

Standards for Professional Learning

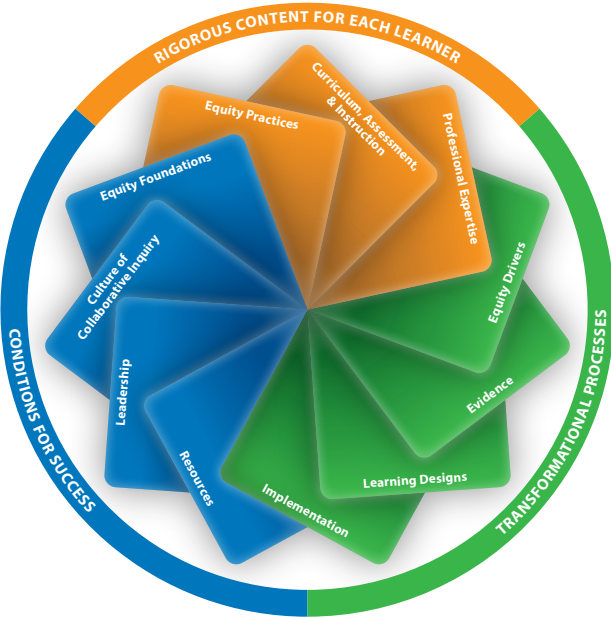
STANDARDS IMPLEMENTATION: POLICY PATHWAYS

This resource provides guidance to educators, advocates, and policymakers committed to embedding Standards for Professional Learning into policy at multiple levels as a way to improve the quality and coherence of professional learning at scale. Standards for Professional Learning describe the content, processes, and conditions for professional learning that leads to high-quality leading, teaching, and learning in schools. Read the standards and access related resources at standards.learningforward.org.

Uses for this tool include:

- Supporting leaders to convene teams representing diverse roles to identify policy goals and a process to achieve them.
- Providing a structure for policymakers to reflect individually or collectively on the role of Standards for Professional Learning in policy and regulation.
- Helping practitioners at any level convene with colleagues to determine their responsibilities in influencing professional learning policy.
- Provide stakeholders with an opportunity to reflect on the importance of a comprehensive approach to professional learning.

Policy pathways to standards implementation



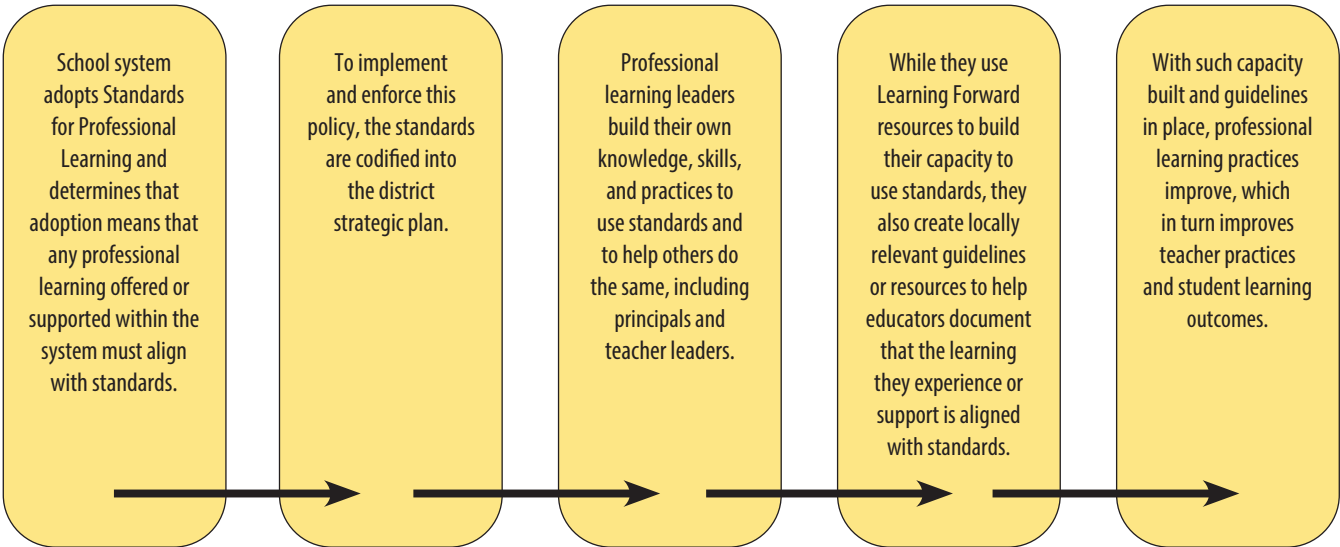
Standards for Professional Learning work within a framework of three categories:

- 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.

Why policy is important

As Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning state, “effective policy informs effective practice.” Policy at multiple levels, including national, state, regional, and local, influences what happens in school systems, buildings, and classrooms. To achieve full implementation of high-quality professional learning, it is essential that those who create policy understand and embrace Standards for Professional Learning and integrate them into the policy work they lead. Creating strong professional learning policies isn’t optional – ignoring the quality and outcomes of policy is a lost opportunity at best and at worst can lead to regulations that waste educators’ valuable time through meaningless compliance exercises. When effectively conceived and implemented with ongoing intentionality, policy acts as a key lever in improving educator practice and outcomes for each student.

A LOCAL-LEVEL EXAMPLE:



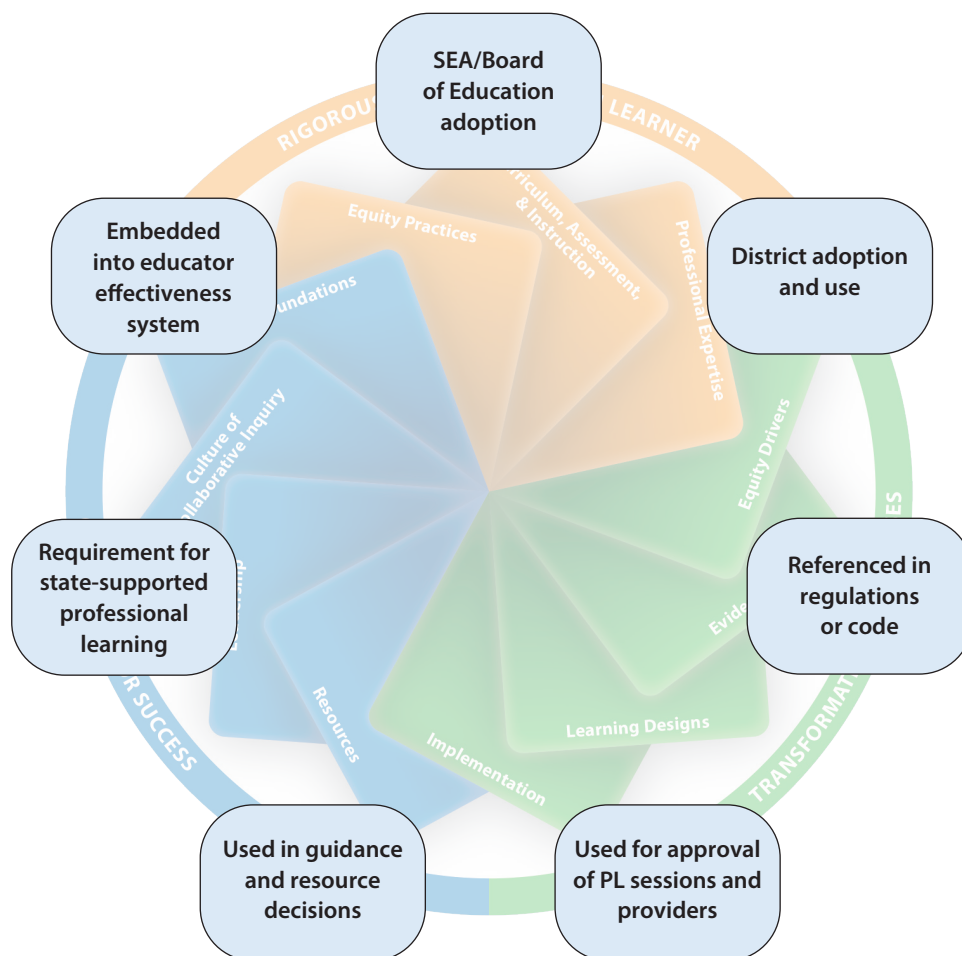
What is standards-aligned policy?

Standards-aligned policy is the intentional inclusion of the standards in high leverage policies including, but not limited to, state and district laws and regulatory language, educator evaluation systems, purchasing guidance, and professional learning guidelines. Policy also needs to be written in a way that encourages effective implementation rather than simply as a compliance measure.

Learning Forward’s goal is full implementation of Standards for Professional Learning in all U.S. states and territories. Standards implementation may look different in each state, but all uses of standards benefit greatly from coherent policy supports. Embedding standards into written policy at several levels will ensure that standards implementation has sustained support and multiple advocates across schools, systems, and states. Note that this is a U.S. focused tool; Learning Forward will also develop a tool for international use.

Several high-leverage policy outcomes are described below. They can be achieved when standards advocates collaborate to take the key steps depicted on the following page. These outcomes can happen independent of each other or in coordination, sequentially or simultaneously. Educators at all levels, including state education agency personnel, district policymakers, Learning Forward Affiliates, and individual advocates have a responsibility to advocate for standards-aligned policy.

For more on how standards can be incorporated into policy at different levels, read this blog: <https://learningforward.org/2022/10/31/states-embed-standards-for-professional-learning-for-effective-systems/>



- **State adoption**

Adoption at the state level represents leaders' expectation or requirement that professional learning aligns with Standards for Professional Learning. Some states adopt standards via the state agency, with or without board of education adoption, and some states start with board approval first. Other states have used the standards with minimal changes as their own state professional learning standards. How states implement after adoption varies widely depending on the state context.

- **District adoption and use**

As with state-level adoption, districts can use standards to set expectations, driving practice at the local level by embedding them into how professional learning is planned, supported, facilitated, and evaluated. Districts reference the standards in their strategic plan and in rubrics and requirements for school decisions about resources and providers. Local school boards can also adopt standards as professional learning policy.

- **Regulatory language or administrative code**

Writing standards into state regulations or administrative code ensures that the standards are recognized by the state so that they can serve as the foundation for professional learning for all educators, and as indicators that guide the learning, facilitation, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning.

- **Evaluation and support**

Standards can be the basis for rubrics that guide professional learning planning and assessments. Because evaluation and assessments are often mandated, embedding Standards for Professional Learning helps to both ensure the rigor and relevance of evaluations and supports their increasing use by educators who might not otherwise be aware of them.

- **Name your own policy goal**

Are you considering a different policy pathway or goal than the ones listed above? In a few sentences, describe your own policy pathway or goal and what success would look like.

**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING
EXAMPLES OF STANDARDS-
ALIGNED POLICY:**

State-Level Adoption: https://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Teaching/Educator-Equity/Ohio-s-Educator-Standards/Finalstandards-professional-development_FINAL-1.pdf.aspx

State-Level Adoption with Adaptation: https://www.ride.ri.gov/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/RIPLS_Final_Oct_2018.pdf

Use in Planning and Evaluation Rubrics: https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/education/training/PD_Rubric_Sept_2017.pdf

District Adoption and Use: <https://www.gcpsk12.org/Page/27376>

Regulatory Language: <https://regulations.delaware.gov/AdminCode/title14/1500/1598.shtml>

Create your standards policy pathways plan



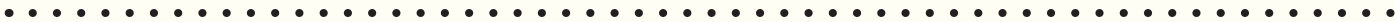
THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Standards policy pathways plan

This writable template will support the development of a plan that reflects a collaborative effort to clearly identify the priority standards policy outcome(s); determine the strategies related to achieving the outcome(s); build awareness and capacity; and determine key actors and timelines.

- **CONSIDER YOUR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE:** Consider who you are, your role, what coalitions you belong to, and who makes up your professional network. These are some factors that strengthen your leadership, individually and collectively. No leader does this alone! Perhaps you are a Learning Forward Affiliate leader with state education department staff among your membership, or a district professional learning leader with a network of other professional learning enthusiasts. These individuals will be your allies in raising awareness about the standards and their policy value and offer support and inspiration as you move forward.

Question 1: How would you explain to others why you will be a strong leader of this effort? What is your experience with the standards and how will you share that? What networks and platforms can you engage? How have you approached other changes that needed leadership?



Strength in leadership

[Empty writing area for the response to Question 1]

TO GO DEEPER ABOUT BUILDING A TEAM, USE THIS PROTOCOL:

<https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/tool-strategic-teaming-working-together-better.pdf>

- **ASSEMBLE THE POLICY TEAM:** Assemble a diverse, cross-role policy design team that represents multiple roles, divisions, and perspectives. Include classroom educators, Learning Forward Affiliate leaders, district and school leaders, and community members. Strive for a balance of members with policy expertise, strong networks, professional learning expertise, community relationships, and other important contributions. Consider the widest range of individuals who could participate, and include any individuals who have historically not been included.

Question 2: What are the names and roles of the 8-10 people who will make up the policy team? Why are these people the right coalition to identify and achieve meaningful policy goals? Have you ensured diversity of roles and backgrounds?

Policy team members

Standards policy pathways plan

- **BUILD SHARED UNDERSTANDING:** Spend some time as a team and as individuals studying the standards. Discuss the standards' concepts that resonate with your context and articulate how policy supports for high-quality professional learning will improve teaching and learning. Discuss a few key pieces of research in the standards that are particularly relevant to your context and that support your vision for how professional learning will improve educators' knowledge, skills, and practices and student outcomes.

Question 3: What aspects of Standards for Professional Learning seem most relevant to the team's policy conversations?



Relevant aspects

TO GO DEEPER INTO THE POLICY ANALYSIS WORK, USE THESE TOOLS:

<https://essa.learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/04/ESSA-toolkit-SEA-stage-4-where-are-we-now.pdf>

<https://learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/how-to-evaluate-professional-learning-policies.pdf>

- **REVIEW CURRENT POLICY:** Identify the current state of relevant policies related to professional learning, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and determine whether to strengthen or abandon certain policies. Consider that having the standards written into regulation may not be enough to result in meaningful implementation. The team can work together to gather information and collaboratively review the current policy landscape. Consider whether there are policies that could be more effectively or more broadly implemented, and any policies that are unintentionally acting as barriers to improving standards-aligned professional learning. Remember that the federal definition of professional learning under ESSA (<https://essa.learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/04/ESSA-toolkit-resource-1-1.pdf>) establishes a standards-aligned frame to map to for state and local policy.

How will your efforts lead to meaningful implementation of the standards? Are there existing policies where changes are needed to fully implement the standards (perhaps adding support or removing a barrier)?

Question 4: Describe the current state of professional learning policy in your context, including any policies that might support or hinder improving the conditions for implementing Standards for Professional Learning.



Current professional learning policies

Standards policy pathways plan

- **IDENTIFY YOUR POLICY GOAL:** Considering the current policy landscape and the data that is most compelling to your policy team, identify your first policy goal. Given how intertwined policies can be, you may have to adjust this goal as you make progress, but name what seems most promising to work on right now. States or systems may focus on the outcomes most relevant to their context and then use the full list of policy outcomes as stretch goals and ongoing work for increasing effectiveness.

Question 5: Describe your team's policy goal.



Policy goal

**FOR MORE ON
HOW TO MAKE THE
CONNECTION FOR
POLICYMAKERS:**

<https://learningforward.org/journal/setting-the-standards/make-the-connection-for-policy-makers/>

- **DEVELOP YOUR PITCH:** Articulate the argument for the policy change you wish to see. This tool may be helpful: <https://learningforward.org/lf-newsletter/tools-laser-talk-use-the-epic-acronym-and-laser-talk-make-your-delivery/>. Define your expected outcomes with regard to professional learning’s reach and impact on teachers and students. Consider which data to highlight in a pitch to policymakers or system leaders. Describe any aspect of the federal ESSA definition (<https://essa.learningforward.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2020/04/ESSA-toolkit-resource-1-1.pdf>) that this policy would improve. Use standards and related resources as the foundation for your advocacy, since they describe a comprehensive system of professional learning and highlight important research. Develop brief materials to share with decision makers, including elevator pitches, sample policy, and an overview of the reason for the policy change and what will improve as a result.

Question 6: What are the top five points to make in a pitch for this policy change?



Top five pitch points

Standards policy pathways plan

- **REACH OUT:** Identify and meet with key policymakers to share the rationale for strengthening professional learning policy and how that effort will improve teaching and learning. Reach out to and meet with other advocates and with key policymakers to develop their understanding about how standards can drive a comprehensive framework that supports effective professional learning. Refer back to the relationships you identified in the “strengths as a leader” section and activate those networks.

Question 7: Describe the first meeting your team will seek and how you will approach it, including the reason for meeting with this person and the expectations for the conversation.



First meeting

-
- **PAUSE AND REFLECT, THEN KEEP GOING:** Periodically convene the policy team to reflect on progress to date, next steps, and any midcourse corrections needed. Review how any meetings or presentations went and any potential adjustments to your goals, approach, or materials. Most importantly, don't give up. This is important and difficult work. Your team will need to come back together periodically to consider other allies to engage, other policy opportunities, and recent research or events in the news that could be used as a reason to reach out to an ally or policymaker.

Question 8: What dates will you reconvene the policy team to discuss progress and plan next steps? How will you keep your team engaged and motivated? What events could you use to spark a new meeting or conversation?

.....→

Dates to plan next steps

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.

RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER

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.

TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES

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.

CONDITIONS FOR SUCCESS

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:

Learning Forward

504 S. Locust St.

Oxford, OH 45056

Telephone: 800-727-7288

Email: office@learningforward.org

www.learningforward.org

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.