

## **Standards for Professional Learning from Learning Forward (2011)**

Learning Forward is a non-profit, membership-based professional association focused on educator professional development. This group has developed a set of standards describing best practice in professional development. This standard set has been incorporated into Illinois rules that regulate PDH for Illinois educators.

According to Learning Forward (p. 14) their standards reflect essential elements of professional learning that function in synergy to enable educators to increase their effectiveness and student learning. The standards are intended to guide decisions and practices of those who have responsibility to fund, regulate, organize, implement, and evaluate professional learning. Additionally, they are intended to serve as a “consumers guide” for educators, outlining what they should expect from professional learning activities and what they should be prepared to commit to these activities.

Learning Forward discusses that the standards were designed holistically and are intended to work in partnership with one another. According to Learning Forward, focusing on some rather than all standards may contribute to the failure of professional development (p. 19). To encourage professional development offered in line with these standards, ISBE requires that group PDH activities indicate how the activity “fits” within the framework described by the standards.

**Learning Communities** – Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

As described by Learning Forward, learning communities convene regularly and frequently during the workday to engage in collaborative professional learning characterized by collective responsibility for the learning of all students within the school.

**Leadership** – Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

This standard describes expectations for school professional development leaders: set a professional learning agenda aligned to classroom and school goals; use data to monitor and measure effects of professional development on educator and student performance; facilitate and coach professional learning and/or supervise those who provide the professional development

**Resources** – Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

This standard acknowledges that human, fiscal, technology and time resources are needed to ensure educators have access to high quality and effective professional development. Decisions about resource allocation must be made with a focus on student and educator learning needs and a commitment to equity.

**Data** – Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

Decisions made by professional development leadership teams are informed and enriched by data collected from a variety of sources and analyzed in light of professional development priorities and intended outcomes. This standard elaborates on how professional development leaders should collect and analyze data to identify needs and assess progress made toward targeted outcomes.

**Learning Designs** – Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

As applied to structured activities such as workshops, this standard emphasizes the importance of designing the activity in light of an understanding of how people learn. For example, activity designers can use multiple modes and types of resources to present information and/or model skills and procedures. Activities may include low-risk practice opportunities and design features that support transfer to the workplace. Workshop designs should use active engagement strategies such as discussion and dialogue, writing, demonstrations, inquiry, reflection, and practice with coaching to support educators in developing deep understanding of new learning and increased motivation to implement it.

As applied to job-embedded professional learning activities that often occur during the workday, these standards emphasize the importance of the activities occur within a collaborative culture with peer accountability and professionalism. Some examples of job-embedded professional learning activities include analysis of student data, peer observations, co-teaching experiences, peer and expert coaching, action research, and book studies.

**Implementation** – Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

While formal professional learning activities such as workshops or conferences may be helpful in expanding knowledge and skills, this standard acknowledges that integration of new ideas into practice often requires multiple years of ongoing implementation support and coaching with feedback. Leaders must understand these principles and apply research about individual and organizational change in planning and allocating professional learning resources.

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

According to Learning Forward (p. 48), the likelihood of professional learning leading to increased student learning is highest when the link between the content of professional learning activities and student learning is explicit. As such, the standards call for professional learning activities that integrate student curriculum and educator performance standards. Professional learning activities should build on earlier professional learning and be followed up by more advanced work to become part of a coherent set of opportunities for ongoing professional learning.