

Reach the Highest Standard in Professional Learning: Outcomes

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A Joint Publication



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Introduction to the Series

These are the demands on educators and school systems right now, among many others:

- They must fulfill the moral imperative of educating every child for tomorrow’s world, regardless of background or status.
- They must be prepared to implement college- and career-ready standards and related assessments.
- They must implement educator evaluations tied to accountability systems.

A critical element in creating school systems that can meet these demands is building the capacity of the system’s educators at all levels, from the classroom teacher to the instructional coach to the school principal to the central office administrator, and including those partners who work within and beyond districts. Building educator capacity in this context requires effective professional learning.

Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning define the essential elements of and conditions for professional learning that leads to changed educator practices and improved student results. They are grounded in the understanding that the ultimate purpose of professional learning is increasing student success. Educator effectiveness—and this includes all educators working in and with school systems, not just teachers—is linked closely to student learning. Therefore, increasing the effectiveness of educators is a key lever to school improvement.

Effective professional learning happens in a culture of continuous improvement, informed by data about student and educator performance and supported by leadership and sufficient resources.

Educators learning daily have access to information about relevant instructional strategies and resources and, just as important, time for collaboration with colleagues, coaches, and school leaders. Education leaders and systems that value effective professional learning not only provide sufficient time and money but also create structures that reinforce monitoring and evaluation of that learning so they understand what is effective and have information to adjust and improve.

WHY STANDARDS?

Given that any system can—and must—develop expertise about professional learning, why are standards important? Among many reasons are these:

First, adherence to standards ensures equity. When learning leaders across schools and systems agree to follow a common set of guidelines, they are committing to equal opportunities for all the learners in those systems. If all learning is in alignment with the Standards for Professional Learning and tied to student and school improvement goals, then all educators have access to the best expertise available to improve their practice and monitor results.

Standards also provide a common language that allows for conversation, collaboration, and implementation planning that crosses state, regional, and national borders. This collaboration can leverage expertise from any corner of the world to change practice and results.

Finally, standards offer guidelines for accountability. While an endorsement of the standards doesn't in itself guarantee quality, they provide a framework within which systems can establish measures to monitor progress, alignment, and results.

FROM STANDARDS TO TRANSFORMATION

So a commitment to standards is a first critical step. Moving into deep understanding and sustained implementation of standards is another matter. Transforming practices, and indeed, whole systems, will require long-term study, planning, and evaluation.

Reach the Highest Standard in Professional Learning is created to be an essential set of tools to help school and system leaders take

those steps. As with the Standards for Professional Learning themselves, there will be seven volumes, one for each standard.

While the standards were created to work in synergy, we know that educators approach professional learning from a wide range of experiences, concerns, expertise, and passions. Perhaps a school leader may have started PLCs in his school to address a particular learning challenge, and thus has an abiding interest in how learning communities can foster teacher quality and better results. Maybe a central office administrator started her journey to standards-based professional learning through a study of how data inform changes, and she wants to learn more about the foundations of data use. This series was created to support such educators and to help them continue on their journey of understanding systemwide improvement and the pieces that make such transformation possible.

In developing this series of books on the Standards for Professional Learning, Corwin and Learning Forward envisioned that practitioners would enter this world of information through one particular book, and that their needs and interests would take them to all seven as the books are developed. The intention is to serve the range of needs practitioners bring and to support a full understanding of the elements critical to effective professional learning.

All seven volumes in *Reach the Highest Standard in Professional Learning* share a common structure, with components to support knowledge development, exploration of changes in practice, and a vision of each concept at work in real-world settings.

In each volume, readers will find

- A think piece developed by a leading voice in the professional learning field. These thought leaders represent both scholars and practitioners, and their work invites readers to consider the foundations of each standard and to push understanding of those seven standards.
- An implementation piece that helps readers put the think piece and related ideas into practice, with tools for both individuals and groups to use in reflection and discussion about the standards. Shirley M. Hord and Patricia Roy, series editors and longstanding Learning Forward standards leaders, created the implementation pieces across the entire series.
- A case study that illuminates what it looks like in schools and districts when education leaders prioritize the standards in

their improvement priorities. Valerie von Frank, with many years of writing about education in general and professional learning in particular, reported these pieces, highlighting insights specific to each standard.

MOVING TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

We know this about effective professional learning: Building awareness isn't enough to change practice. It's a critical first piece, and these volumes will help in knowledge development. But sustaining knowledge and implementing change require more.

Our intention is that the content and structure of the volumes can move readers from awareness to changes in practice to transformation of systems. And of course transformation requires much more. Commitment to a vision for change is an exciting place to start. A long-term informed investment of time, energy, and resources is non-negotiable, as is leadership that transcends one visionary leader who will inevitably move on.

Ultimately, it will be the development of a culture of collective responsibility for all students that sustains improvement. We invite you to begin your journey toward developing that culture through study of the Standards for Professional Learning and through Reach the Highest Standard in Professional Learning. Learning Forward will continue to support the development of knowledge, tools, and evidence that inform practitioners and the field. Next year's challenges may be new ones, and educators working at their full potential will always be at the core of reaching our goals for students.

Stephanie Hirsh
Executive Director, Learning Forward

CHAPTER ONE

Professional Learning Standards Through the Lens of Cultural Proficiency

A Response for Equitable Outcomes

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*Knowing who your students are and knowing their stories
tells the students that you care about them as people, inside
and outside of class.*

— Sean Slade, Academic Director, ACSD

The *Standards for Professional Learning* were developed and tested over time for the purpose of outlining characteristics that promote effective professional learning, supportive leadership, and improved student results (Learning Forward, 2014). An important assumption held by the writers of this chapter is that we believe the standards address the professional learning of educators and, as such, involve teachers and administrators invested in their *collaborative* professional learning. Although the professional learning

standards are designed to work interdependently, this chapter specifically addresses the Outcomes Standard:

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

Briefly summarized, the three “big ideas” embedded within the Outcomes Standard that drive the work of school and district professional learning educators are these deliverables:

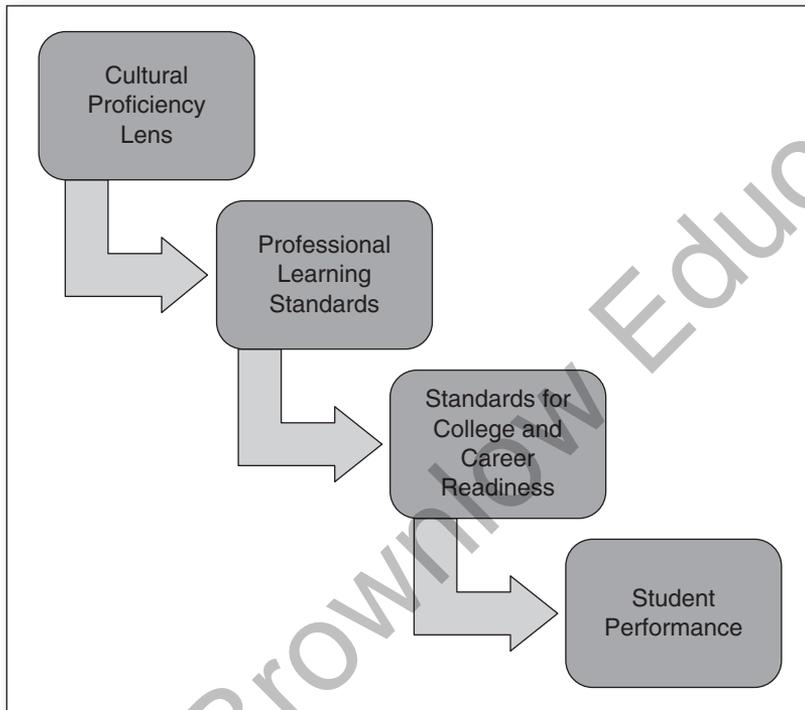
- Meet performance standards—achieves knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions expected of effective educators and are ensured by state licensing agencies and professional associations.
- Address learning outcomes—provides professional learning focused on educator practice and expectations found in pedagogy, educator content knowledge, and understanding how students learn.
- Build coherence—ensures the successful integration of educator knowledge, educator professional standards, and local and/or national assessments aligned with learning outcomes and pedagogy.

We use the lens of Cultural Proficiency to highlight the equity theme embedded in the standard. Equity of access and outcomes for students must be intentionally addressed through professional learning. Figure 1.1 depicts the manner in which Cultural Proficiency frames the three big ideas of the Outcomes Standard.

Cultural Proficiency is an approach to equity and access for all learners. When professional learning is viewed through the equity and access lens of Cultural Proficiency, as depicted in Figure 1.1, coherence toward best practices and high-quality instruction provides all learners with opportunities to be prepared for college and the workplace.

In this publication we focus on educator effectiveness and student performance outcomes through raising equity and access to a level of collective mindfulness. Our assumption, built on sound practice, is that equitable professional learning experiences aligned with professional learning standards and student performance goals support equitable learning outcomes for educators and their students.

Figure 1.1 Interdependent Relationship of Quality Professional Learning Delivered Through Cultural Proficiency Lens



To guide your reading, this chapter has been constructed in seven distinct parts, each of which scaffolds on the preceding parts and often loops back to provide connections, explanations, and illustrations:

1. Organization of the Chapter—describes processes and major content sources.
2. Deeper Attention to Equity and Access—introduces concept of *inside-out* change as both individual and systemic for attaining access and equity outcomes in schools.
3. Mindful Use of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency—uses time-honored communication skills of reflection and dialogue to uncover assumptions and beliefs that guide personal behavior and school policies and practices.

4. Leadership for Systemic Change and Connection—illustrates value and use of continuous improvement within classrooms as well as across schools and districts.
5. Learning Communities as Collaboration-In-Action: Disturbing the System—demonstrates value of learning communities using disaggregated access and achievement data for continuous improvement.
6. Cultural Proficiency: Context and Conditions for Professional Learning—lays out the Tools of Cultural Proficiency in ways that illustrate the necessity for core values that must be visible in the actions of educators and their schools and districts.
7. Planning for Professional Learning—provides a linear path for developing action plans in the dynamic and fluid settings of our schools.

ORGANIZATION OF THE CHAPTER

This chapter is organized to provide a description of the Tools of Cultural Proficiency in the context of Learning Forward’s Outcomes Standard. Tables are embedded throughout the chapter to describe the tools, to illustrate use of the tools, and to provide opportunity for your planning to apply the tools to your work. Intermittently, you are provided opportunity to reflect both on your reading and on your practice.

We invite you to use this chapter as a guide for examining your practice as well as the prevalent practices in your school or district that inform professional learning with particular attention to student outcomes. With this chapter you have the opportunity

- to clarify your personal values, assumptions, and beliefs about providing all demographic/cultural groups of students access to high-quality education;
- to develop knowledge and skills for working with fellow educators in developing shared values for educating all demographic groups of students;
- to develop knowledge and skills for creating policies and practices that align with shared values for educating all demographic groups of students; and
- to choose to act differently when you acquire and develop knowledge and skills that make a difference in your life and in the members of your learning community.