learningforward
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Standards for Professional Learning

STANDARDS VIGNETTE:
SUSTAINING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ACROSS TIME AND SPACE

To illustrate how Standards for Professional Learning can guide the work of educators seeking to advance equity for educators and students in diverse settings, Learning Forward created the following vignette of a fictional regional service center. The narrative is based on real experiences to depict how implementing standards-based professional learning is a journey, rather than an overnight transformation or a checklist to be completed.

About this resource

The purposes of this vignette are to help educators:

- Envision what professional learning aligned with or informed by Standards for Professional Learning looks like in a real-world setting; and

- Consider how standards-based professional learning can address essential school, district, and regional challenges.

Suggestions for use

1. Read the following vignette, using the prompts that follow to track notes, insights, and questions for subsequent conversations.

2. Note or highlight where you see direct or indirect evidence of Standards for Professional Learning throughout the narrative. While themes from the Implementation, Resources, and Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction standards are prominent, aspects of most standards are present to depict a systems approach to implementing high-quality professional learning.

3. Use the notes and insights to inform a team discussion or individual reflection to lead to deeper understanding and shared actions.

A WIDESPREAD NEED

The regional education services center representing several counties in rural Nebraska has taken on the challenge of implementing a whole-child learning curriculum across multiple pre-K-12 schools and classrooms over a four-year period. Educator surveys over the years revealed an upward trend in demand for more information and resources related to addressing students' social and emotional needs, and declines in the region's economy made this need even more pressing. The curriculum is now in year two.

Miriam Taylor is spearheading the effort based on her experience leading several wide-scale professional learning initiatives in both rural and urban settings, as well as her experience as an elementary school principal. She has been with the regional services center for seven years, and while she has been part of a successful reading curriculum implementation, she has also seen several expensive initiatives flounder due to poor planning for sustainability and insufficient support for educators. She believes that a comprehensive plan of sustained multilevel professional learning is the key to success for this new social and emotional learning initiative.

UNDERSTANDING CHANGE

Taylor understands well that professional learning is a process that extends across sites and contexts, takes time and nurturing, and requires individualized support and feedback. Armed with Standards for Professional Learning, research about effective change management, and the whole-child curriculum and tools, Taylor and her team spend a significant amount of time developing the theory of action for the implementation as well as assessing the current state of professional learning, learning communities and teams, and individuals' experiences and backgrounds.

Ensuring that learning continues coherently across multiple sites over four years is a daunting charge, but Taylor has enlisted a group of educators from across the region who dedicate a full day every quarter to creating a comprehensive plan and then assessing against the deliverables and benchmarks they established at the beginning.

The team first analyzes data related to several indicators, such as chronic absenteeism, discipline referrals, counseling meetings, and student engagement. They then delve into change management theory and the science of how people learn. They read about and discuss the Concerns-Based Adoption Model, trust building, and teacher agency. As they look to implement high-quality professional learning regionwide, they also study Standards for Professional Learning and use Innovation Configuration maps for several roles to understand the specific behaviors that lead to and sustain improvement. This step of their work is so helpful to the planning team that they decide they should add a similar course of study for educators into their plan.

The next step is to map out the implementation plan for the next four years. The stakeholder team plans the whole-child curriculum implementation as a series of learning experiences across grade levels and content teams with clear goals, benchmarks, and supports aligned with the state's strategic priorities rather than a collection of stand-alone events measured by a fixed number of hours. They also identify leading educators who can provide coaching and mentoring and lead professional learning sessions and events.

DISSEMINATING LEARNING ACROSS SITES

Taylor and the team next consult with principals and district leaders to determine what days in the existing calendars they can use to introduce the initiative, when teachers can meet in teams to carry the work further, and then set times to follow up with assessments of progress and reintroduce content in subsequent years.

Realizing that this is only the first step, she meets with each principal to determine how best to provide support and coaching. The reality is that many schools do not have access to dedicated coaches and mentors — often people are working in hybrid roles and coaching while also teaching — so their workload cannot be increased.

Keeping in mind that the goal of coaching and feedback is to provide specific, actionable input, Taylor and her team create a plan for differentiated support in which educators will receive direct coaching, participate in a peer feedback relationship, or co-teach with a colleague, depending on experience and inclination to change as indicated on preassessments each educator completes. Taylor and her team are determined to offer all educators the opportunity to practice new strategies in a context where they can get feedback to help them adjust and improve.

Based on educators' experiences during the pandemic, Taylor recognizes that some support can be offered virtually, connecting teachers from the same grade level or facing the same implementation challenge through videoconference or asynchronous conversations in a private online community.

Freed from the constraints of location and travel, she launches virtual platforms for individual and collaborative feedback conversations in which grade-level peers can get together from different schools to discuss classroom-level challenges and successes as well as developmentally appropriate student exercises and assessments. She also launches a virtual coaching program to connect coaches with additional educators and at the same time minimize coaches' travel between schools.

FUNDING IMPACT

Supporting educators virtually has had a positive impact on the budget for implementation, which was inadequate from the start. Taylor has repeatedly advocated for more funding for sustained professional learning in future years, and she is hoping that the impact data they collect will help make that argument even more forcefully in the future.
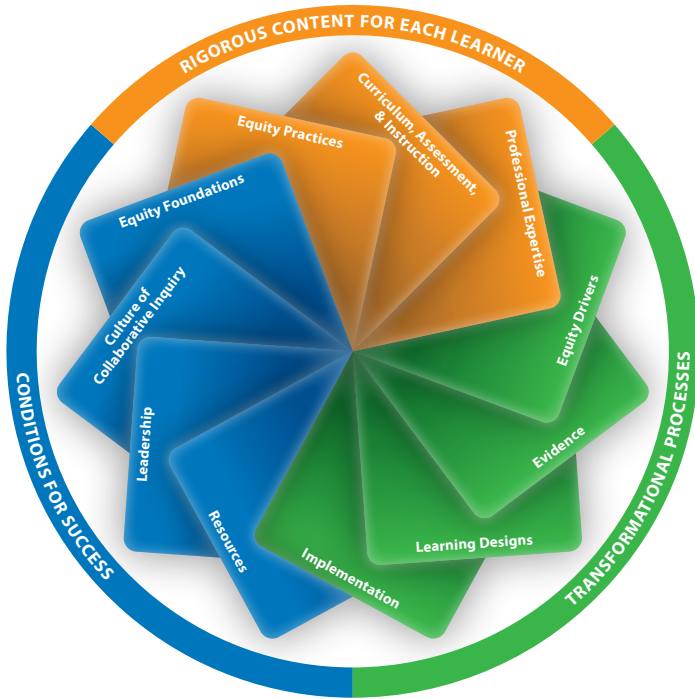
Standards for Professional Learning work within a framework of three categories:

- The **Rigorous Content for Each Learner** standards describe the essential content of adult learning that leads to improved student outcomes.

- The **Transformational Processes** standards describe process elements of professional learning, explaining how educators learn in ways that sustain significant changes in their knowledge, skills, practices, and mindsets.

- The **Conditions for Success** standards describe aspects of the professional learning context, structures, and cultures that undergird high-quality professional learning.

Prompts for discussion and reflection:

What critical school, district, and regional challenges are present?

What strengths and improvement-oriented actions do you see in the vignette? Where do you see room for growth?

Which Standards for Professional Learning do you see reflected? Note key phrases that represent the standards at work.

What ideas, questions, or concerns does the vignette spark for your work in your context?

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Standards for Professional Learning

Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators ...

EQUITY PRACTICES
... understand their students' historical, cultural, and societal contexts, embrace student assets through instruction, and foster relationships with students, families, and communities.

CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, AND INSTRUCTION
... prioritize high-quality curriculum and instructional materials for students, assess student learning, and understand curriculum and implement through instruction.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE
... apply standards and research to their work, develop the expertise essential to their roles, and prioritize coherence and alignment in their learning.

Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators ...

EQUITY DRIVERS
... prioritize equity in professional learning practices, identify and address their own biases and beliefs, and collaborate with diverse colleagues.

EVIDENCE
... create expectations and build capacity for use of evidence, leverage evidence, data, and research from multiple sources to plan educator learning, and measure and report the impact of professional learning.

LEARNING DESIGNS
... set relevant and contextualized learning goals, ground their work in research and theories about learning, and implement evidence-based learning designs.

IMPLEMENTATION
... understand and apply research on change management, engage in feedback processes, and implement and sustain professional learning.

Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators ...

EQUITY FOUNDATIONS
... establish expectations for equity, create structures to ensure equitable access to learning, and sustain a culture of support for all staff.

CULTURE OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY
... engage in continuous improvement, build collaboration skills and capacity, and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.

LEADERSHIP
... establish a compelling and inclusive vision for professional learning, sustain coherent support to build educator capacity, and advocate for professional learning by sharing the importance and evidence of impact of professional learning.

RESOURCES
... allocate resources for professional learning, prioritize equity in their resource decisions, and monitor the use and impact of resource investments.

Learning Forward is committed to building every educator's capacity to establish and sustain high-quality professional learning so that every student has access to high-quality teaching and learning.

As the only membership association solely focused on effective professional learning for K-12 educators, Learning Forward serves thousands of members and subscribers while simultaneously influencing the broader education field. Learning Forward works at all levels of the education system.

Information about standards, membership, services, or products is available from:

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Learn more

Visit **standards.learningforward.org** to find resources useful for sharing, studying, and implementing Standards for Professional Learning.

- Role-based Action Guides include Innovation Configuration maps.
- Research resources go deep on the evidence behind standards.
- Policy tools suggest steps to advance adoption and use of standards in a range of contexts.