

# Standards for Professional Learning

## STANDARDS VIGNETTE: ACHIEVING THE FULL BENEFIT OF NEW CURRICULUM

**T**o 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 district. 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 and district 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 Culture of Collaborative Inquiry, Equity Practices, 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.

## IDENTIFYING THE CHALLENGE

The science team at Eastside High School is focused on strengthening its capacity to use its new science curriculum over the next year.

The science chair, David Morales, and the teachers on his team are concerned about the evidence that the school's students aren't consistently experiencing the quality of teaching they deserve or that the curriculum could yield.

A couple of years earlier, the district had identified sharp declines in enrollment in higher-level science classes, particularly among Black and Latinx students. Several recent graduates enrolled in demanding college courses acknowledged that they weren't prepared for them. To address this challenge, the district adopted the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). District leaders followed up with the purchase of new NGSS-aligned high-quality curriculum and instructional materials. End-of-year surveys revealed that the teachers at Eastside High recognized that, after the initial training, district leaders had an expectation for immediate improved results for students without allocating sufficient time for teachers to shift instruction or practices aligned to the high-quality materials. NGSS-aligned teaching requires teachers to facilitate student experimentation and application more than providing direct instruction. This shift requires dedicated learning time for teachers to build skills, practices, and confidence levels.

While Morales is convinced that the new curriculum materials will help students make great gains in learning, he recognizes that his whole team needs meaningful and sustained professional learning to make the shifts in instruction the materials demand. His principal, Maria Fresno, agrees and serves as a thought partner and resource provider. Fresno is part of the district's professional learning leadership network, which uses Standards for Professional Learning to guide the work they do districtwide. She brings the resulting knowledge and tools back to

the school's leadership team to inform how to transform professional learning. Members of the leadership team use specialized implementation tools (Innovation Configuration maps) to get on the same page in terms of language, goals for improvement, and specific actions to take.

## COLLECTIVE AND INDIVIDUAL LEARNING NEEDS

As Morales brings ideas and plans to the science team, he engages his colleagues in ongoing conversation about their best next actions. He stresses that knowing and using the new curriculum well is the top priority if their goal is to ensure each student has access to rigorous, grade-level learning. The educators agree to study the whole curriculum as well as their upcoming units in depth in teams, both to build their knowledge and skills and to map out their learning goals for the short and long term. Morales also helps the team recognize that its collaborative study of materials will ultimately save time as the team collectively deepens its expertise and builds a toolbox of strategies and lessons.

Among the teachers, the experience levels vary widely, with one team member fresh out of college and Morales with more than 25 years of experience. Their learning needs are diverse.

While studying the instructional materials, Clara Ortiz-Westin, the team's newest teacher, recognizes her need to go back to the Next Generation Science Standards to bolster her understanding of several key concepts in the physical sciences. Her teammate, Jayne Evans, invites Ortiz-Weston to her class for an upcoming lesson that Evans believes demonstrates strategies for addressing misconceptions. Fran Maddox, also a long-time educator, commits to contacting the science chair at Long High School, another school in the district that has seen success with the same instructional materials. Based on her conversation with the science chair at Long, Maddox offers suggestions

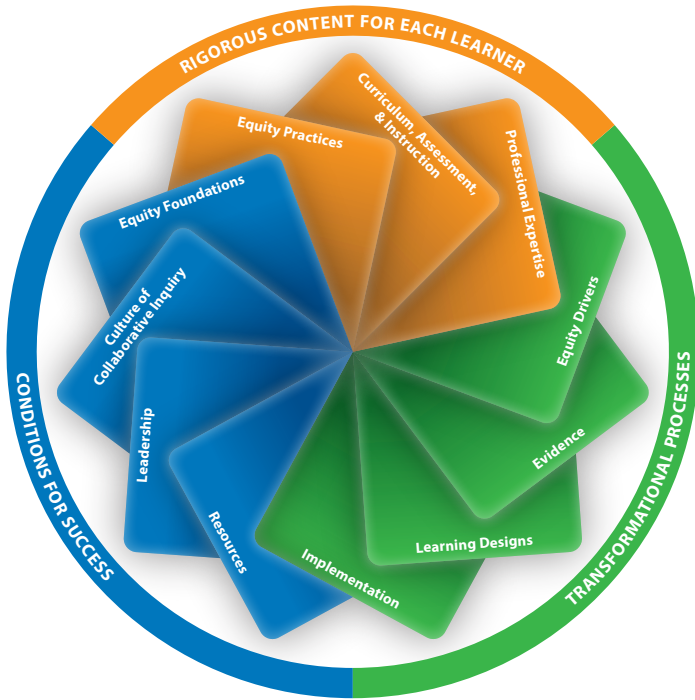
about designing the science team's learning in ways that mirror the learning the students will do as they use the materials. For example, in teams, the teachers study specific lessons and talk about scientific phenomena in the ways they will facilitate students to do. Principal Fresno, who occasionally participates in the team meetings, underscores the importance of every educator experiencing the curriculum as a student would.

## ESTABLISHING A RHYTHM FOR IMPROVEMENT

As a team, the teachers agree they find great value in unpacking the content of their instructional materials in collaboration and identifying instructional strategies that meet the varied needs of their students. Morales reminds the team that the student learning goals represented throughout the standards and curriculum are the team's guideposts. In his own study of Standards for Professional Learning, he recognizes that educators set their learning goals based on student needs. Monitoring progress toward shared learning goals must be part of their work.

Six months later, the science faculty has made significant progress by establishing a rhythm of unit-specific team meetings, where teachers identify their learning needs and an agenda to meet them. Not only does each teacher have a more thorough understanding of the instructional materials, but teachers have also developed, practiced, and modified a range of supplementary adaptations for the students who struggled to achieve grade-level mastery or for those who demonstrated mastery early on and benefited from extended learning options. Principal Fresno enlisted a district science subject specialist coach to join learning teams periodically to help examine data and suggest next steps for study. The coach also joins teachers in their classrooms to observe and debrief lessons.

The team meetings vary depending on what the educators need. They typically start with an analysis of



**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.

evidence about student progress, including student work artifacts, quiz answers, or unit tests. As a team, the teachers make meaning from the data and discuss implications to help revise the unit, including assessments, continually seeking tight alignment between curriculum, assessment, and instruction. During some conversations, a teacher conducts a brief minilesson to showcase an instructional practice and answer questions. Other times, the

teachers watch a video together of a model lesson or discuss a supplemental resource they've agreed to study to strengthen their own subject expertise. They always end by committing to their next agenda.

**LOOKING AHEAD**

As the year ends, Morales is pleased to see improvement overall, with evidence in every class of advances in student learning on teacher-developed

assessments. He knows that in the following year, the team will commit more of its time to learning to use the curriculum.

Morales successfully advocates for an extension of team meeting time with the principal and also makes the case with the curriculum coordinator that a member of his team will serve on the district's instructional materials committee to inform the district's professional learning and implementation practices.

**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?

# Standards for Professional Learning

<p><i>Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators ...</i></p> <p><b>EQUITY PRACTICES</b> ... understand their students' historical, cultural, and societal contexts, embrace student assets through instruction, and foster relationships with students, families, and communities.</p> <p><b>CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, AND INSTRUCTION</b> ... prioritize high-quality curriculum and instructional materials for students, assess student learning, and understand curriculum and implement through instruction.</p> <p><b>PROFESSIONAL EXPERTISE</b> ... apply standards and research to their work, develop the expertise essential to their roles, and prioritize coherence and alignment in their learning.</p>	RIGOROUS CONTENT FOR EACH LEARNER
<p><i>Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators ...</i></p> <p><b>EQUITY DRIVERS</b> ... prioritize equity in professional learning practices, identify and address their own biases and beliefs, and collaborate with diverse colleagues.</p> <p><b>EVIDENCE</b> ... 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.</p> <p><b>LEARNING DESIGNS</b> ... set relevant and contextualized learning goals, ground their work in research and theories about learning, and implement evidence-based learning designs.</p> <p><b>IMPLEMENTATION</b> ... understand and apply research on change management, engage in feedback processes, and implement and sustain professional learning.</p>	TRANSFORMATIONAL PROCESSES
<p><i>Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators ...</i></p> <p><b>EQUITY FOUNDATIONS</b> ... establish expectations for equity, create structures to ensure equitable access to learning, and sustain a culture of support for all staff.</p> <p><b>CULTURE OF COLLABORATIVE INQUIRY</b> ... engage in continuous improvement, build collaboration skills and capacity, and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.</p> <p><b>LEADERSHIP</b> ... 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.</p> <p><b>RESOURCES</b> ... allocate resources for professional learning, prioritize equity in their resource decisions, and monitor the use and impact of resource investments.</p>	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:

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## Learn more

Visit [standards.learningforward.org](http://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.