**Module 6, Assignment 1:**

**A Summary of the Professional Learning Standards**

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**Professional Learning Standards: A Rationale**

Professional Learning Standards, created and recently revised by Learning Forward, are a set of seven standards that, in the words of Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh, “define the essential characteristics of professional learning that leads to improved educator practice and results for students.” The seven standards that are essential components for professional learning to take place are Learning Communities, Leadership, Resources, Data, Learning Designs, Implementation, and Outcomes. All seven standards are part of a holistic process of professional learning, meaning that all seven standards have equal value and all standards must take place for any professional learning process to be complete, leading to improved educator practice and student results.

**The Seven Professional Learning Standards: Summaries and Reflections**

* **Learning Communities**

Any educator who has ever mentioned meeting with her or his “PLC” is working in a place that is using the (professional) learning community. This is a group of people working together, collectively planning for instruction and assessments, sharing teaching strategies, setting goals, and collecting and evaluating data to assess learning to see if goals are being met, and to plan for new instruction and interventions.

In my building, I serve on two PLCs… my grade-level team, and next year, I’ve been asked to serve on the building leadership team.

* **Leadership**

This is a team of people working within a building, district, or an agency whose mission is to help stakeholders “develop capacity for learning and leading.” These stakeholders are not just classroom teachers. These leaders need to also build relationships and capacity and advocated for the need for professional learning with parents, the wider community – in the school neighborhood, district offices, and with agencies who make our work their own.

In my building, I see our leaders being the principal, our two instructional coaches, our district office staff, and at times, me – the classroom teacher. At the district level, I serve on a committee that provides an overarching structure and finances for instructional coaches and individualized professional development opportunities.

* **Resources**

Resources are what is needed to complete professional learning. Resources can be human, as are the leaders I’ve addressed previously. Resources can also be material, being items, such as books, technology, and supplies.
 I am fortunate enough to work in a building where we have access to knowledgeable human resources, and we have organizational structures in place where supplies are always provided. I am appreciative of that, yet there are over 60 schools in my district. Can the same be said in all the buildings? Do schools struggling to meet proficiency goals get the resources needed for professional learning? In my building I feel that we do not get the same human resources, as we’ve been told our data doesn’t warrant it. Whenever resources have to be shared, equities need to be addressed.

* **Data**

On its own, I define data as quantitative or qualitative information that is the result of actions and/or assessments. Data can be sourced from student work, teacher work, and the work of other agencies in the form of assessments, observations, work samples, and reports. Data analysis leads to evaluations of past tasks and guides in the planning of future ones.

Our building is very data-driven in pursuit of our mission and vision. It drives how we form instructional and intervention groups in reading and math. My grade level PLC discusses data every time we meet. We use data to make referrals in special education, talented and gifted programs, and behavior interventions.

* **Learning Designs**

I interpret learning designs in professional learning as the blueprint of a professional learning plan. As is the case with architecture, plans are rarely exactly duplicated, as the factors that go into making them are often unique. Lesson goals, the type of audience, learning styles of the audience, the teaching style of the presenter, are but a few of the factors that influence how learning designs take place.
 One area of creating learning designs that I appreciate is that when necessary, a design can be retrofitted to best serve myself and my audience. For example, when my grade level PLC meets, and we make plans for the upcoming week. We agree on the learning outcomes and we will agree on the common formative assessments we give. However, we do not script lessons. We support each other as needed, but we can make changes to our common design in ways that we think it will best benefit our students.

* **Implementation**

Just as the learning design is the architectural blueprint of a professional learning plan, the implementation standard is when the work in the plan begins. The plan is coming to life.This process must take time. It takes time to present new learnings. It takes time to see if what is being done is working for all students. Because we teach diverse learners, then we, as educators need to understand that we need to know when and how to assess students’ engagement and understanding throughout all stages of the implementation process. Preparing for that takes time, and it also takes time to figure out how to tweak that blueprint so or that all students can achieve.

In my experience, this standard is the most challenging for me to deal with. It requires constant vigilance in making sure no child is left behind. It also requires that I take copious mental and scripted notes how my implementation of a professional learning s working.

* **Outcomes**

Using my blueprint analogy once again, if learning designs provide the blueprint or design of

the professional learning and the implementation is the work that brings the blueprint to life, then the outcomes are the double check that the work followed guidelines and goals that were previously set. That is the framework for analyzing results of the work, including discussions of he discussion of how sound that construction was, how effective the workers were, along with applying any learnings to move forward with similar work in the future.

 A discussion of standards, whether they are from the Common Core, Iowa Core, or our district guide ALWAYS happens in every PLC meeting, staff meeting, or building leadership team meeting I’ve attended that has student achievement on the agenda. How can one have a meaningful discussion on student capacity or student achievement without discussing outcomes?

Each standard is not only a key component for professional learning, the learning is a key component for student achievement. Within each standard, Learning Forward has placed four key elements that guide the academic process of professional learning into becoming a reality in educator and student achievement.

1. Educators – in want ways can all educators be on board with each standard?
2. Effectiveness – the work of professional learning, like with student achievement, is focused on building capacity
3. Results – like with student work, multiple measures or approaches may need to take place in meeting a standard
4. All students – like with student instruction, educators need to keep equity in mind in making sure the achievement of all students are prioritized in the implementation of each standard.

**The Learning Standards and Individualized Professional Development**

In Iowa, all certified teachers are required to do an Individualized Professional Development Plan (IPDP) each year with a minimum of three checkpoints throughout the school year. The IPDP became required in 2006, after the Iowa State Legislature passed a series of educational reforms that also increased teacher pay to bring average salaries up to rank 25th in the nation. Even though the IPDP is signed off each year by the principal, it is intended for the individual’s own consideration and reflection.
 This planning process is intended to for the educator for apply the seven standards of professional learning on oneself. Every year when I do it, I give myself a learning target. At the beginning of the year (September), I create a plan of action to describe how I plan to reach the target by the end of the year. The IPDP can be a portfolio, but the only required submission in a computer document, so artifacts are optional.

There are two connections that I have made between the IPDP and Learning Forward’s work. First, each of the standards are referred to in the form in some or another. The connection is not direct, as the IPDP form was created before Learning Forward revised their standards in 2020. Secondly, there were many educators questioning why mandate an IPDP, as that’s just one more thing for teachers to do. However, leaders from the Iowa Department of Education and some state teacher union leaders agreed on the political spin of said that the reforms were necessary to justify the increase of salaries, and to make the profession look more professional, which was the same rationale that Learning Forward Executive Director Hirsh said in her opening video clip about the need for creating the learning standards.

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