

- **Educators’ commitment to students, all students, is the foundation of effective professional learning.** Committed educators understand that they must engage in continuous improvement to know enough and be skilled enough to meet the learning needs of all students. As professionals, they seek to deepen their knowledge and expand their portfolio of skills and practices, always striving to increase each student’s performance. If adults responsible for student learning do not continuously seek new learning, it is not only their knowledge, skills, and practices that erode over time. They also become less able to adapt to change, less self-confident, and less able to make a positive difference in the lives of their colleagues and students. This is why it is important for all educators to engage in professional learning, no matter how proficient they may be at a given point in their careers, and no matter the relative abilities of their students.
- **Each educator involved in professional learning comes to the experience ready to learn.** Professional learning is a partnership among professionals who engage with one another to access or construct knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions; however, it cannot be effective if educators resist learning. Educators want and deserve high-quality professional learning that is relevant and useful. They are more likely to fully engage in learning with receptive hearts and minds when their school systems, schools, and colleagues align professional learning with the standards.
- **Because there are disparate experience levels and use of practice among educators, professional learning can foster collaborative inquiry and learning that enhances individual and collective per-**

**formance.** This cannot happen unless educators listen to one another, respect one another’s experiences and perspectives, hold their students’ best interests at the forefront, trust that their colleagues share a common vision and goals, and are honest about their abilities, practices, challenges, and results. Professional accountability for individual and peer results strengthens the profession and results for students.

- **Like all learners, educators learn in different ways and at different rates.** Because some educators have different learning needs than others, professional learning must engage each educator in timely, high-quality learning that meets his or her particular learning needs. Some may benefit from more time than others, different types of learning experiences, or more support as they seek to translate new learning into more productive practices. For some educators, this requires courage to acknowledge their learning needs, and determination and patience to continue learning until the practices are effective and comfortable.

Professional learning is not the answer to all the challenges educators face, but it can significantly increase their capacities to succeed. When school systems, schools, and education leaders organize professional learning aligned with the standards, and when educators engage in professional learning to increase their effectiveness, student learning will increase.

#### **THE LINK TO STUDENT RESULTS**

Learning Forward asserts that, when professional learning incorporates the indicators of effectiveness defined in its standards, educator effectiveness and student learning increase. Numerous research studies over the last 20 years confirm that there is a strong relationship between teacher practice and student learning. Studies, too, conclude that professional learning positively influences educa-

tor practice — specifically, teacher practice. Studies of school and district leadership conclude that there is a relationship between leadership practices, teaching effectiveness, and student learning. Some studies conclude that there is a relationship between professional learning and student achievement. Many studies of school improvement and education reform name professional learning as one of the top five components of reform efforts. The body of research about effective schools identifies collaboration and professional learning as two characteristics that consistently appear in schools that substantially increase student learning. Some studies of the effects of professional learning have also produced insignificant results on teacher practice or student achievement when measured over a brief period of time, most often at the end of one year of professional learning. Not all professional learning used as a treatment, intervention, or as part of a reform initiative, however, incorporates all the essential elements included in the Standards for Professional Learning. A few studies explore the relationship of policies at various levels of government or system level to the effectiveness of professional learning and its effects.

The field of professional learning will continue to benefit from additional research and evaluation studies that examine the interaction between the effectiveness of the professional learning and its effects on educator practice and student learn-

ing. Research in professional learning is sufficient enough to recognize that it is an important lever to improve schools, educator practice, and student learning. With additional research focused on the kind of professional learning that meets the standards specified in the 2011 edition of Standards for Professional Learning, the research may lead more directly to the conclusion that effective professional learning that meets the essential elements described within these standards will produce greater effects for educators and students.

### STANDARDS MOVEMENT

Professional learning is a relatively young field. As is true in other fields, professional learning has matured with experience and research. It was not until 1994 that the National Staff Development Council (now Learning Forward) mobilized 10 education organizations to develop Standards for Staff Development. The organization expanded and repeated that process in 2001 with representatives from 19 associations, condensing the standards from three school levels into one unified set, and published a revised version of the Standards for Staff Development. More than 35 state and provincial education agencies and many school systems have either adopted the standards, adapted them, or consulted them as the touchstone for effective professional learning.

### RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND STUDENT RESULTS

1. When professional learning is standards-based, it has greater potential to change what educators know, are able to do, and believe.
2. When educators' knowledge, skills, and dispositions change, they have a broader repertoire of effective strategies to use to adapt their practices to meet performance expectations and student learning needs.
3. When educator practice improves, students have a greater likelihood of achieving results.
4. When student results improve, the cycle repeats for continuous improvement.

This cycle works two ways: If educators are not achieving the results they want, they determine what changes in practice are needed and then what knowledge, skills, and dispositions are needed to make the desired changes. They then consider how to apply the standards so that they can engage in the learning needed to strengthen their practice.

