

Introduction

Calls for reform spiral around schools, and these calls know no borders. Globally, the public, the press, and the profession share concerns about the effectiveness of education systems.

All stakeholders declare their intentions to provide high-quality learning opportunities for all students, no matter what their native language, socioeconomic status, family heritage, traditions, culture, government, or religion. Fortunately, a sophisticated understanding of what this challenge entails is evolving from research and study of successful education systems. However, the knowledge gained is inequitably applied in schools around the globe.

Today's educators are held accountable for preparing all students to meet increasingly rigorous curriculum outcomes and academic standards to be ready for careers and college. Educators and school systems are responsible for ensuring that all students perform at high levels, including those stu-

dents without access to the experience and resources that support optimal learning.

The public expects educators to be successful with all students throughout their school years, regardless of the profound demographic, economic, cultural, and technological changes that impact student learning. And at the same time, educators, schools, and school systems must meet these challenges in school contexts that are inconsistent and inequitable within and across nations, making it increasingly difficult for all citizens operating in a global environment to have access to an equitable education.

The Standards for Professional Learning do not prescribe how education leaders and public officials address all the challenges related to improving the performance of schools, educators, and students. Instead, the standards focus on one critical aspect of the education system — **professional learning**, sometimes referred to as professional development, staff development, inservice, or training.

A NEW KIND OF EDUCATOR LEARNING

These standards call for a new form of educator learning. The decision to call these Standards for Professional Learning rather than Standards for Professional Development signals the importance of educators taking an active role in their continuous improvement and places emphasis on the learning. By making learning the focus, those who are responsible for professional learning will concentrate their efforts on assuring that learning for educators leads to learning for students. For too long, practices associated with professional development have treated educators as individual, passive recipients of information, and school systems have expected little or no change in practice.

Such development opportunities have often been episodic and unconnected to a shared, systemwide purpose. This form of professional development has consumed tremendous resources over the last decade and produced inadequate results for both educators and students.

The quality of professional learning that occurs when these standards are fully implemented enrolls educators as active partners in determining the focus of their learning, how their learning occurs, and how they evaluate its effectiveness. These educators

are part of a team, a school, and a school system that conceive, implement, and evaluate carefully aligned professional learning that responds to individual, team, schoolwide, and systemwide goals for student achievement. The standards give educators the information they need to take leadership roles as advocates for and facilitators of effective professional learning and the conditions required for its success.

Placing the emphasis on professional learning reminds public officials, community members, and educators that educators' continuous improvement affects student learning. Increasing the effectiveness of professional learning is the leverage point with the greatest potential for strengthening and refining the day-to-day performance of educators. For most educators working in schools, professional learning is the singular most accessible means they have to develop the new knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to better meet students' learning needs. If educators are not engaged throughout their careers in new learning experiences that enable them to better serve their students, both educators and students suffer. And if those educators are not learning collaboratively in the context of a systemwide plan for coherent learning tied to a set of goals aligned from classroom to school to school system, their

professional learning is less likely to produce its intended results.

In the United States as well as in many other countries, every public school pre-K-12 educator participates in some form of professional learning each year. Professional learning is a component of the extant infrastructure of education systems. Therefore, unlike many proposals for improving public education, there is no need to invent something new or introduce another element into education. It is necessary, however, to improve professional learning's effect on educators and students. Essential to improving professional learning's impact is recognizing and leveraging it systemwide, rather than using professional learning solely as a strategy for individual growth.

This publication is the new iteration of the standards. Like its predecessors, it represents the consensus views of major education associations and agencies representing and serving teachers, school system and school administrators, and education leaders at all levels.

The standards make explicit that the purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions they need to help students perform at higher levels. This process of new learning for educators is more complex than most people realize. Indeed, researchers have found that it can take 50 or more hours of sustained professional learning to realize results for students. Students' learning results are paramount. Therefore, educators must make serious efforts to develop and implement practices that effectively produce those results. To support these efforts, professional learning must also be a much more serious enterprise than has sometimes been the case in order to demonstrably benefit educators and their students.

THE ROLE OF THE STANDARDS

It is important for educators to understand what the standards are and are not. They are the essential elements of professional learning that func-

tion **in synergy** to enable educators to increase their effectiveness and student learning. All elements are essential to realize the full potential of educator professional learning. The Standards for Professional Learning describe the attributes of effective professional learning to guide the decisions and practices of all persons with the responsibility to fund, regulate, manage, conceive, organize, implement, and evaluate professional learning. It is this latter group that should closely study the standards and systematically use them as a template for organizing professional learning. However, the standards are also a consumers guide for all educators, describing what they should expect and demand of their professional learning, as well as their responsibilities as participants.

The standards are not, however, a workbook, tool kit, or technical assistance guide. They neither address every issue related to professional learning nor provide a road map for creating professional learning that is faithful to the standards. That is intentional. Using the standards to shape more effective professional learning will require study, thought, discussion, and planning. While Learning Forward will produce a suite of print and electronic resources to assist with such efforts, educators and others who want to increase the effect of professional learning should begin by reading the standards deeply. That reading for understanding will most productively occur in a collaborative team where a small group of colleagues reflect on the implications of the standards for their school system or school. From there, team members can begin to imagine and plan how to reshape the professional learning for which they are responsible.

PREREQUISITES FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Implicit in the standards are several prerequisites for effective professional learning. They are so fundamental that the standards do not identify or describe them. These prerequisites reside where professional learning intersects with professional ethics:

- **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.



When it began nearly three decades ago, the standards movement in education had as its core purpose to increase the effectiveness and equity of education for all students regardless of their circumstance or postal code. As a long-standing effort to assure that all students achieve at high levels, the standards movement has raised awareness of existing inequities in schools and accountability for results. Whether in the form of national curricula that define equitable expectations for all students or increased expectations for school systems, schools, and educators, efforts to define and implement standards for education continue to be a strong policy lever so that all students achieve at high levels.

The first edition of professional learning standards joined standards in other aspects of education, such as those for specific roles and content-specific curriculum, to establish a set of expectations to assure equity and effectiveness in educator performance. Learning Forward's foundational belief is that reaching high levels of student learning requires corresponding high levels of educator learning. Yet, as occurs with student learning, opportunity, quality, and effectiveness of professional learning have been subject to inequities based on school or school system conditions. If all students are to achieve at high levels, those responsible for their education must have equitable and effective professional learning inextricably tied to student outcomes.

This edition of the standards, drawn from research and based on evidence-based practice, describes a set of expectations for effective professional learning to ensure equity and excellence in educator learning. The standards serve as indicators that guide the learning, facilitation, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning.

Three points underscore the 2011 revision of the standards.

1. There is continuing examination and evaluation of the veracity and practicality of the standards, with feedback solicited from and offered by field practitioners, policy mak-

ers, and researchers. The standards are never finished, and Learning Forward's quest for efficiency and effectiveness never ends.

2. To have the greatest influence on professional learning, Learning Forward regularly updates the standards to reflect insights from current research and field experience about professional learning, its application, and its effect on desired outcomes. Learning Forward carefully studies findings to understand needed changes in the standards. To ignore these findings would leave professional learning hopelessly outdated.
3. Standards for professional learning are employed to assure that the quality of learning experiences are not assessed on satisfaction or "happiness coefficient" measures. Instead, the standards and their descriptions establish quality measures related to how well professional learning informs and develops educator knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions to increase learning for all students.

The seven new standards focus attention on educator learning that relates to successful student learning. The standards require professional learning that is interactive, relevant, sustained, and embedded in everyday practice. They require professional learning that contributes to educators' expertise and the quality of their professional practice, regardless of their role in the education workforce. In this way, equity of access to high-quality education for every student is possible, not just for those lucky enough to attend schools in more advantaged communities.

A HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A grant in 1994 from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation led to the development of the first set of nationally accepted standards for staff development for middle grades. For some time, leaders of the National Staff Development Council (NSDC), now Learning Forward, discussed the role

standards might play in advancing high-quality professional learning in schools. When Hayes Mizell, then the foundation's director of the program for student achievement, issued the invitation to apply for the initial grant, the staff accepted with caveats. The development of the standards would require collaboration among representatives from a significant number of professional associations. The association's leaders wanted educators to have a single, common set of standards for professional learning and urged the contributing associations to join with NSDC to speak with one voice about the elements of effective professional learning. The field benefited from the collective thinking and a consensus mandate for improvement, thanks to the engagement of the associations.

By 2000, changes in the field demanded a review of the standards. The Edna McConnell Clark Foundation again supported the process. The original as well as new associations and individuals contributed to the process. The number of standards was reduced to 12 appropriate at K-12 levels. Once again, the standards were grounded in evidence and research to support the relationship between each standard and changes in educator practice and student learning.

Over time, the standards became the foundation for designing, supporting, and evaluating professional learning. Over the last 15 years, numerous states, organizations, and school systems have adopted policies and studied guidance documents related to the standards. They took these actions with expectations that they would lead to improvements in the quality of professional learning and its results. And, indeed, where the standards were consistently implemented and regularly monitored and evaluated, the standards delivered on their promise.

FAST-FORWARD TO 2011

Since 2001, considerable research has emerged in the field of professional learning, with mixed results. As a result of the research, the field gained clarity about what distinguishes effective from

ineffective professional learning. During this decade-long period, there was an explosion of new technologies to support educator learning. In response to these developments, Learning Forward proposed a revision to the standards. With a grant from MetLife Foundation, Learning Forward undertook a revision of the standards for professional learning. New educational reforms, research, and heightened accountability mean that educators and their students are required to meet increasingly rigorous standards. Professional learning that prepares the education workforce to meet these higher standards must also be held to higher standards.

As the first step in developing new standards, Learning Forward undertook a comprehensive examination of the state of professional learning. A team of researchers from Stanford University's Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education led by Linda Darling-Hammond (www.learningforward.org/stateprofllearning.cfm) conducted a three-part study that served as the foundation for the standards revision. The study included a review of the literature, a comparison of professional learning practices in the United States and in countries whose students outperform the U.S., an analysis of recent and past practice in professional learning in the U.S., and a case study of state policy related to professional learning. This series of studies was made possible by generous grants from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, The Wallace Foundation, and MetLife Foundation.

The standards development process continued when Learning Forward again invited individuals representing leading education associations to review research and best practice literature to compose standards for their own constituencies, including teachers, principals, superintendents, and school board members. The organizations agreed that a common set of standards to guide the field remained key. They viewed standards as essential for all aspects of professional learning, including planning, implementation, and evaluation at individual, school, and

school system levels and as benchmarks for determining future directions for improvement. Rather than developing multiple sets of standards, nations, organizations, states, provinces, and school systems can use the Standards for Professional Learning as a foundation and devote their attention to implementing high-quality professional learning and thereby realize the results of their efforts more quickly.

Learning Forward integrated additional input and contributions into the standards development process by convening focus groups of practitioners, noted authorities, and government officials and circulating the draft standards for public comment.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STANDARDS

The 2011 edition of the Standards for Professional Learning includes several key changes from earlier editions.

Fewer standards: Seven standards emerged from the study of research literature about professional learning. While these seven were included in earlier editions of the standards, they are now more clearly defined, and some aspects are more prominent.

Holistic view: The standards work in partnership with one another. Focusing on some rather than all standards may contribute to the failure of professional learning to deliver on its promised results. These seven standards are not optional for professional learning that intends to increase educator effectiveness and results for all students. The context, process, content organizer is not as prominent in the new standards, yet remains a foundation for the seven standards. For it to be effective, professional learning occurs most often in learning communities; is supported with strong leadership and appropriate resources; is drawn from and measured by data on students, educators, and systems; applies appropriate designs for learning; has substantive implementation support; and focuses on student and educator standards.

Combined content standard: The three previously defined content standards — Equity, Qual-

ity Teaching, and Family Involvement — have been replaced with a single Outcomes standard that incorporates two dimensions, student learning outcomes and educator performance expectations. There are essentially two reasons. First, the Standards for Professional Learning as a whole are focused on increasing results for all students and educators. All seven standards, rather than a single one, focus attention on equity and all drive toward that goal. Second, the educator performance expectations as defined by policy makers include substantially expanded expectations for equity, family and community engagement, and role-specific performance expectations. This combined standard strengthens alignment between educator professional learning and its role in student learning.

Revised stem: The standards begin with a common statement: “Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students” This statement confirms the link between educator practice and results for students. The link between educator learning and learning for every student is the purpose of professional learning, and the stem makes that link evident. The statement also emphasizes equity of results. The use of “all” is intentional to elevate the significance of ensuring the success of every student, regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, exceptionality, language, socioeconomic condition, culture, or sexual orientation.

Three areas of focus: The Standards for Professional Learning describe the context, processes, and content for effective professional learning. Learning Communities, Leadership, and Resources standards define the essential conditions for effective professional learning. Without these in place, even the most thoughtfully planned and implemented professional learning may fail. Data, Learning Designs, and Implementation standards describe the attributes of educator learning processes that define quality and effectiveness of professional learning. The single content standard, Outcomes, identifies the essential content of professional learning.

CORE CONCEPTS

Four core concepts are embedded in the stem — educator, effectiveness, results, and all students.

- **Educator** describes the members of the education workforce, those employed within schools and school systems and in other education agencies to provide direct or indirect services to students. Educators include both the professional and support staff who contribute to student learning.
- **Effectiveness** refers to educators' capacity to meet performance expectations, implement evidence-based practices, create and sustain conditions for effective learning, and increase student learning. Effectiveness is evident in performance as defined by role expectations and professional standards and by the results of an educator's work.
- **Results** refers to all aspects of student growth and development. Academic success is the primary results area, and it is coupled with social and emotional learning in the overall development of students. Academic, social, and emotional development work together to ensure student success. Student learning is assessed through multiple measures, both formative and summative, that provide evidence that students are succeeding in meeting the expected curriculum outcomes and development indicators. These measures include, and are not limited to, daily classroom assessments such as student work samples and performances; educator and parent observations; student self-assessments; periodic common or benchmark assessments, portfolios of work, projects or performances; and standardized assessments.
- **All students** signifies that educators' professional responsibility and professional learning are driven by the belief that education for all students, not just some, is fundamental to the well-being of a global soci-

ety. Without equitable opportunities and universal high expectations for all students, societal, political, and economic infrastructures suffer.

FULFILLING THE PROMISE

Continuous learning provides members of any profession with new understandings, insights, and ideas for how to develop essential skills and behaviors. In short, it enables the profession's members to refine and extend their knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions related to their specific role and context. Individuals are unlikely to seek the services of an automobile mechanic, plumber, or surgeon who isn't up-to-date on the latest field knowledge, studies, products, and procedures. Students deserve nothing less from the educators who serve them.

As educators invest in continuous improvement through professional learning, they demonstrate professionalism and commitment to students. School systems that invest in professional learning and build coherence throughout the system demonstrate commitment to human capital development and acknowledge that investment in educator learning is a significant lever in improving student achievement.

The use of Standards for Professional Learning by school systems and educators supports a high level of quality of the professional learning. Further, use of the standards to plan, facilitate, and evaluate professional learning promises to heighten the quality of educator learning, performance of all educators, and student learning. Increased educator effectiveness makes possible a shift from current reality to the preferred outcomes of enhanced student learning results — a goal to which all educators subscribe.

— *Hayes Mizell*, Distinguished Senior Fellow

— *Shirley Hord*, Scholar Laureate

— *Joellen Killian*, Deputy Executive Director

— *Stephanie Hirsh*, Executive Director

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