

The Standards for Professional Learning

WHERE ARE WE NOW?

Our school board has adopted Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning.

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Our district and school leaders are able to articulate the Standards' purpose, meaning, and importance to staff and student success.

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All district and school leaders use the Standards to plan and evaluate professional learning.

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District and school leaders use the Standards for Professional Learning as a framework to ensure that every day educators and students are learning.

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District and school leaders use Learning Forward's Innovation Configuration maps and Standards Assessment Inventory to determine progress and set goals for becoming a learning system.

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In a learning system, district and school leaders use Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning as a framework for learning and change. A framework is a set of assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that helps practitioners examine and understand ideas. A framework adds value to an organization by giving seemingly discrepant practices, policies, and protocols meaning and showing how they fit together to achieve the organization's moral purpose.

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning make clear that professional learning helps educators develop their own knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions so they can help students perform at higher levels. Research studies over the last 20 years confirm a strong relationship between teacher practices and student learning (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 1998; Wang, Frechtling, & Sanders, 1999). Since professional learning improves teacher effectiveness (Yoon, Duncan, Lee, Scarloss, & Shapley, 2007), students benefit from adults' professional learning.

Additional studies indicate a dynamic relationship between district and school leader effectiveness and teacher effectiveness (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005).

Learning system leaders use the Standards in their own learning, accept collective responsibility for success, design staff learning systems that shift practice, employ a cycle of continuous improvement (see Appendix), and hold themselves accountable for learning. When leaders assimilate the indicators of effectiveness defined in the Standards, educators' effectiveness and student learning improve.

The Standards are only useful, however, when they are fully understood. The Standards work in concert with each other; all are equally important. They do not form a linear or sequential framework. Each Standard has a clear set of descriptors and exemplars, and leaders can use

the Standards to evaluate their efforts in establishing a learning system. If a Standard is disregarded, any intended result from professional learning likely will be minimized.

The full value of using the Standards as a framework becomes evident when they are used as a foundation for professional conversations among practitioners seeking to enhance complex teaching skills.

The framework may be used as the foundation of a school or district's mentoring, coaching, professional development, and teacher evaluation processes, linking those activities and helping teachers become more thoughtful practitioners.

In learning systems, leaders leverage the Standards to ensure that every day everyone is learning. They make intentional, purposeful use of the Standards to personalize learning.

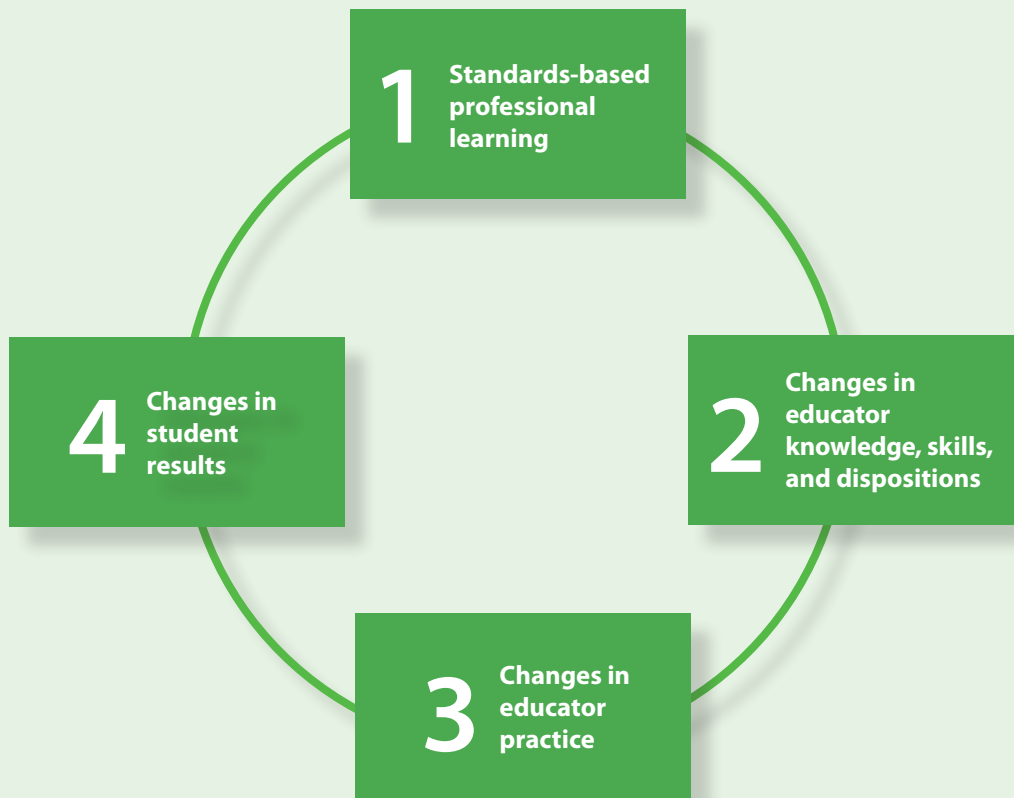
District and school leaders in learning systems

- Make sure everyone in the organization understands the Standards and their implications for all aspects of the organization;
- Publicize adoption of the Standards and the rationale for adopting them;
- Apply the Standards in planning and executing decisions about professional learning;
- Evaluate professional learning annually with adherence to the Standards and results of educator and student learning;
- Build a community of learning leaders at the district and school levels who collaborate to apply Standards to their work supporting school improvement and educator effectiveness; and
- Advocate for school-based professional learning for teaching teams, and call attention to practices that contradict it.

The relationship between professional learning and student results

This cycle works in two ways:

- If educators are not achieving the results they want, they determine what changes in practice they need to make and what knowledge, skills, and dispositions they need to acquire to make those changes.
- They consider how to apply Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning so that they can learn what they need to strengthen their practice.



1. When professional learning is standards based, it has a greater potential to change what educators know, 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, leading to continuous improvement.

Source: *Standards Quick Guide* (Learning Forward, 2012, p. 16).

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning

Learning communities: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

Leadership: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

Resources: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

Data: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

Learning designs: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

Implementation: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

Outcomes: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Establish goals and assess progress

To identify and describe the major components of the Standards in operation, learning systems use Innovation Configuration (IC) maps. Learning Forward developed the IC maps to describe evidence that shows staff developing greater competence as they work toward precision. The maps help those in various roles understand what actions to take to implement a change systemwide. Learning system leaders use IC maps to create a clear picture of the Standards in practice and to guide others in increasing the quality and results of professional learning.

An IC map defines quality and measures fidelity. As users identify the level of their practice using the maps, they can look toward higher levels of implementation to define their next actions.

Table 4.1 is a sample IC map for district leaders working on the Learning Communities standard. The first desired outcome (1.1.1) is that district leaders develop the capacity to apply the cycle of continuous improvement. The highest level of proficiency is Level 1. Effective district leaders continuously refocus their efforts by reflecting on their progress and setting goals to move to the next highest level.

Table 4.1 Engage in continuous improvement

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Desired outcome 1.1.1: Develops the capacity to apply the seven-step cycle of continuous improvement					
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops own knowledge and skills about the seven-step cycle of continuous improvement Develops staff and participant knowledge and skills about the seven-step cycle of continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops own knowledge and skills about the seven-step cycle of continuous improvement Develops participant knowledge and skills about the seven-step cycle of continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops own knowledge and skills about the seven-step cycle of continuous improvement Recommends that participants learn about the seven-step cycle of continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develops own knowledge and skills about the seven-step cycle of continuous improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Fails to develop own and others' knowledge and skills about the seven-step cycle of continuous improvement 	

Source: Learning Forward. (2013). *Standards into practice: School system roles Innovation Configuration maps for Standards for Professional Learning*. Oxford, OH: Author.

Outline effective professional learning

The Standards Assessment Inventory 2, revised to align with the new Standards, outlines the characteristics of professional learning that leads to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. Teachers take an online survey about their perceptions of their school's progress in becoming a learning school.

Successfully applying any major change in schools requires deep study and commitment to a shared vision of what that change will look like once implemented.

- The results give decision makers data on
- The quality of the district's professional learning, as defined by Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning;
 - How a system's professional learning aligns with the Standards;
 - The degree of success or challenge the district is encountering with respect to implementing professional learning and new practices; and

- Ways to strengthen the district's use of the Standards to improve educator effectiveness and student achievement.

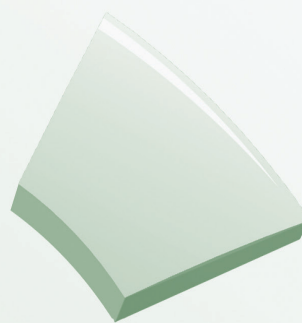
District and school leaders use the data to set each school's professional learning goals. Studies of implementation of innovations have shown that successful implementation strategies vary.

Each organization has its own challenges, as well as staff and student needs. "Just because authorities mandate, experts request, or colleagues agree to adopt innovations does not guarantee fidelity of implementation" (Learning Forward, 2012, p. 7).

Successfully applying any major change in schools requires deep study and commitment to a shared vision of what that change will look like once implemented. Central office staff coordinate districtwide programs, professional learning, and the resources needed to help each educator achieve the goals for student achievement.

The Standards provide a clear vision of high-quality, results-oriented professional learning. "The Standards seek to eliminate the gap between what we know about quality, effective adult learning and what many experience in their daily professional lives," write Stephanie Hirsh and Shirley Hord (2012, p. 1).

Reflection questions



- How do Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning help staff shift practices to positively affect student learning?
- How well does our professional learning align with the Standards?
- How might we use the Standards as a framework to make decisions about district- and school-level professional learning?
- What tools and strategies would help us understand where we are in developing as a learning system?
- How have district and school leaders helped others deepen their understanding of the Standards?
- What could central office administrators do to ensure educators throughout the district appreciate and apply the Standards?