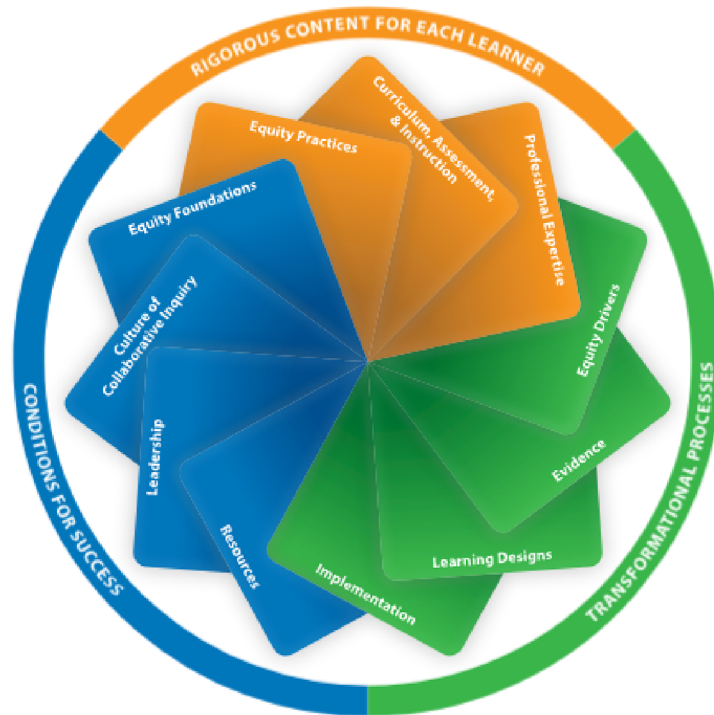


Professional Expertise



Standards for Professional Learning



LEARNING FORWARD

Professional Expertise

Professional learning results in equitable and excellent outcomes for all students when educators engage in continuous improvement, build collaboration skills and capacity, and share responsibility for improving learning for all students.

Educators continually develop and deepen the expertise essential to the roles they fill throughout their careers. The complexity of education requires that educators build knowledge, skills, and practices in multiple content areas, integrate understanding about pedagogy to create effective learning conditions and experiences, and study how people learn and develop.

They align their learning with standards and frameworks and monitor how the field evolves. Over time, they develop professional judgment that deepens their expertise and informs habits and practices.

Educators in all roles undertake this professional learning focus throughout their careers. Those in leadership positions have a responsibility to prioritize strengthening their content expertise as well as to support those in their teams and departments. When classroom educators begin a new position or shift to teach students in different subjects or grades, they focus on the specific learning needs relevant to their new responsibilities. Similarly, when educators move to a different part of an education system, they seek learning related to their new roles.

Here are the main constructs of the Professional Expertise standard.

Educators apply relevant standards and research.

Befitting their positions and roles, educators are responsible for understanding relevant standards and strengthening their capacity to apply them to how they teach, lead, and support students and other educators.

The most applicable performance standards for each educator become primary texts for study and learning, whether content-area standards, teaching standards, teacher leadership standards, standards on using technology with students, standards related to social and emotional learning, standards for teaching English learners, or others.

Educators with specialized roles — such as media specialists, special educators, special area teachers, counsellors, aides, paraprofessionals, technology specialists, principal supervisors (Assistant Director, and others — have their own content standards to study. School and system leaders ensure these educators also have professional learning and sustained support in deepening their professional expertise.

School and system leaders also ensure that educator evaluation frameworks align with educator performance standards so that performance review processes provide actionable, relevant feedback to inform and support both collaborative and individual professional learning rather than serving as compliance processes.

High-quality professional learning advances educators' capacity to understand the rigorous learning benchmarks and outcomes of student standards. Educators develop fluency with the content of the standards and the aligned curriculum that guide the classes over which they have responsibility, and they apply their understanding to the use of materials.

When student standards change, along with subsequent changes in curriculum, educators collaboratively study how the changes impact their own learning as well as that of their students and adjust their practices accordingly with support from peers, coaches, and others.

Educators explore the latest research and evidence available related to what they teach, and they apply what they learn in consideration of the adults and students they serve. Those responsible for leading professional learning, curriculum and instruction, equity and inclusion, research, and overall school improvement bear a particular responsibility to monitor, identify, and apply relevant research and reports containing evidence about information and practices that have an impact on adult and student learning.

In the area of reading, for example, educators responsible for literacy, curriculum, and instruction monitor research and reports about the science of reading and identify relevant information as the basis for learning that leads to improvement in teachers' knowledge, skills, and practices.

Educators apply relevant research in part by drawing on evidence-based guidelines and frameworks that describe specific aspects of and approaches to teaching and learning, which may or may not be embedded in other student content standards. Examples include frameworks that describe personalized learning, 21st-century skills, and Universal Design for Learning.

Educators strengthen discipline-specific expertise.

Educators continually build their discipline-specific expertise to understand the conceptual foundations that undergird their roles and responsibilities, whether they serve at the system, school, or classroom level. The expertise for which educators are responsible is not necessarily captured in their job title.

Learning Forward uses the term discipline-specific expertise to describe the knowledge, skills, and practices essential for professional educators to succeed in their roles. Such expertise encompasses content knowledge (content such as biology or Latin), pedagogical knowledge (how to teach), and pedagogical content knowledge (specifics related to teaching a particular content area).

Content knowledge is a critical part of building discipline-specific expertise. For example, mathematics educators — whether teachers, department chairs, team leads, or curriculum and instruction leaders — know the mathematics content they teach students and adults and focus their professional learning on that content.

They also deepen their pedagogical content knowledge to successfully integrate what they know about the subject with how to best teach that subject to students. Pedagogical content expertise is critical to their success in implementing curriculum, determining when and how to scaffold, enhance, and adjust instruction, and knowing how to effectively assess learning throughout instruction.

With discipline-specific expertise, mathematics educators, for example, can skillfully use student work, questions, and misconceptions to accelerate learning. They use multiple representations of solutions to problems so that students with diverse approaches to learning can achieve proficiency.

Educators attend to different content learning depending on their unique needs. Those in elementary contexts cover multiple content areas, while those in secondary settings tend to focus on one or two content areas. Educators at any level attend to cross-disciplinary learning and vertical progressions to ensure, for example, that high school science instruction reflects an understanding of academic language learning or that elementary music teachers can build literacy skills among young learners. Professional learning with a cross-disciplinary focus is especially important for educators learning and implementing new curricula or teaching out of field due to teacher shortages.

For roles outside the classroom, discipline-specific expertise covers topics such as leadership, human resources, talent management, professional learning, educational technology, curriculum and instruction, and equity, diversity, and inclusion, among many others. Leaders at various levels, including teachers, center their learning not only in explicit leadership topics but also content that helps them serve as instructional leaders, leaders of adult learning, coaches, mentors, or feedback partners to peers, colleagues, and educators they supervise. All educators are responsible for learning and understanding human development and how students and adults learn.

Educators sustain coherence and alignment.

Educators who develop professional expertise attend to coherence and alignment in their learning over time, balancing individual and collective learning needs. They work in collaboration to develop and sustain learning that aligns with school- and system-level strategic plans, guided by an ongoing examination of data and evidence from multiple sources. They seek and design learning that builds on prior knowledge and experiences and updates their understanding and practices as necessary. They align learning with student content standards and educator performance standards.

Coherence of educator learning extends through educators' careers, building on preservice education and induction and informed by educators' short- and long-term goals for advancement over time. Learning does not stop with higher levels of educator experience; rather, educators select more advanced levels of content to increase and diversify expertise and sustain professional judgment. They exercise agency in shaping their growth throughout their careers, and they take on leadership responsibilities both formally and informally to match personal long-term goals and interests.

Educators prioritize goals and practices for equity in determining any content of professional learning, fostering the continual integration of equity considerations throughout team, school, and system-level learning efforts. Educators recognize that their goals for equity for each student and educator never stand apart from any ambitious learning goal.

In seeking coherence and alignment, educators consider where they operate within a system and align their learning with that of teammates and colleagues to best achieve desired outcomes for adults and students. Educators assess their teams to identify strengths, recognize and spread expertise among team members, identify areas for critical learning, and seek opportunities to leverage complementary expertise efficiently to accomplish shared goals.

They identify content for learning that both advances their practice and their abilities to collaborate to continually strengthen their shared power to excel. Colleagues at all levels create greater alignment among departments and initiatives through professional learning.

Selected research

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Links to other standards

Educators use the Standards for Professional Learning together to inspire and drive improvement. Each of the 11 standards connects to the other standards to support a high-functioning learning system. **Here are some of the ways the Professional Expertise standard connects to other standards:** The **Evidence** standard highlights the importance of consulting research studies as a critical source of evidence.

The **Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction** standard emphasizes building capacity in using high-quality curriculum and instructional materials, which links to educators' content and instructional expertise.

The **Leadership** standard details how coherence contributes to an aligned system of support for all learners.