



## Course Profile

### *Becoming a Learning System*

#### **Welcome!**

Welcome to *Becoming a Learning System*. This course is focused on restructuring a district or system's internal procedures, processes, and policies to support continuous learning of each member of the system in order to improve the learning of *all* students. An underlying assumption of this work is that effective professional learning leads to improved educator knowledge, skills, and practice. Improved instruction leads to improved student achievement. A learning system also uses the standards of professional learning, developed by Learning Forward in concert with 18 other educational associations, to guide not only professional learning but also to use as a measuring stick to determine whether the rest of the system is in alignment with that goal.

#### **About Your Course Guides**

Patricia Roy and Parker McMullen developed this course. They have extensive experience as middle school and high school teachers, administrators, and professional development consultants, and trainers. Pat has been involved with Learning Forward for over 30 years. She was President of the Board of Trustees in 1993. She co-authored *Becoming a Learning School* with Joellen Killion and also co-authored the first set of Innovation Configuration maps for the professional learning standards with Shirley Hord in 2001. Pat also wrote two monthly columns for *The Learning Principal* and *The Learning System* from 2004-08.

Parker facilitated the development of his urban high school as a member of the Coalition of Essential Schools and also served as a principal of an intermediate school in Delaware. He served as a team coach for Arizona schools engaged in a three-year program to improve professional learning at their sites.

Because of modern technology, you will be able to access a host of other experts and resources as well. You will find videos from Stephanie Hirsh, Executive Director of Learning Forward, Frederick Brown, Deputy Executive Director, as well as a variety of other experts and consultants who have provided webinars through Learning Forward media programs. You will also find articles from many of Learning Forward's publications such as the *JSD*, *Tools for Learning Schools*, *Leading Teacher*, and *The Learning System* as well as special reports and research studies. A vast array of resources creates the foundation for this online course.

## Who Is the Target Audience?

There are two primary target audiences. First, individuals who are interested in strategies for aligning a district's work so that it promotes and facilitates effective professional learning that not only enhances educators' knowledge and skills but results in improved learning for all students. Research has shown that there are isolated islands of excellence, individual schools that accomplish desired outcomes for student learning within each district. But, the entire system has not reached those goals. If that is the case, the district needs to examine itself to determine how to attain better alignment of processes and outcomes.

The second target audience is a small, heterogeneous Study Team. We imagine that a district might be interested in learning about becoming a learning system but may want to send a small scouting party out to see what that task might involve. The Study Team might include central office staff, principals, teachers, and instructional coaches. The course has been designed so that a Study Team can move through the materials together, hold conversations, complete activities, experience chapter tools, and conduct self-examinations. Our hope is that when they have completed the course, they would be ready to make a recommendation to the Superintendent or District Leadership Team about whether to proceed with whole district work on becoming a learning system.

## Why This Course Exists

When the standards for professional learning were first conceived, the school was considered the center of change. Much of the early work around effective, collaborative professional learning centered on the role of the principal, teacher leaders, instructional coaches, and teachers. The school was where powerful professional learning should take place. In 2009, *Becoming a Learning School*, was developed with that idea in mind. That book focused on what school-based educators, administrators, and staff needed to know and be able to do to create robust and continuous improvement at the school level. While the role of central office and superintendent were also examined to determine how they could support this school-level work, the focus was still at the school level.

It became clear that working school by school was not an optimal strategy. The central office needed to play a significant role in shaping, supporting, and sustaining collaborative learning at the school level. This course and the book, *Becoming a Learning System*, presents the underlying concepts, tools, and deep thinking needed to transform a district into a learning system. A learning system creates schools that ensure **all** students receive an excellent education. Creating schools that ensure an excellent education for all students requires a transformation of the entire district.

*Becoming a Learning System* includes 24 chapters addressing

- beliefs and vision,
- roles and responsibilities,

- building a learning system, and
- strategies for effective implementation.

This book addresses more much content and processes than what could be addressed in an online course. As a result, this course offers an introduction to the material with the hope that interested educators could sample the content, examine the tools and suggested processes, and experience the conversations required to begin the process of becoming a learning system. The course has been written so that an individual could take the course, but a small learning team can also take the course. That small team could be charged by the district to explore the content and be ready to make a recommendation to the superintendent or leadership team concerning whether the whole district should take on the work to become a learning system. Included in activities are directions for individual participants as well as study teams. Study teams engage in activities and conversations suggested in the tools that are part of the book.

### Course Materials

The course involves five modules that include readings, videos, short power point presentations, practices, and reflections. Practice activities are included so that you will have experience with and understand the impact of various components and tools provided in the course. The expectation is that the practice activities will deepen your understanding, ground your practice, and encourage you to take action.

There will also be five quizzes, one for each module, based on the content. To pass the quizzes you have to read and/or watch all the content and participate in the practice activities. The point of including assessments is to check to make sure you are keeping up with the reading and that you understand the basic concepts of the course. You have to correctly answer at least 4 out of the 6 questions to pass the quiz and advance to the next module.

### Course Design

The first decision about this course was to ensure that your participation could occur any time and any place that is convenient for you—rather than determined by a specific day and time for real time interaction. As a result, creating community or requiring interaction is not a component of this online course unless you are part of a Study Team. We will ask you to occasionally respond and post your reflections, responses, reactions, and thinking in a commentary box called the [Open Space Forum](#). This space will also allow you to see how other participants are reacting to the materials and thinking about the tools. It will allow you to see commonalities as well as differences from others across the country who are taking the course.

The primary material for this course is *Becoming a Learning System* by Stephanie Hirsh, Kay Psencik, and Frederick Brown. It was published by Learning Forward in 2014. It includes a set of online tools for each chapter. You will be able to download and use chapters and tools from this book.