

Inside Learning Forward's global community



Tip O'Neill, former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, famously said, "All politics is local," meaning that people experience policies, even national and international ones, in the context of their own communities and lives.

Educators know that all learning is local, too. Many best practices apply across very diverse settings, as this issue of *The Learning Professional* illustrates, but they must ultimately be applied in ways that are responsive to local contexts.

Learning Forward Affiliates foster local application of best practices in professional learning and are a vital part of building and maintaining Learning Forward's vibrant, diverse, and international community. Affiliates are branches of Learning Forward with deep local expertise and a commitment to equity and excellence in professional learning.

State and provincial affiliates build educators' and systems' capacity to design, facilitate, and assess high-quality professional learning that aligns to the Standards for Professional Learning and improves educator and student outcomes. They do this through a range of events and resources, including conferences, book studies with expert speakers, podcasts, tool kits, and videos.

Affiliates also work with Learning Forward to influence state and local policies and practices and advocate at all levels of government for sustained funding. Collaborating with state departments of education and other policymakers, they raise awareness about the impact professional learning can have on educators and students and offer resources and tools to collect data and measure impact.

Importantly, Learning Forward Affiliates provide an active community of like-minded colleagues and professional learning experts from around the world. They learn with and from each other and Learning Forward. They share lessons and insights from their own contexts that inform Learning Forward's work and resources.

Learning Forward has 24 active affiliates, including three outside of the U.S. *The Learning Professional* invited leaders of Learning Forward British Columbia, Learning Forward Ontario, and Learning Forward India to share highlights from their work and the role of standards-aligned professional learning in their local contexts. The commonalities and uniqueness of these three affiliates underscore the breadth and strengths of Learning Forward's global community of thoughtful and dedicated educators.



Learning Forward India

Affordable, quality professional learning puts teachers at the center

BY SANDEEP DUTT, RAJINDER PAL DEVGAN, NEETU KORANGA, AND KUNAL RAJPUROHIT

The National Education Policy 2020 (Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020) aims to reshape India's academic landscape to develop global citizens rooted in local values, with teachers being the catalyst for school transformation. However, a recent report on the education workforce in India found that students lack sufficient access to quality teachers (Centre of Excellence in Teacher Education, 2023). India needs better working conditions and affordable professional learning resources for teachers.

Addressing those needs is the goal of Learning Forward India, which was founded in 2015 by Sandeep Dutt. We aim to transform schooling in India through a focus on modeling and providing high-quality professional learning. We help children and teachers learn together through the Good Schools Alliance, a network of schools across India that works to empower learners for a brighter future.

As of 2024, 25 member schools are part of the growing Good Schools Alliance. Teachers from the alliance schools engage in personalized professional learning as well as a professional learning community across schools. Students join an online program that meets every Sunday to read, reflect, and build relationships.

We are committed to providing professional learning that is not only high-quality but also affordable for all teachers in India. The annual fee for the professional learning is INR 1100 (\$13

U.S.) so even educators with limited incomes can participate. In addition, the foundation provides scholarships to selected teachers. Expert mentors and coaches work pro bono with the Learning Forward India Foundation to facilitate high-quality learning.

ABOUT OUR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The professional learning program provides custom-built learning for each participant or team to match their needs, with the teachers' happiness at the core. It promotes a holistic development practice for educators, enriching their teaching methods and engagement through a blend of activities:

1. **Reading and discussion:** The learning modules based on books help teachers improve the classroom environment.
2. **Individual/group assignments:** The social and emotional learning-based assignments focus on collaborative learning and teacher-student relationships inside a classroom.
3. **Writing:** Teachers are encouraged to write and publish their thoughts online. It helps teachers build their professional writing, language, and communication skills.
4. **Speaking:** Teachers are encouraged to communicate and share their experiences on Learning Forward India's podcast.

5. **Progressive teachers'**

community: The focus of this community is to have an open platform where teachers can share best practices and updates from education sectors across the globe.

One of the focus areas is e-learning because many teachers are not digitally literate (UNESCO, 2023). We encourage teachers to use open educational resources, and we provide free digital tools like a learning assessment management platform and Blogger to learn, track, and share progress.

Teachers learn how to navigate the new technology supported by coaches, paying close attention to using technology flexibly and in ways that promote diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. We use open source resources and social media, using the hashtag #HappyTeachers.

We also offer additional opportunities for teachers to connect with one another to learn and grow. For example, a cohort of 63 teachers and coaches meets online every Saturday for a program we call Masterclass.

APPLYING THE STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

We ground our work in the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2022). In the table on p. 46, we explain how Learning Forward India applies the standards to the professional learning we facilitate and to our internal operations.

| Standards frame | Standard | How Learning Forward India addresses the standards |
|---|---|--|
| Rigorous Content for Each Learner The essential adult learning content that leads to improved student outcomes | Equity Practices | Our professional learning programs are affordable to all in our country. |
| | Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction | Learning Assessment Management Platform helps manage the operations and the learning programs. |
| | Professional Expertise | Coaches and passionate educators help strengthen the professional learning communities. |
| Transformational Processes Process elements of professional learning, explaining how educators learn in ways that sustain significant changes in their knowledge, skills, practices, and mindsets | Equity Drivers | Diversity, inclusion, and belonging are at the core of all our professional learning and school programs. |
| | Evidence | We collect data about participation as a measure of engagement. Our learning community consists of over 500 members from 25 schools that reach over 25,000 students. Multiple graduates return to volunteer, which demonstrates the joy and success of their learning. |
| | Learning Designs | Collaborative learning is one of the research-based learning designs we use to explore core values like happiness, respect, and humility. |
| | Implementation | On Saturdays, teachers meet with the school improvement coach to collaborate and get feedback, a key part of implementing professional learning. |
| Conditions for Success Aspects of the professional learning context, structures, and cultures that undergird high-quality professional learning | Equity Foundations | Our offerings are affordable and include micro-learning that is accessible to large numbers of people. |
| | Culture of Collaborative Inquiry | Our professional learning includes a focus on collaborative reading, reflection, and relationships. |
| | Leadership | The Teacher’s Academy graduates are our champions and brand ambassadors. They experience and then advocate for high-quality professional learning. |
| | Resources | Open educational resources are available online and via Telegram. We share news, updates, and resources for building professional learning communities. |

TEACHERS AS AGENTS OF CHANGE

Improving the conditions of teacher professional learning in India can be critical and challenging, but we are taking steps in the right direction and putting teachers at the center, as the agents of change. We will continue to deepen our work as we grow.

Learning Forward India has a robust development plan and is committed to onboarding 100 schools and program partners by 2025, building capacity to serve 100,000 students, and helping empower over 2,500 teachers.

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Learning Forward British Columbia

Conversations inspire innovative, transformative practices

BY SUE ELLIOT AND AUDREY HOBBS JOHNSON

The mission of Learning Forward British Columbia is to create professional learning opportunities that focus on improving student engagement, learning, and achievement in the province of British Columbia. We do this by fostering and facilitating powerful cross-role, cross-district conversations to inspire innovative, transformative practices.

With each conversation, we listen, reflect, and stay open to change so we can apply the lessons learned as we continue our work. We commit to listening to our students, getting out of their way, and supporting them. We challenge ourselves to go beyond the borders of our country, province, district, schools, and classrooms.

Our affiliate invites teachers, administrators, board office staff, and superintendents (our district CEOs) to step beyond the borders of their associations, and the roles that each plays, to create the most engaging possible environment to support students in their learning journey. We aim to encourage leadership within and among all roles and to center student voice and agency.

Our work in professional learning is to ensure that our system aligns with a global context and works toward transformation. Learning beyond our borders is a fundamental aspect of what we do. For example, Learning Forward British Columbia is informed by the OECD Future of Education and Skills 2030 agenda, which was adopted in 2015 “to set goals and develop a common language for teaching and learning” (OECD, n.d.). It uses the metaphor of a compass to emphasize the need for

students to learn to navigate through unfamiliar contexts. Core foundations for 2030 are the fundamental skills, knowledge, attitudes, and values that are prerequisites for further learning.

Learning Forward British Columbia is also guided by the goals of the Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, whose strategic plan outlines priorities that include Indigenous education, global competencies, and postsecondary education sustainability, and by the British Columbia Ministry of Education curriculum (Council of Ministers of Education, Canada, n.d., British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.a).

The curriculum builds on literacy and numeracy and is driven by the Core Competencies, a set of intellectual, personal, and social and emotional proficiencies that all students need to engage in deep lifelong learning (British Columbia Ministry of Education, n.d.b). Our work is also guided by the First Peoples Principles of Learning (First Nations Education Steering Committee, n.d.), a set of learning principles specific to First Peoples.

National and global perspectives have historically informed our lens on education in British Columbia. Working with leaders across Canada, including those from other provinces and territories, produces a Pan-Canadian perspective and stretches our thinking, while at the same time allowing us to operate in the context of our province.

In 2023 and 2024, we have engaged with Learning Forward Ontario in two cross-Canada conversations involving multiple roles

and perspectives. One conversation focused on how the learning needs of students post-COVID-19 are driving professional learning practices, and another focused on the role education must play in preparing our students for the reality of an AI world.

We nurture an international perspective in many ways. For example, three of Learning Forward's Annual Conferences have been held in Vancouver, and they have served as a catalyst to pull together and collaborate with our education partners both locally and globally. Collaborating with educators from around the world helped us and our partners deepen our global perspective.

At the same time, these convenings have helped us strengthen collaboration within our province. British Columbia has strong education organizations that address the needs of their members, including trustees, superintendents, secretary treasurers, principals, and teachers.

The learning does not end at the conclusions of the events, however. For example, since the 2016 conference, we have followed the work of Pasi Salhuburg, an author and professor of educational leadership who was a speaker at the conference, and are encouraged by his work at Melbourne University in Australia in finding ways to build high-performance systems, especially listening to student and teacher voices.

FOCUS AREAS

An ongoing focus of our learning opportunities has been to work with districts on the truth and reconciliation process in Canada. The Truth and

Reconciliation Commission was formed in 2008 to investigate the full extent of the harm caused by the forced displacement of Indigenous children into residential schools and to propose solutions and prevent future abuse of Indigenous communities. The commission developed actionable policy recommendations meant to aid the healing process (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015).

Our learning opportunities with districts often lead to powerful conversations that inspire our ongoing work. For example, one district recently hosted a hybrid session that was held in person and on Zoom for educators throughout the province. Breakout discussion groups were held at the in-person site, at a second site where 30 people engaged in the session virtually, and online for those who joined from their own remote locations.

The session began with an Indigenous welcome, including a welcome to their territory, thanks to the participants for coming together to move the truth and reconciliation conversation forward, and drumming. The facilitators expressed the hope that the learning experiences for Indigenous children would be more welcoming and encouraging than it had been in the past.

In the online breakout group, participants raised several questions that evolved into a conversation on cultural bias and the importance of addressing it in the truth and reconciliation process. It was a reminder of why sustaining ongoing learning opportunities is essential.

To hold us to account, each district facilitates equity scans — “a collective and collaborative decision-making process for school districts to enter into a genuine and meaningful self-assessment dialogue about the experience of education for Indigenous learners and to respond in strategic ways to create conditions for success” (Government of British Columbia,

2024). This process encourages us to explore how we encourage educators to welcome every student with respect and the willingness to create a welcoming rich learning environment for every child.

Overarching this are the OECD parameters and metrics, a tool providing opportunity for reflection and goal setting. Learning Forward British Columbia highlights districts that are making progress in addressing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s goals and improving the graduation rate of Indigenous students.

Another current focus for Learning Forward British Columbia is facilitating conversations about AI practices in education in our province. In our January 2024 cross-Canada conversation with Learning Forward Ontario, we hosted a panel conversation about AI and the role education must play in preparing our students for the reality that AI is a part of our world.

We reached out to education partners in British Columbia and Ontario, the Canadian Teachers’ Federation, and others to encourage varied perspectives on teachers’ and students’ needs. A district leader, district vice principal of innovation and technology, a classroom teacher, and a student offered their perspectives on the promises and perils as well as the questions they are asking related to AI.

We are following up on this conversation, with plans to convene again to discuss next steps in exploring AI. We are focused on supporting educators and students to develop agency and ensure they are well-prepared for a changing global context.

REFLECTION AND CONVERSATION

As we continually reflect on our work, we remain focused on creating ongoing provocative conversations to ensure that our system works toward transformation. We believe

improvement alone will not produce the changes needed to give our students the skills they need to be successful in their adult lives.

By engaging voices across boundaries — whether province, country, classroom, school, or school district — we have the potential to prepare and support our educators and students to be successful within a global context.

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Learning Forward Ontario

Clear goals and a commitment to equity improve professional practice

BY BEATE PLANCHE

Learning Forward Ontario, one of two Canadian affiliates, hosts virtual events and discussions that are responsive to our community's needs. We share many goals and aspirations with our American colleagues, but as an international affiliate, our work is directly influenced by our context, and as a result, we have a different association with our fellow educators.

Ontario has a centralized public school system directed by the provincial government, and all of our school boards use a common curriculum and standardized summative reporting practices, which we can access online. School boards differ in terms of complexity and size, but we are all working toward the same learning outcomes and have the same learning intentions for our students and staff.

The Conservative government in Ontario has encouraged a back-to-basics approach with an emphasis on core skills in reading, writing, and mathematics. School boards are also involved in efforts to increase student engagement and well-being, including student and staff mental health.

What Learning Forward Ontario, and Ontario educators generally, share with Learning Forward is an emphasis on creating a culture of collaboration, inquiry, and strong professional practice. We focus on having a clear driver, goal, and a desired outcome in our work.

Another area we share with Learning Forward is a commitment to promoting equity. The research behind Learning Forward's Standards

for Professional Learning is therefore highly relevant for our work.

Educators attend Learning Forward Ontario events and discussions as individuals, rather than as representatives of a particular school board. To shape our learning opportunities, we survey those who engage with us about their interests and needs.

Our board of directors is in a rebuilding phase as we address the post-COVID-19 challenges that have affected education systems worldwide. In the past year, we have welcomed many new directors and associate members, who attend six to eight board meetings per year. They have also aligned themselves with project work that interests them via subcommittees.

SUBCOMMITTEE FOCUS AREAS

Current projects and focus areas include the following.

The Early Years subcommittee focuses on supporting educators in kindergarten and the early years. Ontario's literacy practices have shifted this year to more structured literacy for students.

Members of this subcommittee organized an online virtual conference in February during which board members implemented professional learning in self-regulation, the role of play, and concepts of strong early literacy pedagogy. A follow-up conference is planned for the 2024-25 school year.

The Supporting Professional Learning Through Inquiry

subcommittee is working on building educator capacity and developing resources that will be accessible on the Learning Forward Ontario website. Highlighting the connections between inquiry and equity to drive school improvement is a goal for this group and may involve future virtual or face-to-face learning opportunities.

Our most recently developed subcommittee focuses on the promise and perils of AI in education. Members are organizing an online learning institute for October 2024. Ontario educators and leaders will be presenters, and there will be time for participant sharing and discussions. The goal for this learning institute is to learn from each other's emerging experiences with AI and how its place in pedagogy can be effective for educators and students.

COMMITMENT TO COLLABORATION

Collaboration is a staple for us as an organization, and we work within and across our province. Locally, we collaborate with the Ontario Principals' Council and the Catholic Principals' Council of Ontario to engage in three article studies together each year. Our sessions have a leadership focus. This year's topics have included leading in times of transformational change, trauma-informed leadership, and students as agents of change.

Beyond our province, we collaborate with Learning Forward British Columbia. To date, we have organized two virtual gatherings on the topics of refocusing professional learning post-COVID-19 and on the

LEARNING FORWARD AFFILIATES

To learn more about or join your local Learning Forward Affiliate, visit learningforward.org/affiliates
If you are interested in starting an affiliate in your area, contact machel.mills-miles@learningforward.org

emerging influence of AI in schools and school life. Panelists were from both provinces, and participants were from many different jurisdictions across Canada. We look forward to continuing these conversations with Learning Forward British Columbia in the future.

RESPONSIBLE AND RESPONSIVE TO LEARNING NEEDS

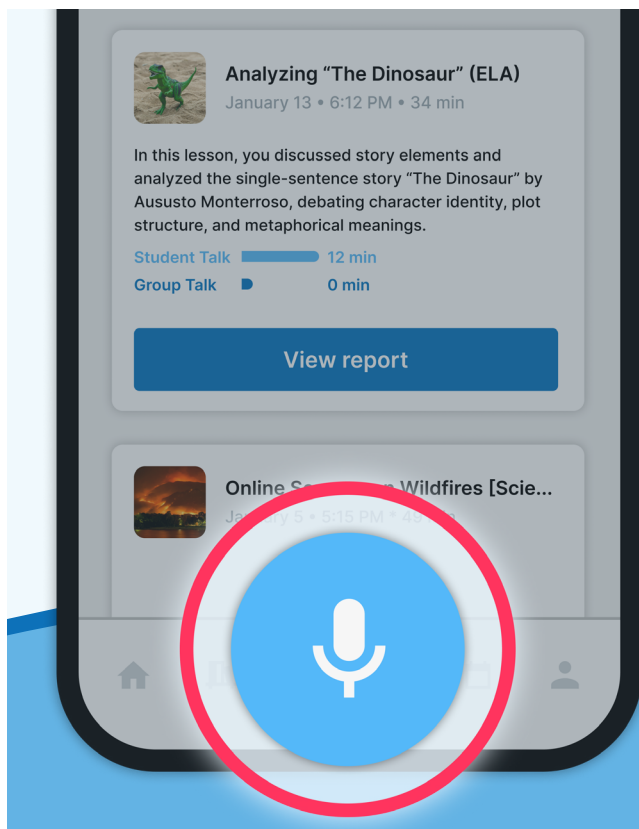
We consider our work to be emergent and responsive to the areas that our Ontario participants deem to be important, and we aim to make

it widely accessible. Ongoing surveys of board members and participants are a key part of this. In addition, we have relaunched our website (www.lfontario.com), and we continue to explore how to use social media to connect with participants and promote learning opportunities.

As educators, Learning Forward Ontario members and associates understand how important it is for each of us to take responsibility for leading learning for ourselves as well as others. As Learning Forward articulates, rigorous content for each learner,

transformational learning processes, and attention to conditions for success underpin opportunities for high-quality professional learning. We believe this orientation is in the best interest of all educators, no matter which country they call home.

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