

Seven Policy Shifts that Improve Professional Learning

Last month I wrote a blog describing the shifts in practice needed in professional learning to improve educator practice and student results. This month, I would like for you to consider shifts in professional learning policies at the state and system level.

While the first step for many states is adopting more rigorous content and performance standards for students and educators, the key to fully implementing these standards lies in transformed professional learning. Without high-quality professional learning, adopting standards becomes an empty promise.

States and school districts have many options for ensuring effective professional learning that produces desired outcomes. The work must begin with establishing policies that set high expectations and provide the support necessary to achieve them. As policies transform expectations for students and educators, policies must transform expectations for professional learning.

In the spirit of continuing the conversation, use the chart below to consider how well your state or system is transforming its professional learning policies.

Not only...	But also...
Requiring professional learning as a core component of every newly adopted initiative and program,	Developing a comprehensive system to support effective professional learning.
Adopting a definition and Standards for Professional Learning,	Assessing the implementation of the definition and Standards for Professional Learning.
Some support and/or resources for professional learning,	Significant investments in resources and support for implementing state and district priorities.
Occasional days set aside for professional learning,	Time embedded in the school day and calendar year for educator collaboration and support.
Setting annual requirements in days or hours for educator engagement in professional development,	Requiring educators to collect evidence demonstrating improved practice and student results.
Registering third-party professional learning providers,	Establishing more stringent requirements so third-party professional learning providers use evidence

	to demonstrate impact of their services.
Seeking occasional input from stakeholders,	Establishing formal feedback and advisory systems to tap expertise and insights of educators, especially those with primary responsibility for implementing initiatives.

To see how your state or local school district measures up on these seven policy shifts, use this number system to determine your score.

3 - The But Also category defines our current system.

2 - Our policies are moving closer to the But Also side.

1 - The Not Only category is most characteristic of our policies.

If you scored 18-21 - Give yourselves a hand. More importantly, give your policy and decision makers a hand for the good work they are doing.

If you scored 14 -17 Feel good about being on the right track and recognizing what is essential for professional learning to achieve better outcomes.

If you scored 10 -13 Write a plan on possible steps you will take in the next few months to address what you see as required policy shifts.

If you scored 7-9 - Seek some help from others who have the policies in place you view as important.

If you scored 7- It's time to focus on policies. Convene others who share your view and study the resources available to you. May I recommend you start with

...

Professional Learning Policy Review: A Workbook for States and Districts

Comprehensive Professional Learning System: A Workbook for States and Districts

Many of the other new resources, freely available to educators through our [Transforming Professional Learning initiative](#).

Let us know how your efforts are going and how we can help.

The ideas in this post have been informed by our [Transforming Professional Learning initiative](#), which has included more than two years of on-the-ground work in partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education and with support from the Bill & Melinda Gates, Sandler, and MetLife Foundations.

Stephanie Hirsh

Executive Director, [Learning Forward](#)

[@HirshLF](#)