, and renewed energy or passion. However, a sense of overload can bring on anxiety, frustration, and even a bit of fear. What do you do with all this newly acquired information and energy once the conference is over?

Learning Forward developed a tool kit to support individuals and teams in organizing and making sense of everything learned at a conference — from keynote speakers, session presenters and facilitators, other educators, and vendors. The tool kit includes actionable steps you can take before, during, and after the conference so that you can apply what you've learned to your work. While it was designed for Learning Forward's Annual Conference, the tool kit can



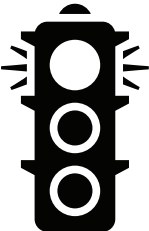
be used for any conference or learning event.

The table on p. 67 shows the steps we recommend before, during, and after the conference. In this issue of *The Learning Professional*, we highlight tools to use before and during the conference. Post-conference tools will be featured in the next issue. The entire tool kit can be downloaded or used online at **conference.learningforward.org/conference-action-toolkit**.

Preconference goal-setting and planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Start with a clear purpose and outcomes. Use the Preconference Goal-Setting and Outcomes Planning Template below to focus your thinking. 2. Select sessions to match your goals. Use the Reflection Questions for Session Selection below. 3. Plan how to navigate the conference. For example, Learning Forward’s Annual Conference offers an Overview & First Timers Orientation session on the first morning.
During the conference	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Capture your thinking during sessions. Use the Session Note Catcher on p. 68. 5. Collaborate and learn from others. Meet educators from around the world, for example, when you attend lunch. 6. Share ideas. Schedule a time to meet and plan with your team to capture those great new ideas. Connect with colleagues daily or at the end of the conference and use the Conference Debrief Protocol on p. 69.
Post-conference action planning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 7. Reflect and plan for next steps, using the tool on p. 70, How Do We Turn Our New Learning Into An Actionable Plan? 8. Commit to action. 9. Measure impact. 10. Make a strategic implementation plan. <p>(Tools for steps 8, 9, and 10 can be found in the December 2023 issue of <i>The Learning Professional</i> or at conference.learningforward.org/conference-action-toolkit.)</p>

PRECONFERENCE GOAL-SETTING AND OUTCOMES PLANNING	
Start with a clear purpose and outcomes:	
Purpose: What do I/we hope to gain from this conference? Why? What is my/our purpose for attending?	
Goal(s): What do I/we hope to achieve when we return?	
Action: How will we ensure we implement learning when I/we return?	
Reflection questions for session selection	
The following stems can be used to assist you in making decisions for session selections mindful of your purpose and outcomes:	
• Given the purpose I/we have for attending this conference, it makes sense that I should attend ... because ...	
• If I attend sessions that address ... I will be able to ...	



SESSION NOTE CATCHER	
Session title:	
 1. What are the big ideas you captured from this session?	
 2. To which of your conference goal(s) do these connect?	
 3. Because of this learning, what do you want to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Start doing?• Stop doing?• Continue or tweak?	Start:
	Stop:
	Continue/tweak:
4. What do you need to share and with whom?	

CONFERENCE DEBRIEF PROTOCOL

Purpose

Now that the conference is over, take a moment to reflect on your experience of the event. This activity is designed to maximize group learning by sharing and prioritizing ideas learned from a conference. This protocol works best in groups of four.

Time

- 45 minutes (daily debrief, depending on group size); or
- 75-90 minutes (end of conference debrief, depending on group size)

Process

1. Before the debrief session, participants should review responses to questions 2 and 3 of their Session Note Catchers.
2. Identify a facilitator, timekeeper, and note-taker.
3. As a group, review the purpose and goal for attending from your Preconference Planning Sheet. (5 minutes)
4. Individually review notes and materials to look for trends, confirmations, and new ideas or questions. On the Conference Debrief Notes page, select a session or two that stood out to you, and write a one-sentence summary and note the ideas it sparked for you. (5 minutes)
5. In round-robin fashion, each participant shares a brief overview of one session from the Conference Debrief Notes page, including the session title, a summary, the essential learnings, and the relationship to the group goal. (2-3 minutes each round)
6. Other participants ask clarifying questions, identify new practices, or brainstorm changes to existing practices in your school or system. (2-3 minutes each round)
7. After everyone has shared, review and revise group goals if necessary.
8. Identify and prioritize the top ideas to move forward. (5 minutes) Note: Prioritizing can be done for each day or once at the end of the conference.
9. Once the team debriefs the entire conference, schedule time to begin the reflection and After Conference Action Plan Template (which will appear in the December 2023 issue of *The Learning Professional*).

CONFERENCE DEBRIEF NOTES	
Our original purpose/goal: Write goal here.	
Session summaries (Connection to goals and impact to professional learning)	Ideas sparked (Connection to goals and impact to professional learning)
Revised goal (if any): Has our goal changed based on our new learning?	
Prioritized top ideas	1. 2.

HOW DO WE TURN NEW LEARNING INTO AN ACTIONABLE PLAN?

Before determining actionable steps, reflect on your new learning from this conference and its connection to your school, district, or organization (e.g., professional learning, policy, structures, culture, etc.).

Consider how your responses to the following questions will influence how you move forward as a result of the new learning acquired at this conference:

- **To what extent do our professional learning practices reflect the research on adult learning?**
How might this new learning/resource support this work?

- **How does our staff view professional learning?**
In what way(s) will this new learning/resource influence this?
Who will benefit from this? Why?
Will staff understand the need for this? If necessary, how will we develop this understanding?

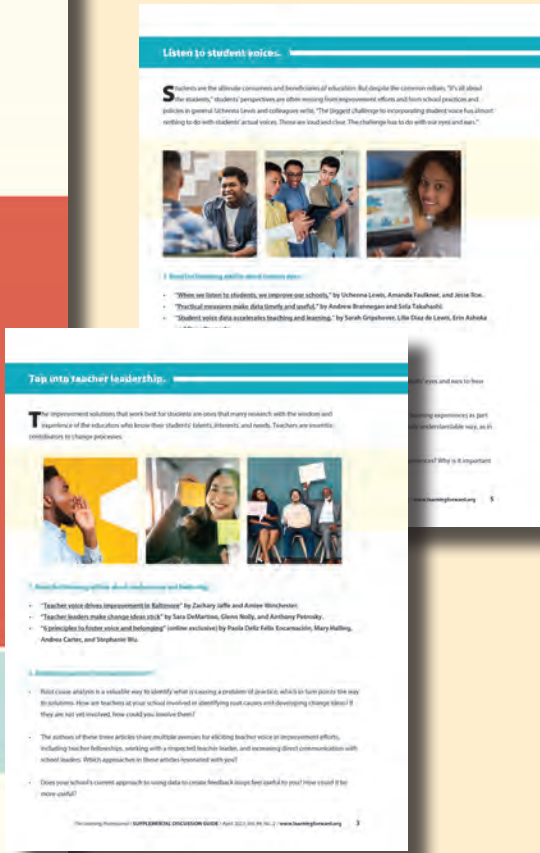
- **To what extent are our professional learning practices results-oriented?**
How might this new learning/resource move us in this direction? In what way(s) does this represent changes in practice that are necessary to achieve desired results?
How might new learning and resources sustain and/or strengthen the work we are currently doing?

- **Is our professional learning appropriately differentiated?**
In what way(s) might this new learning/resource allow for appropriate differentiation for professional learning?

- **To what extent do our policies, structures, and culture reflect our beliefs about professional learning?**
In what way(s) does this new learning/resource reflect or influence our beliefs?

CONNECT. BELONG. SUPPORT.

UPDATES



NEW DISCUSSION GUIDE ON IMPROVING TOGETHER

A free discussion guide is now available to accompany the April 2023 issue of *The Learning Professional*. This guide will help you and your teams collaboratively engage in continuous improvement approaches that can shift educator practices to help students thrive. Continuous improvement methods, which are widely used in medicine and other fields, provide a way to think strategically about needs and potential changes; processes for identifying, implementing, and monitoring changes; and methods for tracking impacts and making necessary adjustments.

Download the guide at learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Gates-Discussion-Guide-Apr-2023.pdf.

THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

2024 THEMES ANNOUNCED FOR THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

In anticipation of another year of compelling professional learning stories, we have selected six new topics for this magazine. We are looking for authors with experience in thriving professional learning communities, coaching successes, learning leadership wins, positive data stories, academic victories, and more.

Every issue of our magazine contains nonthematic articles as well as those pertaining to the theme, so we are always on the lookout for professional learning stories of all kinds. All issues of our magazine are grounded in Standards for Professional Learning, the benchmarks for designing, implementing, and sustaining high-quality professional learning that lead to environments in which educators and students have equitable access to powerful learning. Note that we prioritize work that addresses equity, leadership, and high-quality curriculum and instructional materials.

By sharing examples of effective work with one another, we strengthen the network of educators dedicated to creating a professional learning movement that benefits all students. We hope you will consider sharing your story here.

Find submission guidelines at learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/write-for-us/.

- **Evaluating professional learning** – February 2024 (Submission deadline: Dec. 1, 2023)
- **Technology and the future of learning** – April 2024 (Submission deadline: Jan. 1, 2024)
- **Global perspectives on professional learning** – June 2024 (Submission deadline: March 1, 2024)
- **Learning to pivot** – August 2024 (Submission deadline: May 1, 2024)
- **Curriculum-based professional learning** – October 2024 (Submission deadline: July 1, 2024)
- **Building bridges** – December 2024 (Submission deadline: Sept. 1, 2024)

Annual Conference top trending session topics

Here are the 10 top trending session topics for Learning Forward's 2023 Annual Conference:

1. Leadership development
2. Coaching
3. Equity
4. Implementation
5. Data-driven decision-making
6. Continuous improvement cycles
7. Curriculum and instructional materials
8. Educator effectiveness
9. School improvement/reform
10. Models of professional learning (including in-person, virtual, and hybrid models)

Conference attendees are encouraged to make session selections before the conference gets underway. Last year, some sessions filled up weeks in advance. For more information or to register, visit [conference.learningforward.org](https://learningforward.org).



Explore the standards at your own pace

Learning Forward launched its first self-paced online course, Introduction to Standards for Professional Learning. Over four hours, educators can become acquainted with the standards and discover what fundamental components are essential to a comprehensive learning system. Through the lens of the standards, learners reflect on implications of this framework for their systems, schools, and their individual roles. Featuring videos, readings, reflection activities, and more, this course guides you to a deeper understanding of the standards. Learners who complete the course will receive a certificate for four hours of professional learning. Learn more at learningforward.org/online-courses-2/.

5 CONFERENCE SESSIONS FOCUS ON STANDARDS

- **Standards for Professional Learning:** 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Sunday, Dec. 3, session PC06
- **Standards Policy: Multiple Pathways and Opportunities:** 9:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Monday, Dec. 4, session 1223
- **Tool Time 2023: Resources for Implementing Standards for Professional Learning:** 12:45 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. Monday, Dec. 4, session 1425
- **Maximizing Impact Through the Standards Assessment Inventory:** 12:45 p.m. to 2:45 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 5, session 2413
- **Equity in the Standards for Professional Learning:** 8:45 a.m. to 10:45 a.m. Wednesday, Dec. 6, session 3204

Read full session descriptions on p. 15 of the conference program.



Expand your learning through Standards Labs

Each day of Learning Forward's 2023 Annual Conference features opportunities to learn about Standards for Professional Learning from experts. Standards Labs offer conference-goers the chance to gain the latest knowledge and insights to design, implement, and sustain high-quality professional learning, and participate in immersive discussions.

Last year, hundreds of attendees committed to being standards ambassadors, and we encourage them all to stop by and share their experiences. All attendees are encouraged to consider becoming a standards ambassador to further awareness and understanding of Standards for Professional Learning.

Find the Standards Lab discussion schedule on p. 14 of the conference program.

Blended coaching up next for Book Club

The next Learning Forward Book Club discussion will be held in January, focusing on *Blended Coaching: Supporting the Development and Supervision of School Leaders*, by Gary Bloom and Jackie Owens Wilson. In this second edition, the authors discuss how to construct professional learning and supervision models that best serve the needs of adult learners and outline a powerful set of strategies that can serve as a foundation for effective supervision.

Book club books and discussions are a benefit for Learning Forward comprehensive members. Learn more about comprehensive memberships at [learningforward.org/membership/](https://www.learningforward.org/membership/). Look for a future email with book club meeting specifics.



Denise Stevens

Georgia district works to build a better tomorrow

Anthony Smith, superintendent of Clayton County Public Schools in Georgia, adopted the mantra “Building a better tomorrow, today.” By partnering with Learning Forward to provide transformative professional learning aimed at empowering district and school leaders to learn and lead the way to success for all students, the district is taking intentional actions to make that happen. Denise Stevens, director of leadership development, said, “Our goal is to empower and equip all CCPS leaders with the essential knowledge, skills, and expertise to improve student outcomes throughout our school district and our community.”

Two key academies, facilitated by Learning Forward staff and consultants, support that effort. One features a collaborative inquiry into how Standards for Professional Learning outline the foundational elements of effective professional learning systems and how they can be used to help leaders develop a more systemic approach to designing and supporting professional learning.

The second academy is aimed at supporting novice school administrators. Because 48% of school leaders have less than three years of experience in their leadership role, district leaders recognized the need for substantial support from the district itself. However, due to the diverse levels of experience among leaders and the differing needs of schools, they realized the need for a tailored and individualized support plan. To provide this, the district recruited a team of highly experienced, recently retired principals, as well as current assistant principals, and partnered with Learning Forward to develop coaching and mentoring skills.

“We believe that informed leaders contribute to more effectively functioning departments and schools, which results in greater effectiveness and improved student outcomes,” said Delphia Young, deputy superintendent of teaching and learning & strategic improvement.



NEW RESOURCES SHARE INSIGHTS FROM COACHING PROJECT

One way to improve K-12 education outcomes is to scale up programs that have rigorous evidence of effectiveness. The American Institutes for Research, in partnership with Teachstone and Learning Forward, led a project focused on a teacher professional learning program called MyTeachingPartner-Secondary — an instructional coaching program that has already demonstrated positive impacts on student achievement in two randomized controlled trials.

The partnership worked with 49 schools across 15 states from 2017 to 2023 to expand the use of the program and boost awareness of its distinctive features, while also generating rigorous evidence to inform improvements and examine program impacts. Educators participating in the program reported that the predictable, efficient process, the use of video, and the focus on teachers' successes rather than weaknesses were particularly strong aspects of the coaching program.

Learn more and hear directly from program participants in the new digital story *Magnifying Teachers' Successes: Insights from the MyTeachingPartner-Secondary Coaching Project* (www.air.org/magnifying-teachers-successes) and go deeper in Learning Forward's new brief, *Focusing the Conversation: How Video Improves Teaching and Learning* (learningforward.org/report/focusing-the-conversation-how-video-improves-teaching-and-learning/).

Learning Forward recognized for social media campaign



Ariel Durham and Anthony Armstrong from Learning Forward attend the Nonprofit Communications Awards, hosted by Ragan Communications and PR Daily.

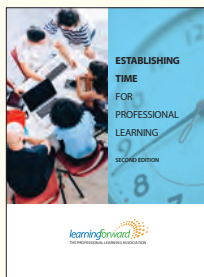
A campaign created by Ariel Durham, Learning Forward's director of digital marketing, was recognized as a finalist in PR Daily's 2023 Nonprofit Communications Awards for the Social Media Campaign category.

PR Daily's Nonprofit Communications Awards recognize organizations and teams that have excelled in using the power of effective communication to advocate for, build awareness of, and raise funds for important causes and initiatives.

Durham designed a campaign around how to design professional learning for teachers who are tired and overwhelmed but who still want to learn. She shared this in a blog post that quickly surpassed Learning Forward's most popular blog posts for 2022 and 2023 in total and unique page views.

The blog post is at learningforward.org/2023/03/30/professional-learning-for-tired-teachers/.

ESTABLISHING TIME FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING 2ND EDITION RELEASED



Ask any educator what the major challenge is in providing effective professional learning, and the answer is probably the same: time. Yet many schools and districts find ways to provide regular, frequent opportunities for teacher collaboration and professional learning.

Learning Forward's workbook *Establishing Time for Professional Learning* guides districts and schools to develop, vet, and implement recommendations for increasing collaborative learning time for educators, then evaluate the effectiveness of the change. The workbook contains tools that provide learning leaders with resources to increase or refine the use of time for educator collaboration to achieve goals associated with any key initiative.

The hard copy is available for purchase in the Learning Forward Bookstore (learningforward.org/store) or download free at learningforward.org/report/establishing-time-professional-learning/.

FLORIDA AFFILIATE FALL CONFERENCE RECAP



Learning Forward's Florida affiliate members at their annual fall conference.

Learning Forward's Florida affiliate held its annual fall conference in St. Petersburg, Florida, in September, choosing the theme *Anchored in Excellence* to underscore its commitment to supporting professional learning leaders in delivering outstanding educational experiences.

The goal of the event was to enhance the capacity of state leaders in professional learning, empowering them to design and advocate for high-quality professional learning experiences that align with Florida's Professional Learning Standards.

A session featuring Michelle Bowman, Learning Forward's senior vice president of networks and continuous improvement, delved into Joellen Killion's book, *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Professional Learning* (Corwin/Learning Forward, 2018, 3rd ed.). Participants gained valuable insights and practical skills to apply a process for creating comprehensive evaluation plans for their professional learning programs. Each participant received a copy of Killion's book.

One of the conference highlights was a tribute to Debbie Cooke, who is retiring after 26 years of service to Learning Forward, with 17 of those years as executive director of the Florida affiliate. In recognition of her outstanding contributions, the board honored Cooke with a lifetime achievement award. In addition, participants heard a keynote presentation from Frederick Brown, Learning Forward president/CEO.

The conference wrapped up with a presentation and panel on guiding leaders in developing their district professional learning systems, featuring the Florida Department of Education and other prominent state leaders. The panel's goal was to assist leaders in comprehending the implications of the new Florida Educational Leadership Standards as well as how to construct and align highly effective professional learning initiatives in the context of these standards.



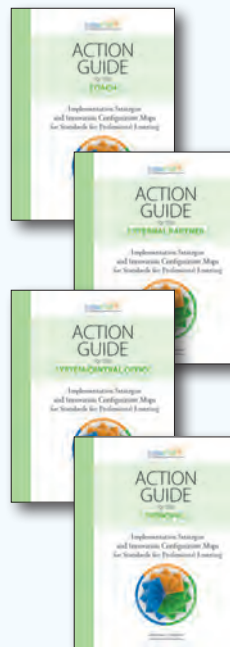
Wendy Robinson

Remembering Wendy Robinson

Wendy Robinson, a remarkable leader who was the longtime superintendent of the Ft. Wayne Community Schools in Indiana, and a member of the Learning Forward board of trustees, died in August. Robinson served as a board member from 2018 to 2023 and was board president in 2021.

During her tenure, she played a pivotal role in guiding Learning Forward through the challenging times posed by the COVID-19 pandemic with grace, compassion, and wisdom. A lifelong learner, Robinson exemplified the values she championed throughout her career and life.

She had a profound impact on educators and community members. Robinson's influence will endure through the lives of the students who benefited from her leadership and the educators whose careers were ignited by her inspiration.



ACTION GUIDES AT CONFERENCE BOOKSTORE

The Learning Forward Bookstore will sell standards resources, including new role-specific Action Guides to help implement Standards for Professional Learning in meaningful, effective ways, at the Annual Conference. Action Guides that include Innovation Configuration maps will be available for the following roles: coach, external partner, principal, and system/central officer leader. For more information or to register, visit [conference.learningforward.org](https://www.learningforward.org).

THROUGH THE LENS

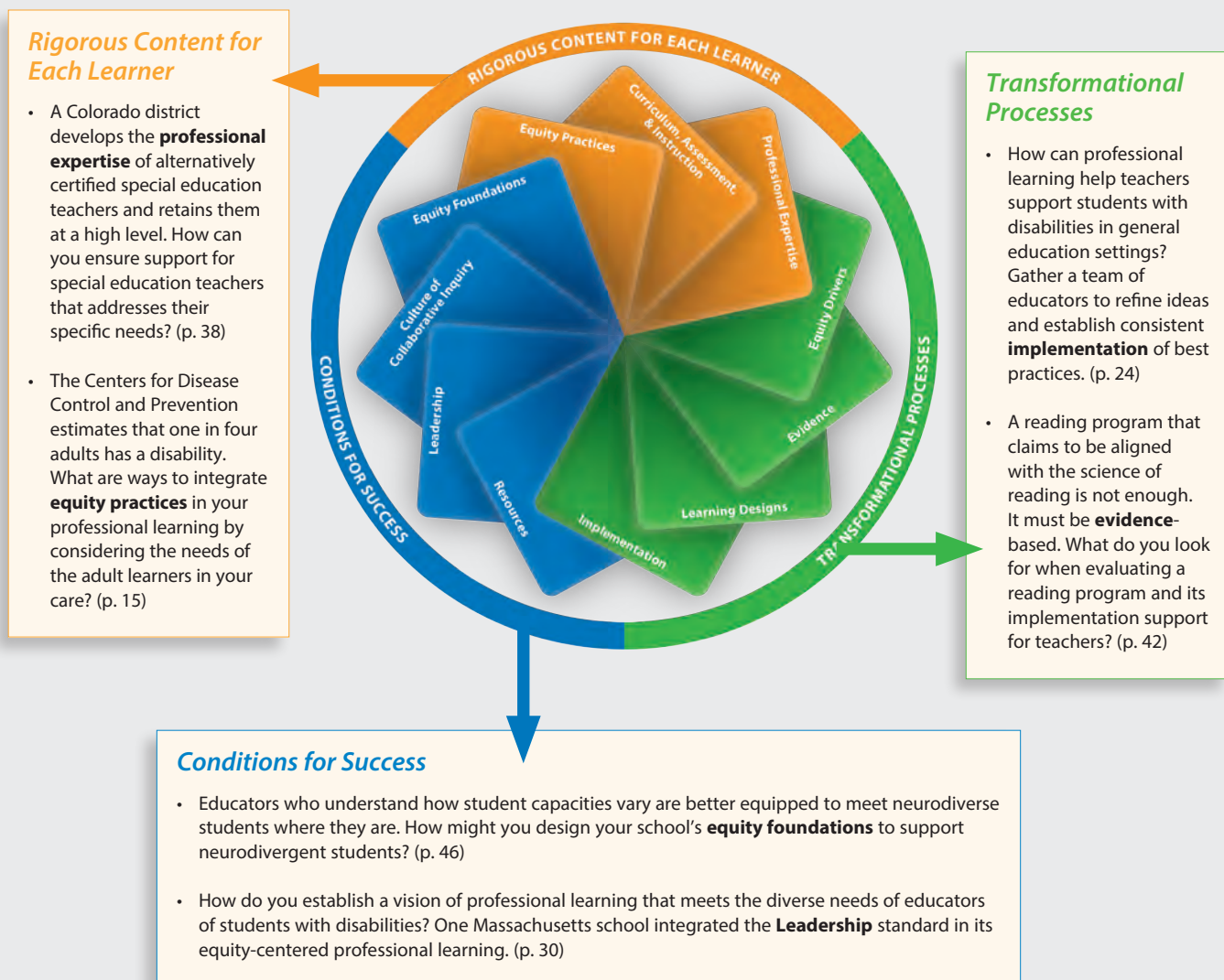
OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

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 TO REACH ALL LEARNERS



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

AT A GLANCE

Teachers' learning about disabilities is an equity issue.

Millions of U.S. students have disabilities and spend much of their school days in general education classrooms, but most teachers do not feel prepared to meet their needs.

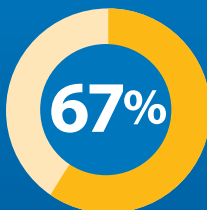
Professional learning can help.

STUDENTS

7.3 million

disabled students account for 15% of the total K-12 U.S. student population.

15%



67% of students with disabilities spend **80%** or more of their time in general education classrooms.

80-90% of these students have **DYSLEXIA**

15% have other health impairment designations, which includes students with ADHD.

12% have an autism spectrum disorder.

Special education identification is uneven across racial groups:

8%
ASIAN

11%
PACIFIC ISLANDER

14%
HISPANIC

15%
WHITE

15%
TWO OR MORE RACES

17%
BLACK

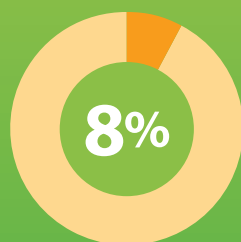
19%
AMERICAN INDIAN/
ALASKA NATIVE



TEACHERS



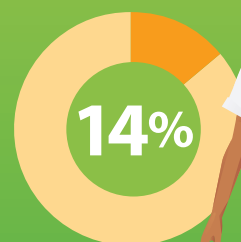
Only **30%** of general education teachers feel they can be successful instructing students with specific learning disabilities and attention issues.



8% of special education teachers believe their general education colleagues are prepared to support students with disabilities.



30% of general education teachers have taken no coursework on serving students with disabilities.



Only **14%** of special educators report having enough planning time with other teachers.



Professional learning that supports all students is:



• **Intensive.**
Deep foundational knowledge about students and content.



• **Job-embedded.**
Coaching and new teacher mentoring, for example, to understand, create, and support IEP goals.



• **Sustained.**
Ongoing support to utilize focal and high-leverage instructional practices.



• **Data-driven.**
Evidence-based frameworks like Multi-Tiered System of Supports or Universal Design for Learning.



• **Collaborative.**
Time for general and special education teachers to collectively plan and strategize.

For research citations, visit learningforward.org/the-learning-professional/



THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

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Join us Dec. 3-6, 2023, to learn, grow, and connect with the professional learning community.

*Featuring
keynote speakers*

CHRIS EMDIN



SHARRON HELMKE
JEN LARA
JACKIE OWENS WILSON
JAMES THURMAN



BRANDI HINNANT-CRAWFORD



Learning Forward's **2023 Annual Conference**

Washington, DC

Dec. 3-6, 2023

conference.learningforward.org

Take your teaching and leadership to the next level as you network with colleagues from around the world.