



## CHANGEMAKERS: JENNIFER AHN

NOMINATED BY NINA PORTUGAL

**Jennifer Ahn, executive director of Lead by Learning, “is a California-based education leader and a voice in supporting school and district change through adult learning,” writes Nina Portugal, Lead by Learning’s director of visibility and community engagement. Ahn has written for *The Learning Professional* and presented her work at Learning Forward’s Annual Conference.**

**“W**ith over 20 years in education as a teacher, school counselor, and learning leader, Jennifer is dedicated to supporting all young people to thrive in schools and lead choice-filled lives,” Portugal’s nomination states. “Her cutting-edge professional learning disrupts school inequities by creating adult learning environments that center Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) educators and students’ experiences while fostering belonging and trust for all learners.”

### SHIFTING MINDSETS FOR AUTHENTIC COLLABORATION

“I met Jennifer while working as a high school teacher in Oakland, California, when she supported my school’s professional learning. Our school, while full of incredible educators, was not yet realizing our potential because we struggled with collaboration, often focusing more on operations. We were stymied by perfectionism and a fear of vulnerability that hindered our ability to interrogate our practices and learn from student data.

“As a skilled professional learning expert, Jennifer listened deeply to our system to re-establish practices for deep learning grounded in adult social and emotional learning. She supported us to first shift our mindsets before shifting practices. This transformed our school, and my own teaching practices, all leading to improved student outcomes.

“With stronger professional learning and collaboration, there were increases in teacher retention and our students excelled. With Jennifer’s support, our site set an equity-centered goal to improve outcomes for our English language learners who previously had not made academic progress at the same rates as their peers.

“Each month, she guided us to return to our data, goals, and questions to share what was working and interrogate

what was not effective. Students previously on the margins moved to the center, showing significant progress in English proficiency, reading fluency, and overall academic performance. Not only did we feel efficacious as teachers, we had the data to prove it. This fed our drive to continue collaborating and improving.”

### WORK GROUNDED IN COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY GARNERS RESULTS

“Since then, I joined Jennifer at Lead by Learning, where I now facilitate professional learning grounded in collaborative inquiry. I’ve observed the impactful way Jennifer’s professional learning addresses inequities across all levels of the education system. She uses professional learning and collaboration to address inequities with after-school staff, classroom educators, school administrators, and district leaders.

“Since 2020, Jennifer has centered equity within our organization by developing the BIPOC Leaders network, inviting leaders from various education systems into a space where they can share their lived experiences without having to defend or excuse the actions of others, heal from racial harm, and center BIPOC thriving. Under her leadership, the group has developed an anti-racist framework to support BIPOC educators and students in their home schools and districts.

“Jennifer’s commitment to inquiry and learning permeates our organization. The way in which she lives and breathes inquiry and learning fosters a culture of collective efficacy for our internal team so that we can then do so for our external partners. Her approach ensures we continue to address historical inequities and adapt to meet the needs of our education ecosystem.” ■