



# A NEW VISION FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

A TOOLKIT TO HELP STATES USE ESSA TO ADVANCE LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS



JANUARY 2017

## ABOUT LEARNING FORWARD

Learning Forward is a nonprofit, international membership association of learning educators committed to one vision in K–12 education: Excellent teaching and learning every day.

To realize that vision Learning Forward pursues its mission to build the capacity of leaders to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning. Learning Forward supports its members and the field through services, learning opportunities, networks, and publications focused exclusively on what it takes to meaningfully build the capacity of K-12 educators to meet the needs of all students.

Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning, adopted in more than 35 states, define the essential elements of professional learning that leads to changed educator practices and improved outcomes for students. Information about membership, services, and products is available from [www.learningforward.org](http://www.learningforward.org).

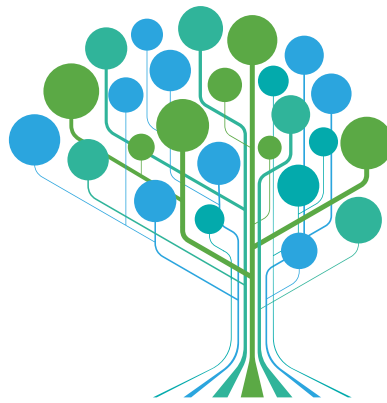
## ABOUT EDUCATIONCOUNSEL

EducationCounsel is a mission-based law, policy, strategy, and advocacy organization committed to strengthening education systems, expanding access to educational opportunities, and promoting equity and improved outcomes for all children from early childhood through post-secondary education. The firm collaborates with education leaders from across the country, including state and local leaders, higher education officials, associations, foundations, and pioneering private and public entities, to help bring together the threads of policy, program design, and implementation. More information and publications are available at [www.educationcounsel.com](http://www.educationcounsel.com).

# This toolkit is for state leaders who recognize that achieving equity and excellence will require a new mindset and approach to professional learning.

This toolkit helps leaders leverage professional learning as an essential tool in overcoming systemic inequities and guaranteeing excellence for all. We know that the single most important way to achieve equity and excellence is by ensuring a knowledgeable and skillful educator workforce. And ensuring the availability of excellent educators for all students requires more than a better workshop, it requires a culture of learning and a system of support for every school and school district. This means that our goal isn't just to improve professional development experiences, but to endeavor to **make each school a learning system** for students and teachers.

At the center of these types of learning and improvement systems are teams of teachers who assume collective responsibility for their students' and their colleagues' success. Their goal is the success of every student



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served by the team. They have consistent and regular time within the workday to engage in a continuous cycle of reflection, learning and improvement, and individualized support relevant to their needs. In learning and improvement systems, principals learn and solve problems together and ensure that learning is shared

from team to team. Central office staff model continuous learning and improvement while they facilitate exchange of expertise from school to school. These concurrent cycles of learning and problem solving are the core of a learning system and a vehicle for achieving every improvement goal.

Although these learning communities are the most important part of a learning system, it takes much more to establish, build, and sustain a learning and improvement system that ensures success for all students and their teachers.

States and districts have a responsibility to establish the conditions that foster these types of learning systems, and ESSA provides an unprecedented window of opportunity to advance these conditions. This toolkit provides guidance to states on how to leverage ESSA to do just that.

# How does this toolkit help states advance learning systems through ESSA?

This toolkit supports states in advancing professional learning and improvement systems by providing:

## 1. SUMMARY BRIEF

This briefing paper answers the question, “**Why** does professional learning matter to equity and excellence, and why must states lead in this moment of opportunity?” Suited to state leaders and ESSA decision makers, this summary aims to provide a concise case for why professional learning must be a critical part of states’ ESSA plans and strategy for achieving equity and excellence.

## 2. STRATEGY GUIDE

The strategy guide answers the questions, “**What** opportunities exist in ESSA for professional learning, and **how** can states advance learning systems through state and local ESSA plans?” The strategy guide is written for those who will develop and implement the talent management or human capital portions of the state’s ESSA plan. The strategy guide aligns the opportunities in ESSA to the conditions that foster professional learning and improvement systems: a shared vision for learning systems, leadership for learning, alignment of resources to the vision, measures to learn and improve, and effective change management strategies. States can select the strategies that strengthen these conditions and address existing gaps in their state. This guide is designed specifically to help states that use ESSA to advance this vision. The strategy guide contains a number of features to help states put these ideas into practice.

### LOOK FOR THESE ICONS THROUGHOUT THE GUIDE TO SPOT THESE FEATURES:



#### CHECKLISTS

Each section of the strategy guide contains clear action steps states can take in their own ESSA planning process, as well as steps to support LEAs in advancing professional learning systems through ESSA.



#### TOOLS

Throughout the toolkit, find links to tools that can support states and districts in taking action. The tools help states and districts:

- Develop and **advance a shared vision for professional learning systems** at the school level, and the unique roles of the state and district in fostering these learning systems
- **Analyze current programs and policies** to 1) determine alignment to the state’s vision; 2) learn how discrete initiatives strengthen or inhibit the conditions that foster professional learning systems; and 3) generate a plan of action for addressing gaps and leveraging opportunities
- **Support local planning** by including a sample question for states’ local planning templates as well as a rubric to provide feedback to districts on how they can improve their plans.



#### SPOTLIGHTS ON PRACTICE

The toolkit also contains a number of illustrative vignettes from leading states and districts that are taking the steps described in this guide.

# SUMMARY BRIEF

## Professional learning and improvement systems are essential to equity and excellence

Advancing the twin goals of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) — equity and excellence — will require as much attention to teaching and leadership as to accountability, standards, and assessment. Research shows that no in-school factors matter more than teaching and leadership, and educators, like students, need continual opportunities to gain new knowledge and skills to enable all students to reach higher career and college-ready standards. We know that:

- Teaching and education leadership are complex professions. Our educators are doing the best they can with the skills they have every day. We know that this level of effort is not getting students the results they need. The Measures of Effective Teaching (MET) study found that 90% of the 1,332 participating teachers scored between a level 2 and a level 3 on Danielson’s four-point *Framework for Teaching*.
- Research shows that when it is well designed and well implemented, professional learning has the power to strengthen practice and improve student learning. Studies of effective professional learning in the What Works Clearinghouse meet the highest evidence standards. These include studies published in venerated journals like *Science*.
- Higher-performing countries, as defined by international benchmarks such as PISA and OECD data collection and reporting, regularly point to their professional learning policy as essential to their growth and success.
- These studies make clear which characteristics matter in high-impact PD; these are the same that can be found in ESSA’s definition of PD. These studies show the importance of building learning systems in schools that support data-driven, job-embedded, sustained, classroom-focused, well-led professional learning.

These are also the qualities teachers cite as most important in multiple surveys (e.g. see Boston Consulting Group’s *Teachers Know Best*). In fact, this approach continues to gain momentum. Learning Forward’s [Standards for Professional Learning](#) have been adopted in more than 35 states and provide a foundation for building systems of professional learning. This approach — focused on moving away from traditional stand-alone PD to systems of learning and improvement for all — is also reflected in the [Redesign PD Partnership Principles](#), endorsed by more than 30 national experts representing professional, technical assistance, governmental, and research organizations, as well as states and school systems.

**There is consensus that we need to expect more from the investment in professional learning, and there is a growing body of evidence about what to work *toward* to get results.** Research and experience continue to elevate a needed shift toward systems of professional learning that are grounded in evidence, well supported, and designed to achieve high standards for both students and educators. Such learning systems create schools where collaborative inquiry, continuous improvement, and shared responsibility for all students guide the work of every professional. In these learning and improvement systems, states and districts establish the conditions—a shared vision, qualified leadership, aligned resources, measures to learn and improve from, and effective change management—that promote continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Authentic professional learning and improvement systems provide an underutilized opportunity to impact the quality of teaching and learning at scale, and new emerging exemplars provide direction for states and districts seeking to implement transformative learning systems.

### **New Opportunities in ESSA to Advance Systems of Professional Learning and Improvement**

ESSA maintains a focus on teaching and learning with professional development as a critical means to improving teaching and learning. ESSA's approach isn't "business as usual." In fact, ESSA's Title I, Title II, and Title IV provide states with new leverage to improve professional learning at the state and local levels. In the consolidated plans that states will submit in 2017, states will address how they are using federal funds — including, but beyond Title II — to establish systems of learning and improvement that transform educator practice and improve student learning. Local reporting requirements, as stipulated in the law, also require districts to demonstrate how their chosen strategies "improved teacher, principal, or other school leader effectiveness" (Every Student Succeeds Act, Title II § 2104(a)(1)). For state leaders who embrace the opportunity to strengthen talent management systems rather than simply complete a compliance requirement, the state plans have the potential to let them and stakeholders reflect on current practice, hone their strategy, and ensure that federal funds are aligned to their vision for transforming teaching and learning. Importantly, in these plans state leaders may fully articulate a vision for learning systems down to the school level, including the state's role and strategies for supporting these systems.

### **Federal Regulations for Consolidated State Plans are Relevant for Professional Learning**

USED's final ESSA regulations require each state plan to describe how Title II and other funds will be used to support excellent educators, advance educator equity, and improve teacher, principal and other school leader effectiveness. Specifically, states must describe their system of professional growth and improvement — including induction, development, compensation and advancement for teachers and school leaders — to the extent that funds are used for any of these purposes. The final regulations also emphasize that state activities focused on development must align with ESSA's new definition of professional development.

<b>OPPORTUNITIES TO ADVANCE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS IN ESSA</b>		
	<b>WHAT ESSA SAYS</b>	<b>HOW THIS CAN SUPPORT PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS</b>
<b>STRENGTHENED REQUIREMENTS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES</b>	Professional development activities must be “sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused.”	This revised definition can serve as a foundation for the state’s vision for professional learning, as well as a powerful new opportunity for states and districts to check their current professional learning and design professional learning that better meets the needs of educators.
<b>EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS</b>	ESSA requires that professional learning at the local level (and many uses at the state level, including mentoring and induction) align with ESSA’s definition of “evidence based, to the extent the State...determines that such evidence is reasonably available.”	This requirement will provide states and districts with the opportunity to analyze current and future investments for their evidence base, and importantly to ensure that their work is informed by data and improved by the ongoing collection and use of data to learn and improve.
<b>ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR STATES</b>	Under NCLB, half of the state’s Title II set aside was reserved for State Agencies of Higher Education for specific purposes. Now, states may use their set-aside on any of the 21 state allowable uses in Title II.	ESSA provides more flexibility in using the state’s Title II set-aside to align the state’s resources with activities that advance its vision for professional learning.
<b>OPTIONAL LEADERSHIP SET-ASIDE</b>	“...in addition to funds [for state allowable uses], a State educational agency may reserve not more than 3 percent of the amount reserved for subgrants to local educational agencies...for one or more of the activities for principals or other school leaders that are described in paragraph (4) [state allowable uses].”	Leaders have an additional resource at their disposal to develop instructional leadership. To support this work, ESSA establishes a new optional 3% state set-aside that states may use to prepare and develop principals and other school leaders. Based on guidance from the U.S. Department of Education, funds may be used to directly build the capacity of school leaders or provide job-embedded coaching to school leaders by principal supervisors.
<b>SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT</b>	Title I requires states to set aside 7% of Title I for school improvement activities for the bottom 5% of schools in the state and for consistently underperforming schools (roughly \$1 billion across all 50 states).	Dramatically improving the lowest performing schools cannot happen without effective development and leadership. Title I provides funds to support professional learning and improvement systems that transform teaching and student learning.
<b>STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT</b>	“In developing the State application...a State shall— ‘meaningfully consult with teachers, principals, other school leaders, paraprofessionals (including organizations representing such individuals), specialized instructional support personnel, charter school leaders...parents, community partners, and other organizations or partners.’ ”	ESSA’s robust stakeholder engagement requirements provide an opportunity for states and districts to co-develop a shared vision for teaching and learning and the kinds of professional learning and improvement systems that will accelerate progress toward that vision. These conversations are an important opportunity to build a consensus around the outcomes professional learning should be driving toward and the key attributes of professional learning.

## State leadership is key

In their state plans, state leaders will be required to describe their systems of professional growth if any funds are used for induction, professional development, educator advancement, or compensation. ESSA provides a window of opportunity to revisit and rethink the state's approach — beyond its federal funds — to advance practice across the state. Transforming professional learning so that it changes practice and improves student learning at scale will require a state vision and its ongoing commitment to realize that vision (see Tool 1: Vision-Setting Tools, p. 41.).

Through ESSA, states have the opportunity to model a new mindset and strategic planning process to their districts and build new capacity for this work. Unfortunately, few educators and decision makers have experienced the kind of high-quality professional learning that transforms practice themselves, or understand the comprehensive set of conditions that must be in place to create systems and cultures that support continuous learning and improvement. States can leverage ESSA to lead by example, and provide the support districts need to see the way forward for a new kind of learning and improvement system. Visionary state leaders can use ESSA to create the necessary conditions for systems of continuous learning and improvement for all school districts. They can provide guidance to districts on how they establish a vision, assess needs in achieving it, develop a coherent plan for building capacity and leadership, and align funds — whether federal, state, or local — to meet needs and advance their vision. ESSA requires states to articulate how local education agencies will apply for federal funds in the months ahead.

ESSA provides a number of opportunities for fundamentally transforming the ways teachers and leaders are supported — providing the potential to establish continuous learning systems that strengthen educator satisfaction, change practice, and most importantly, improve student learning. But states will need a holistic strategy — building local capacity, clarifying best practices, and removing barriers — to leverage this opportunity at scale. This toolkit is designed to support states in leading these essential shifts.



# STRATEGY GUIDE

## How states can foster professional learning and improvement systems

There is consensus that we need to expect more from the investment in professional learning, and there is a growing body of evidence and experience about what to work toward to get results. It begins with states, districts, and schools cultivating a learning and improvement culture, uncompromising in the focus on leadership, effective teaching, and student outcomes. In a learning culture, mindsets, structures, and practice align to advance individual and institutional performance. In a learning culture every educator is a member of a learning team committed to the success of its students, its schools, its district, or even its state. **In this guide, we define five evidence-based conditions essential to developing and nurturing a learning system in every school. Based on these five conditions for learning systems, we offer a variety of strategies for strengthening these conditions so that states and districts can develop a customized strategy that fits their unique context.** States and districts should use the following five conditions as foundations for the architecture of school-based professional learning and improvement systems:

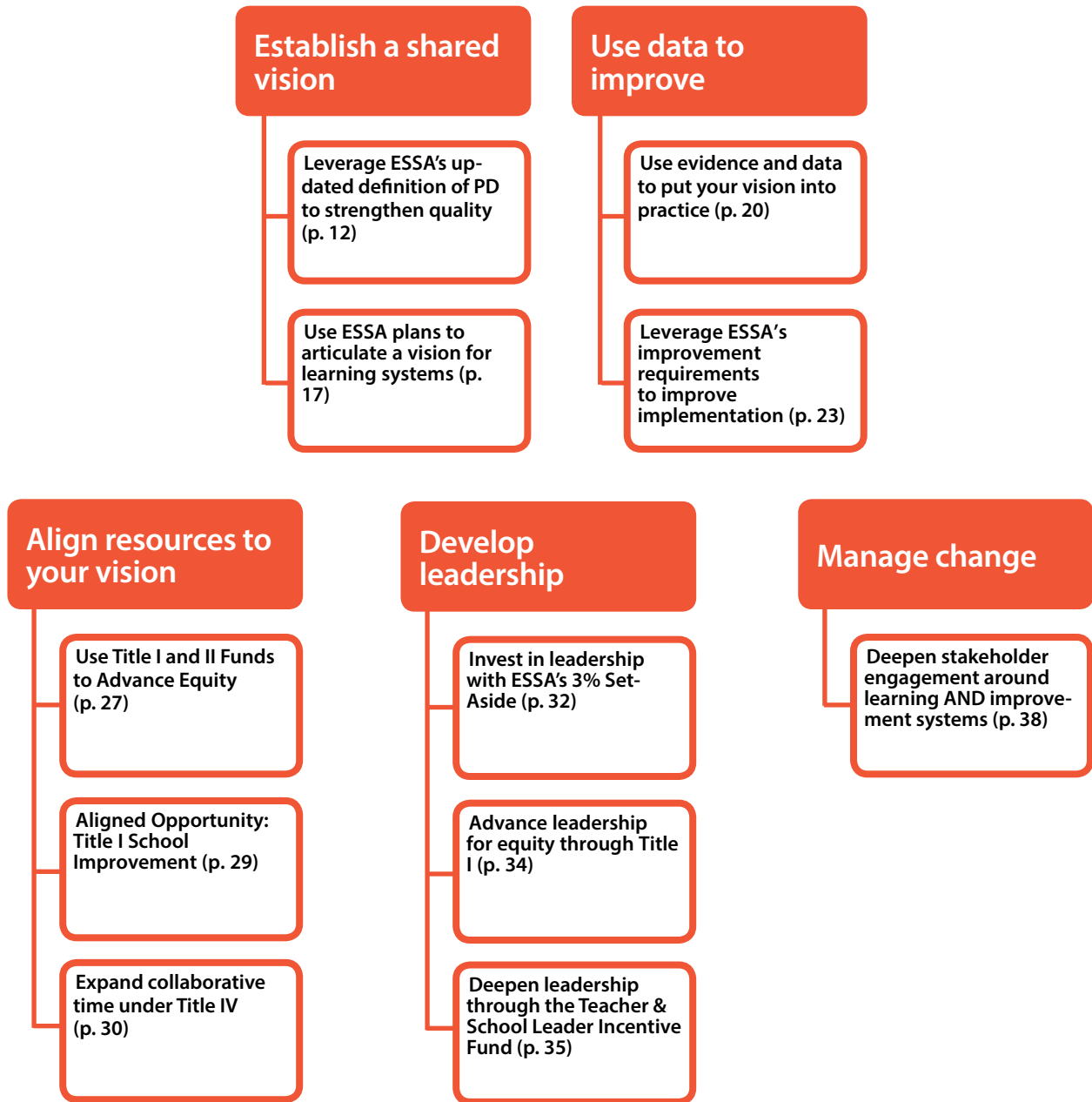
- 1. Establish a shared vision** across the state with district, school and community stakeholders that defines effective professional learning and the processes and structures that will support continuous collective and individual improvement. For states committed to high levels of learning and performance for all students, achieving this goal will require improving teaching. This will require a new kind of vision for high-quality professional learning systems, and for the unique and essential roles of schools, districts and states in working toward that vision. This vision is grounded in written criteria (which may involve standards) for learning and support that leads to changed practice and improved student results, and learning designs that are evidence-based, differentiated, sustained, job-embedded, and classroom-focused. School systems that prioritize continuous learning as part of the daily work of schools see improved results for students (Jensen, Sonneman, Roberts-Hull, & Hunter, 2016).
- 2. Use data to set goals and drive improvement.** Measure to learn and improve. This will mean establishing integrated systems of evaluation at multiple levels that assess whether key programs or strategies promote shifts in teaching that ultimately result in improved student achievement. Critical to the continuous improvement cycle is data to clarify student and teacher progress relative to required standards. Individual, team, and school wide goal setting and evaluation occur most effectively when educators have information that enables them to identify learning gaps for both their students and themselves. In a cycle of improvement, formative measures are regularly revisited to gauge progress and adjust implementation to strengthen results. Teacher evaluation is best integrated into the continuous improvement process, providing educators with immediate feedback as well as formative data that provide information on the quality and impact of their instruction on their goals and those for their students (Jensen et al., 2016).

- 3. Align resources**, which include not only dollars, but also time, personnel, and technology, so the millions of professional development dollars spent in every state support the shared vision and achieve their intended impact. The state has a unique role to ensure that resources are allocated in a manner that evidence shows is most likely to lead to continuous improvement in college and career ready teaching and learning. Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires [prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources](#) (including time, dollars, and personnel) for educator learning. In learning systems, leaders [study their spending on professional growth](#), use data to reflect on the impact of these assessments, and then align resources (to the extent allowed by policy and regulations) to their vision and priorities (Education Resource Strategies). Cutting-edge strategies to support systems can be found in OECD’s 2011 report, [Strong performers and successful reformers in education: Lessons from PISA for the United States](#). Evidence consistently shows how when these are allocated according to the research better outcomes are delivered.
- 4. Build leadership capacity** at every level to lead the creation and sustained commitment to continuous learning and improvement. Establishing learning systems in schools and districts requires a focus on leadership. Principal leadership is second only to teaching in affecting school performance and requires attention to recruitment, preparation, evaluation, and ongoing support ([Manna, 2015](#)). In top-performing systems, leaders receive sustained, intensive support, experiencing the strategies and practices that they will then facilitate themselves ([Jensen et al., 2016](#); [The Wallace Foundation](#)). District, school, and teacher leaders must participate in their own professional learning; they must have the knowledge and skills to facilitate learning communities and create a culture of professional learning ([Leithwood, 2013](#); [Spillane & Diamond, 2004](#)). Performance standards detail the knowledge and skills expected of principal and teacher leaders, while career pathways provide the vision and incentives for more teachers to aspire and prepare for such opportunities. Teacher leaders who are prepared and assume responsibility for facilitating learning and are offered opportunities to develop knowledge and skills to assume additional responsibilities. Even though these systems recruit top-performing teachers into leadership roles, they do not expect them to walk into the role ready to transform teacher practice. They receive sustained, intensive support, experiencing the strategies and practices that they will then facilitate themselves ([Jensen et al., 2016](#); [The Wallace Foundation](#)).
- 5. Sustain implementation through effective change management.** Redesigning professional learning systems will mean a significant shift. Those responsible for professional learning must apply findings from change research and implementation science to support and sustain change in the long-term. A clear change management strategy will recognize the importance of stakeholder engagement, clear communication, well-defined roles and responsibilities, clear action plans, feedback loops, and continuous improvement strategies. High-quality systems regularly and systematically seek feedback to improve performance over time. School, district, and state leaders have additional responsibilities for ensuring alignment and coherence and reducing fragmentation of efforts.

**This guide provides concrete opportunities in ESSA aligned to each of the five conditions to help states lead schools and districts in building professional learning and improvement systems.**

# Opportunity finder

This guide outlines a number of strategies states might pursue to establish or strengthen the conditions that foster learning systems at the local level. Use the graphic below to find the strategies relevant to your unique context.



ESSA'S APPROACH TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ISN'T BUSINESS AS USUAL		
	UNDER NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND ...	UNDER EVERY CHILD SUCCEEDS ACT ...
ATTRIBUTES OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT	"high quality, sustained, intensive, and classroom-focused in order to have a positive and lasting impact on classroom instruction and the teacher's performance in the classroom; and... are not 1-day or short-term workshops or conferences"	"...are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), <b>intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven,</b> and classroom-focused..."
STATE SET-ASIDE UNDER TITLE II	Of the 5% of funds set aside for states, 2.5% were reserved for State Agencies of Higher Education for specific purposes.	All 5% may be used by the state on allowable uses, providing <b>new flexibility</b> to achieve Title II's goals of equity and excellent educators.
EVIDENCE REQUIREMENTS	Beyond the definition, PD was "research based," but with no meaningful, rigorous means to implement the term.	Under ESSA, local professional development and many forms of state-led PD (such as induction and mentoring) must be <b>evidence based</b> . With a clear definition and new guidance, this requirement has the potential to push states and districts to re-evaluate current investments and thoughtfully study future investments for impact.
NEW AND STRENGTHENED PROCESS REQUIREMENTS	Consultation and continuous improvement requirements were minimal.	Under ESSA, states are required to engage in a <b>meaningful consultation</b> process with a wide variety of stakeholders explicitly mentioned in the law.  ESSA plans now also require states to describe their plan to "Continuously improve SEA and LEA plans and implementation."

## 1

CONDITIONS FOR CULTIVATING LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS

**ESTABLISH A SHARED VISION**

Shifting to a learning culture starts with a shared vision for high-quality teaching and leading, and for the professional learning systems that will help all educators develop the necessary skills to achieve that vision.

**OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO ADVANCE A SHARED VISION:****Revised Definition of Professional Development**

The federal definition of professional development has been revised to ensure that professional development activities are “**sustained** (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), **intensive**, **collaborative**, **job-embedded**, **data-driven**, and **classroom-focused**.” All federal funds used for professional development must align with this definition.

The definition emphasizes that PD is “an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators ... with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging State academic standards.”

This updated definition provides states and districts with an opportunity to articulate or re-envision their own definition of professional learning — in alignment with the new federal definition — and use it to review their current professional learning investments and ask: Do all professional learning programs meet these evidence-based characteristics?

This definition can serve as a starting point for developing a shared vision of school-based systems of professional learning as well as the state- and local-level ecosystem that will foster those learning systems in schools. This isn't a one-sentence mission statement or bumper-sticker slogan, but rather a rich narrative that addresses the assumptions, priorities, strategies, and responsibilities for achieving intended outcomes for students. Through this vision for professional learning and improvement systems, states and their stakeholders build consensus on key outcomes and a shared understanding of how organizations must adapt to achieve those outcomes.

**TOOL: DEFINING A VISION**

This toolkit includes a set of vision-setting protocols (pp. 41-47) to assist states and districts in establishing their own vision for professional learning and the state, district, and school-based ecosystem that supports learning systems. Specifically, these protocols provide a process for:

- 1) articulating a clear, compelling, definition for what adult learning looks like at the school level and
- 2) identifying how school, district, and state leadership and policies can each contribute to achieving it.

**STATE CHECKLIST: ADVANCE A SHARED VISION THROUGH THE REVISED PD DEFINITION**

- Engage key stakeholders to establish or strengthen a shared vision of the learning systems, down to the school level, that leverage and meet the new definition of PD.
- Determine how student standards, teaching standards, and professional learning standards will inform the vision.
- Define the unique roles at the state, district, and school level that foster professional learning systems in alignment with your definition and vision.
- Disseminate your state's vision for professional learning and show how it is aligned with the definition.
- Conduct a policy review and analyze current investments to determine alignment with the definition of PD and your state vision (see Tool 2: Program and Policy Review, p. 48)
- Adopt or adapt [professional learning standards](#) and use them to drive all decisions regarding professional development.

**HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT LEAs**

- Encourage LEAs to develop their own visions for professional learning in alignment with student, teaching, and professional learning standards as well as the new definition of PD.
- Provide guidance to LEAs on how Title II's allowable uses can support professional learning that align with PL Standards and advance the new vision for professional learning systems.
- Provide LEAs with examples (and non-examples) of investments aligned with the new definition of professional definition.
- If your state has adopted the Learning Forward [Standards for Professional Learning](#), show LEAs how to use the standards and new definition of PD to guide planning and assessment.



### SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE: KENTUCKY'S VISION FOR IMPROVING PRACTICE

Kentucky adopted Standards for Professional Learning and a definition (p. 44) to describe the professional learning it wanted for all its educators and established a coherent vision for its role in supporting more rigorous learning for all students and teachers. They identified four priorities at the state level: fostering leadership, prioritizing resources, building partnerships, and examining impact. To ensure sufficient resources, the SEA and state board members worked closely with the legislature to maintain the budget for professional development despite declining revenues and budget reductions. The SEA conducted an audit of PD to guide their internal budget planning and to support districts in how to leverage available funds for their biggest priorities. The state led a taskforce of teachers and leaders focused on ensuring sufficient time for learning, posting sample schedules that allowed for collaboration and approved waivers that provided districts with additional flexibility around time. The state removed requirements for multiple plans (e.g. Title I, system improvement plans, etc.) and asked for one plan focused on implementing higher standards and providing the relevant professional development to achieve higher standards. The state required that all RFPs for professional development aligned to the new definition and standards for professional learning, and ensured each included an evaluation of impact. The state also began an annual evaluation of professional learning to assess the quality and impact of PD for all educators in the state, adjusting its own plans based on the results.



### RESOURCE: FEDERAL DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

(FROM SEC. 8002 GENERAL PROVISIONS — DEFINITIONS)

**“PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT.**—The term ‘professional development’ means activities that —  
**“(A) are an integral part of school and local educational agency strategies for providing educators (including teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, paraprofessionals, and, as applicable, early childhood educators) with the knowledge and skills necessary to enable students to succeed in a well-rounded education and to meet the challenging State academic standards; and**  
**“(B) are sustained (not stand-alone, 1-day, or short term workshops), intensive, collaborative, job-embedded, data-driven, and classroom-focused,** and may include activities that—

- “(i) improve and increase teachers’—
  - “(I) knowledge of the academic subjects the teachers teach;
  - “(II) understanding of how students learn; and
  - “(III) ability to analyze student work and achievement from multiple sources, including how to adjust instructional strategies, assessments, and materials based on such analysis;
- “(ii) are an integral part of broad school-wide and district-wide educational improvement plans;
- “(iii) allow personalized plans for each educator to address the educator’s specific needs identified in observation or other feedback;
- “(iv) improve classroom management skills;

*Continued on the next page*



**RESOURCE: FEDERAL DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**  
(FROM SEC. 8002 GENERAL PROVISIONS — DEFINITIONS)

*Continued from the preceding page*

- “(v) support the recruitment, hiring, and training of effective teachers, including teachers who became certified through State and local alternative routes to certification;
- “(vi) advance teacher understanding of—
  - “(I) effective instructional strategies that are evidence-based; and
  - “(II) strategies for improving student academic achievement or substantially increasing the knowledge and teaching skills of teachers;
- “(vii) are aligned with, and directly related to, academic goals of the school or local educational agency;
- “(viii) are developed with extensive participation of teachers, principals, other school leaders, parents, representatives of Indian tribes (as applicable), and administrators of schools to be served under this Act;
- “(ix) are designed to give teachers of English learners, and other teachers and instructional staff, the knowledge and skills to provide instruction and appropriate language and academic support services to those children, including the appropriate use of curricula and assessments;
- “(x) to the extent appropriate, provide training for teachers, principals, and other school leaders in the use of technology (including education about the harms of copyright piracy), so that technology and technology applications are effectively used in the classroom to improve teaching and learning in the curricula and academic subjects in which the teachers teach;
- “(xi) as a whole, are regularly evaluated for their impact on increased teacher effectiveness and improved student academic achievement, with the findings of the evaluations used to improve the quality of professional development;
- “(xii) are designed to give teachers of children with disabilities or children with developmental delays, and other teachers and instructional staff, the knowledge and skills to provide instruction and academic support services, to those children, including positive behavioral interventions and supports, multi-tier system of supports, and use of accommodations;
- “(xiii) include instruction in the use of data and assessments to inform and instruct classroom practice;
- “(xiv) include instruction in ways that teachers, principals, other school leaders, specialized instructional support personnel, and school administrators may work more effectively with parents and families;
- “(xv) involve the forming of partnerships with institutions of higher education, including, as applicable, Tribal Colleges and Universities as defined in section 316(b) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (20 U.S.C. 1059c(b)), to establish school-based teacher, principal, and other prospective teachers, novice teachers, principals, and other school leaders with an opportunity to work under the guidance of experienced teachers, principals, other school leaders, and faculty of such institutions;
- “(xvi) create programs to enable paraprofessionals (assisting teachers employed by a local educational agency receiving assistance under part A of title I) to obtain the education necessary for those paraprofessionals to become certified and licensed teachers;
- “(xvii) provide follow-up training to teachers who have participated in activities described in this paragraph that are designed to ensure that the knowledge and skills learned by the teachers are implemented in the classroom; and
- “(xviii) where practicable, provide jointly for school staff and other early childhood education program providers, to address the transition to elementary school, including issues related to school readiness.”



## Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning

Standards for Professional Learning outline the characteristics of professional learning that leads to effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results:

### 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.

### 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.

### RESOURCES

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

### 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.

### 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.

### 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.

### OUTCOMES

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



### SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE: BUILDING A SHARED VISION IN FLORIDA

The Florida Department of Education believes that the path to improved outcomes for all students is through improved teaching, and that the path to improved teaching is through improved teacher learning. They agree with [Katz and Dack](#) that "Learning is a permanent change in thinking or behavior," and are working to ensure all schools are places where adults are learning at work by design. To develop a common vision of high-quality professional learning, they have organized "learning journeys" for district and school professional learning leaders from across the state. Working with its partner Collective Invention, the SEA identified a number of organizations in other sectors in which adults consistently learn and improve. These organizations included non-profits, the University of Central Florida Center for Simulation and Training, Air Force University, Gap Inc., and Disney University. Through visits to these organizations with successful learning cultures, the committee is coming to a common consensus on the attributes of effective learning systems. Learning Journeys have provided participants with the opportunity to get out of the environments to which they are accustomed and experience first-hand new approaches to adult learning. During the 2016-2017 school year, members are prototyping learning experiences aligned to the vision and will plan to share lessons learned and scale successes.

**OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO ADVANCE A SHARED VISION:**

## State and Local Plans

**E**SSA will ultimately require all states and districts to generate new plans and reports for how they will use Title II funds (and align state and local funds) to advance teacher and leader quality. Title I plans will also play an important role in advancing educator quality.

Whether a state chooses to submit a consolidated plan or a Title II plan, each provides state leaders with the opportunity to articulate their vision for a professional growth and improvement system and clarify the role of the state and districts in supporting learning systems. Plans should articulate a vision for professional learning that is focused on ensuring students meet academic standards by building teacher capacity through ongoing cycles of continuous learning and problem solving.

In the months ahead, states will design the application that local districts will complete to access federal funds. ESSA stipulates that LEAs “shall submit an application to the State educational agency at such time, in such manner, and containing such information as the State educational agency may reasonably require.” This language means that states will be able to determine both the content and the timeline on which LEAs will apply for federal Title II funds. This provides a similar opportunity to ask districts to consider how they will ensure they have the workforce needed to achieve their goals for students. States can ask LEAs to describe their own learning and improvement system and how they have established the conditions needed to support educators and ensure students success.

States should include questions in local plans that focus LEAs on articulating their vision for professional learning systems, ensuring standards of quality, using data for decision making and assessing impact, developing leadership, aligning resources, and planning for effective implementation.

States may also establish priorities for Title II to which LEAs must align their own plans; this can be an important mechanism for ensuring that data-informed priorities are a key part of local plans.

**TOOL: SAMPLE LOCAL ESSA PLAN QUESTION**

This toolkit includes a sample local planning question (pp. 52-56) states may adapt for their local ESSA planning template. This question helps to ensure LEAs have a strong vision for learning and improvement systems, in alignment with ESSA’s new evidence requirements and updated definition of professional development, and a plan for establishing or strengthening the conditions needed to ensure these systems get results. The Tool Overview also includes a rubric that state leaders can use to evaluate responses to the question and provide feedback.



### STATE CHECKLIST: ADVANCE A STATE VISION THROUGH STATE PLANS

- Develop a strategy for working toward your vision by reviewing state data and determining SEA priorities, identifying which state priorities require attention by LEAs, and articulating this strategy in your plan.
- Establish a stakeholder group to contribute to vision for professional learning for educators and the system to support attaining it.
- Educate stakeholders on effective professional learning (using the new federal definition and state standards for professional learning).



### HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT LEAs

- Develop a consolidated LEA plan template that promotes careful attention to the following:
  - Vision for continuous professional learning and improvement tied to student, teaching, and professional learning standards and the updated definition of PD
  - Ongoing data analysis and measures of impact of professional learning
  - Alignment of investments to new evidence requirements
  - Leadership development priorities and strategies
  - Resource alignment to state priorities and vision
  - Sustaining implementation and change management
- In local applications for Title II dollars, require LEAs to describe how their strategy and investments will change given the new definition of professional development.
- Consider options for assisting LEAs with their planning process, such as a convening or virtual coaching sessions.
- Consider processes (e.g. peer review, consultative protocols) for giving districts feedback on their plans before and after they are submitted. If capacity and resources are limited, consider randomly selecting districts or prioritizing districts with the most significant equity gaps.



## SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE: A DISTRICT'S VISION FOR IMPROVING PRACTICE

Fort Wayne Community Schools, intent on ensuring all students met or exceeded state and national standards annually, developed a focus around creating professional learning communities that include cabinet members, principal leaders, instructional coaches, and quality improvement teams made up of teachers. All of their learning is aligned to the three district goals with an emphasis on student achievement. The superintendent modeled a commitment to learning by making public her professional learning goals, and established a district learning community with school leaders focused on defining effective leadership and professional learning. In these learning communities, principals co-observe and discuss problems of practice together, and teachers engaged in regular peer collaboration to plan and analyze data together.

The district's definition of professional learning serves as a vision for the support all educators will experience:

In Fort Wayne Community Schools, professional learning is a comprehensive, sustained, and strategic approach to increase educator effectiveness and results for all students. Professional learning fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and:

1. Is aligned with a rigorous academic curriculum and district improvement goals;
2. Occurs in professional learning communities at all levels throughout the district;
3. Is ongoing and facilitated by skilled staff using a variety of researched-based learning designs;
4. Engages established learning communities in a cycle of continuous improvement; and
5. Is monitored and evaluated as to its effectiveness to inform ongoing improvement and results.

## 2

CONDITIONS FOR CULTIVATING LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS

**USE DATA TO SET GOALS  
AND DRIVE IMPROVEMENT**

To ensure ongoing professional learning is relevant, data — whether quantitative student learning results or qualitative feedback from teachers — must inform decision making and the goals of professional learning experiences. Ensuring professional learning has its intended impact begins with identifying the data that will demonstrate whether an initiative or intervention results in improvement. Data provide critical information about how professional learning must adjust to support teacher practice and improve student learning. These data may also satisfy ESSA's new evidence requirements.

**OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO USE DATA TO SET GOALS AND DRIVE IMPROVEMENT:****State and Local Plans**

In plans, states will likely be required to describe how they will use data to determine priorities, set goals, assess impact, and continually update and improve strategies supported by Title II. This requirement gives state leaders an opportunity to establish or reflect on measures of impact for each of their Title II investments. States may also make the same requirement of LEA plans, given that states can stipulate whatever information they reasonably need in the plans. ESSA also includes new requirements around the use of evidence-based approaches to professional learning. For PD at the local level and for many uses at the state level, professional development must be based on, at minimum, a strong theory of action with clear, ongoing measures to monitor results.



### STATE CHECKLIST: USE DATA TO SET GOALS AND DRIVE IMPROVEMENT IN STATE PLANS

- Determine what sources of relevant data are available to assess needs, set goals, select high leverage strategies, and assess impact of professional learning investments.
- Analyze current or ongoing investments to determine whether there is sufficient evidence for these approaches. Investigate the relevant evidence base of strategies and alternatives that may have a stronger evidence base.
- Establish a plan for collecting, assessing, and reporting the impact of professional learning investments.
- Use state set-aside dollars to support pilots of communities of practice that develop formative and summative measures to document the impact of professional development investments.
- Engage stakeholder groups in analysis of the data.



### HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT LEAs

- Model the process of identifying measures and tracking the impact of investments for LEAs.
- Develop local plan requirements that advance a data-driven cycle of improvement by asking district to identify formative measures and evidence they will collect to assess the impact of their investments. (And ask LEAs to return to these data in their reporting.)



### TOOL: LOCAL ESSA PLAN SAMPLE QUESTION

**Tool 3:** Local Plan Sample Question of this toolkit includes a sample question (p. 52) that states may adapt for use in their local plan template. The question asks districts to consider how they are moving toward the use of evidence in their professional development decision making, and how their professional development strategies are “data-driven,” in alignment with ESSA’s revised definition of professional development. The toolkit also contains a rubric that states can use to evaluate responses to the question and provide feedback.



### **SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE:** USING DATA TO EVALUATE IMPACT AND IMPROVE

In Tennessee, the SEA bases its leadership of professional learning on the priorities identified in its 2015 strategic plan. Interlocking teams meet regularly to analyze data and plan and monitor professional learning activities, and a professional development council of stakeholders advises the commissioner. The SEA regularly uses various types of data to inform its work, including program evaluations that analyze the impact of professional development initiatives on teacher knowledge and practice as well as student outcomes. Recent evaluations have included a 2014 study by the Tennessee Consortium on Research, Evaluation and Development of the Tennessee Higher Education Commission’s STEM Professional Development Program, an [internal study](#) of the SEA’s 2012 math summer trainings, and other evaluations the SEA has commissioned of its summer trainings since 2013. The SEA provides feedback on local professional learning efforts to leaders in schools and districts in need of improvement as part of the technical assistance provided to these leaders.

Excerpted from “[Professional Learning: Trends in State Efforts](#),” a report from the Southern Regional Education Board.

**OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO USE DATA TO SET GOALS AND DRIVE IMPROVEMENT:**

## Continuous Improvement Requirements

**U**nder ESSA, states must now submit annual reports to the Secretary and public that describe how the state is using its funds and how its strategies are improving educator effectiveness, in addition to the annual retention rates of effective and ineffective educators (if available). Districts are also required to report this information to the state, and publicly post their report. States may require other information in the report as well.

While reports are often viewed as a compliance and monitoring strategy, states can instead establish a process for LEAs that focuses on continuous learning and improvement. The questions states ask will signal the degree to which the process promotes reflective or compliance behaviors.

The report may be an important opportunity for districts to revisit their measures of impact, evaluate the success of their Title II investments, and recalibrate their strategy to better support teacher and leader effectiveness and increased student learning.



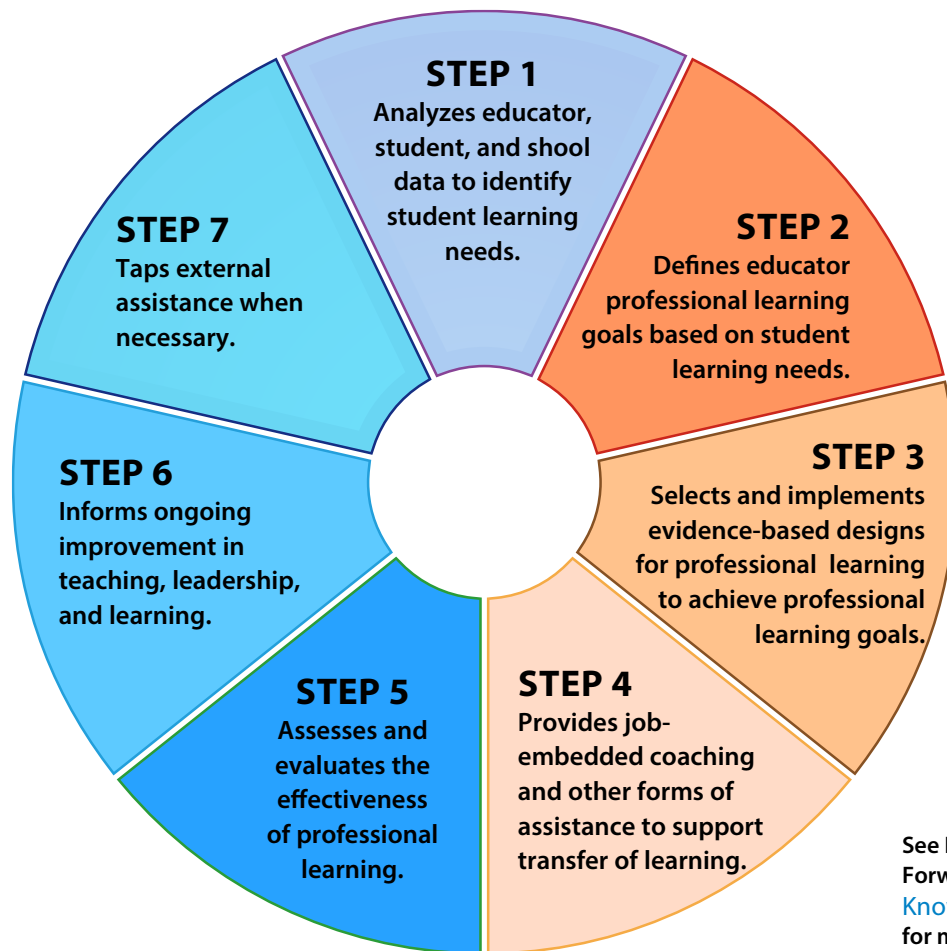
### HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT LEAs TO USE DATA FOR EVALUATION AND IMPROVEMENT

- Discuss with stakeholders how you might transform the reporting requirement into a meaningful reflective activity for the SEA and LEAs.
- Develop a report template and process that guides LEAs through a reflective process and encourages them to consider how they will adapt their strategy based on data and feedback.
- Establish partner LEAs to promote ongoing feedback and support.
- Identify and report data of leading indicators related to quality of professional learning, professional capital, and leadership support. (One model may be the [TALIS survey](#).)
- Select a timeline that will allow districts to meaningfully reflect on their strategy and its impact.
- Consider the SEA's capacity for audit or review so that at least some LEAs receive feedback.




**RESOURCE: CYCLE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT**

The cycle of continuous improvement is a [seven-stage protocol](#) (or five-stage at the learning team level) that lets members of district learning systems continually review, analyze, learn, design and implement, monitor, and adapt their practice to improve teaching and learning. The cycle of continuous improvement, completed within a culture of collective inquiry, helps district staff—all the way to school level—achieve district, school, and individual learning goals. Because it is continuous the cycle never ends. It is unlikely to be linear, either. District and school leaders may find from ongoing data analysis that an earlier stage of the cycle is appropriate. Two aspects of the cycle are critical: Participants must engage in collective inquiry throughout the cycle so that they can learn and change their practice to improve student learning; and educators must set their own learning goals based on student learning needs. Such data may be gathered from school walk-throughs and from observing teachers working in their classrooms and collaborating with their peers. This tool shows a seven-stage cycle of continuous improvement.



See Learning Forward's [Knowledge Brief](#) for more



### **SPOTLIGHT ON STATE PRACTICE: USING DATA TO EVALUATE IMPACT AND IMPROVE**

The Massachusetts Department of Education supports districts in using data to set goals and assess the impact of professional development through a [learning module](#). In the module, the state provides a four-step process to evaluate and improve professional learning. The state has also provided examples of district calendars to demonstrate the ways that planning and assessment are woven throughout the school year's professional learning activities.



### **SPOTLIGHT ON DISTRICT PRACTICE: USING DATA TO EVALUATE IMPACT AND IMPROVE**

Winnett County School District has made data-driven decision making a key part of the way they work. The district has identified which departments contribute to each of its goals, and establishes through its Operational Management Plans the formative measures that let the district know when it is on track and when it must adjust. A similar process exists in each school. The district also develops cross-functional teams, which represent both district teams and school staff, to address issues. These teams use student achievement data and other measures to determine whether their work has resulted in improvements in the district. See this [summary](#) for more information.

## 3

## CONDITIONS FOR CULTIVATING LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS

**ALIGN RESOURCES TO YOUR VISION**

Federal funds provide opportunities to turn a state vision into reality. States seeking to foster high-quality learning and improvement systems must consider funds across sources (e.g. federal, state, and private) to achieve their vision. States can take this opportunity to provide guidance, flexibility, and incentives to LEAs for consolidating and aligning spending to their vision. Too often, tracking the use of federal funds — or any funds — for professional development is an exercise in frustration. When it's unclear how funds were used and whether they resulted in improvements for students and teachers, it's likely that we're missing key opportunities to strengthen the use of funds to get better results. ESSA provides an opportunity for states to examine how funds are used, and ensure that moving forward, these funds are used strategically to improve learning.

**TOOL: PROGRAM AND POLICY REVIEW**

**Tool 2:** Program and Policy Review (p. 48) helps states and districts analyze and understand how existing efforts and policies align with your vision for professional learning. This analysis will help to identify potential opportunities and gaps you may want to address through your ESSA state plan using federal funds.

**SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE: ALIGNING RESOURCES**

The Tennessee Department of Education (TDOE) has developed training and a [comprehensive guide](#) to help districts braid and blend federal funds to meet their goals for student learning and educator support. TDOE has developed a five-step framework for aligning resources to the district's goals:

- **Step 1 – Assess Needs:** Assess LEAs needs, identify barriers to increase student achievement, and implement activities to address those needs.
- **Step 2 – Identify Components and Costs of Activities:** Review and break down each activity to identify the components of the activity and the costs associated with each component.
- **Step 3 – Identify Federal Grants:** Determine which federal grants can support the various component costs of each activity.
- **Step 4 – Determine if Costs Are Necessary and Reasonable:** Once a federal grant is identified as a potential funding source for a component cost, explain how the cost helps fulfill the federal program requirements and justify the amount spent.
- **Step 5 – Verify Consistency with Other Program Plans:** LEAs should review the plans submitted via ePlan [the state's electronic system for annual consolidated plans] to ensure alignment and to identify any areas where duplication may exist.

The TDOE guide on coordinating funds contains a detailed overview of the funds available to districts for a wide variety of goals, including improving literacy and numeracy, providing instructional coaches, redesigning school time, and upgrading curriculum. The guide also identifies potential barriers to coordinating funds and helps LEAs navigate these barriers.

**OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO ALIGN RESOURCES TO YOUR VISION:**

## Using Title I and Title II Funds to Develop Effective Teaching and Advance Equity

**T**itle II's goals and allowable uses now explicitly include efforts to “provide low-income and minority students greater access to effective teachers, principals, and other school leaders.” The funding formula for Title II also weights poverty more heavily, and this weight will increase each year through 2023.

ESSA permits states to set aside up to 5% of Title II funds for state level activities (only 1% of which may be administrative). This is a significant change from No Child Left Behind (NCLB), where half of state funds were reserved for state agencies of higher education. Now all of these funds may be used by the state. The allowable uses of funds for these state level activities are broad.

States may use this 5% of Title II funds to work on improving professional learning systems, advancing equity, and implementing their own state standards for effective professional learning.

Title I of ESSA requires states to include in their state plans “how low-income and minority children enrolled in schools assisted under this part are not served at disproportionate rates by ineffective, out-of-field, or inexperienced teachers.” States must also report on the distribution of these teachers on state report cards under Title I and proposed consolidated plan regulations.

Hiring or firing practices alone will not lead to equitable access to effective teaching. Professional learning that leads to growth and improvement in practice is needed, particularly in areas where inequitable distribution persists. The state's theory of action for professional learning may specifically call out the important role of this work to improving access to quality teaching for all students.

States may reconsider policies that act as barriers to teacher collaboration and collective responsibility. There are strong teachers in most schools, but often no incentive or expectation for them to help other teachers get better, or specific development opportunities to strengthen their leadership and coaching skills. This may be a powerful strategy for accelerating student access to great teaching every day.



### STATE CHECKLIST: ALIGNING TITLE I AND II RESOURCES TO YOUR VISION

- Analyze the current distribution of federal dollars and consider whether funds are aligned to the state's priorities around equity and excellence, rather than status quo initiatives.
- Analyze current spending on professional development and consider each program's return on investment. Determine whether these programs are still the best use of funds.
- Consider targeting leadership development investments in districts with the greatest need for the purpose of developing teaching and leadership (see Section #4 Develop Leadership).



### HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT LEAs TO ALIGN RESOURCES TO A VISION

- Signal the importance of professional learning to improving equitable distribution through guidance on local plans.
- Provide LEAs with examples (and non-examples) of investments aligned with the new definition of professional definition.
- Provide LEAs with examples of professional learning strategies that improve equity (e.g. developing communities of practice for less experienced teachers, facilitated by highly effective, trained peers). Be explicit about the resources that will be needed — in terms of funds, time, and staffing — to be successful in implementing these strategies.
- Educate districts with higher levels of poverty about the increased funding they will likely receive between 2017-2023 and provide guidance to help them to rethink professional learning to improve access to quality teaching.
- Support LEAs in analyzing their past use of funds, including the return on investment.
- Provide technical assistance or guidance (or both) to districts to help re-align their funds to their priorities.

**OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO ALIGN RESOURCES TO YOUR VISION:****Title I School Improvement Funds**

**T**itle I requires states to set aside 7% of Title I for school improvement activities for the bottom 5% of schools in the state and for consistently underperforming schools (roughly \$1 billion across all 50 states). These funds help support school improvement activities in those schools, as determined by the school, district, and state — depending on the severity of the underperformance.

School improvement funds present opportunities to advance professional learning within low-performing schools and their districts. Dramatically improving the lowest performing schools cannot happen without effective development and leadership. Title I provides funds to support professional learning and improvement systems that transform teaching and student learning.

The U.S. Department of Education is prohibited from regulating on specific school improvement activities, among other restrictions in this area, but states and districts must include evidence-based strategies.

Additionally, each school must conduct a needs analysis, and in some cases a resource equity analysis, which could be leveraged to identify and improve professional learning issues in these schools.

**STATE CHECKLIST: ALIGN SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT FUNDS TO YOUR VISION**

- Signal and monitor how professional learning will be improved in low-performing schools, as part of expectations around Title I or consolidated plans.
- Provide directions for a needs assessment that is data driven and focuses on what students and educators need to learn most.
- Provide guidance and technical assistance on developing a learning strategy that aligns with evidence-based professional learning (based on the new definitions of evidence-based and professional development).
- Emphasize monitoring and reflection processes as part of school improvement processes.
- Connect schools in networks or communities of practice to share best practices and problems of practice and build collective responsibility.
- Establish routines to recognize, elevate, and amplify the most successful work of LEAs and schools receiving School Improvement Funds.



### SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE: ALIGNING RESOURCES FOR IMPROVEMENT

In 2014, the Colorado Department of Education launched the [Turnaround Network](#) to support school leaders of schools in improvement. In collaboration with a partner from their district, schools work in small cohorts to address shared focus areas aligned with the state’s framework for improvement. Members receive intensive professional learning and peer support within their learning community. As part of this effort, leaders receive regular coaching in and support for talent management and development, one of the four conditions of success for turnaround. Last year, the state also launched its Turnaround Learning Academy to support teams of central office leaders in the five areas essential to school improvement: a) principal supervision; b) assessment systems and strategy; c) academic priorities and core curriculum; d) adult learning and professional development; and e) accountability pathways. District teams meet throughout the school year to learn about, discuss, and apply research-based strategies they can apply to support turnaround efforts. A core principle of the program is practice-based adult learning, modeling the type of professional learning districts might employ with school leaders and teachers.

#### OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO ALIGN RESOURCES TO YOUR VISION:

### Title IV/21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools

Recipients of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Centers funding under Title IV may use funds for Expanded Learning Time, which includes additional time for “instructional and support staff to collaborate, plan, and engage in professional development (including professional development on family and community engagement) within and across grades and subjects.”

Given this definition of Expanded Learning Time, funds from 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Centers could be used to provide time for professional learning within and beyond the school day, if a state or district chooses to implement expanded learning time as part of its grant.



#### TOOL: FORMING A TIME STUDY TEAM

Learning Forward’s [Time Study Team Tool](#) provides guidance to districts on how to form and lead a time study team dedicated to reshaping the school day in service of improved educator and student learning. It recommends potential members of the team and provides helpful advice on how to get the conversation started.



### HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT LEAs TO USE TITLE IV

- If the state requires a certain number of professional development days in each district, consider requiring an equivalent number of hours, instead, to ensure that educators have regular, sustained time in schools to collaborate and learn.
- Educate districts or provide guidance to districts (or both) about this potential use of funds.
- Elevate and amplify ways to create as well as effectively use time as a result of this funding.
- Promote use of consolidated LEA plan to align Title IV with Title II strategies for a coherent and integrated approach.



### SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE: CREATING TIME FOR LEARNING

As one Florida district worked to transition to more rigorous standards, district leaders understood that educators would need additional time for learning and collaboration to effectively make this shift. The district's chief academic officer and superintendent met with a number of school leaders to understand how schedules were constructed; they wanted to learn what unspoken assumptions were driving the schedule and where there were options to increase time for teacher learning without creating a financial burden. The district established a Time Study Team with representatives from a number of groups to study the issue for several months. The school board adopted their recommendation to create three collaborative periods each week. The state supported their efforts by approving a waiver for a very small reduction in their required daily instructional time. The district leaders, school leaders, and teachers continued to reflect on and discuss implementation of the newly scheduled time, learning along the way how to better facilitate and support the time to ensure it was meaningful for teacher and student learning.



## 4

CONDITIONS FOR CULTIVATING LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS

**DEVELOP LEADERSHIP**

Without effective instructional leadership, our most underserved schools have few chances of achieving college and career-ready outcomes for all students. States have a critical role to play in filling gaps in districts' leadership development pipeline (from preparation through development and retention).

**OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP:****New 3% Set-Aside for School Leaders**

In addition to the state set-aside within Title II, states may now reserve up to 3% of LEAs' Title II allocation to support school leaders. Allowable uses include reforming licensure and certification, building instructional leadership, establishing leader evaluation systems, supporting alternative certification programs, improving recruitment and retention of school leaders, providing technical assistance to LEAs related to principal development, reforming principal preparation, establishing leader academies, and training principals on blended learning, early childhood, career-technical education (CTE), and science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

States with a significant number of rural districts that may not have the capacity or resources to develop school leaders, or states that expect to have an increase in Title II funds based on the new formula, may be particularly well situated to consider how this opportunity may support improved learning systems. While there are tradeoffs to exercising this option, it represents an opportunity for all states to prioritize leadership and maximize the potential impact of state-level activities.

For example, state-supported programs and advanced leadership development opportunities can incentivize recruitment and retention for principals. Or state-sponsored communities of practice for such groups as principal supervisors, Title I principals, rural principals, or other special groups can build professional capital and provide the ongoing support necessary for those with challenging assignments.

This set-aside provides additional funds to states (beyond their 5% allocation of Title II) to strengthen school leadership. The uses are broad, allowing states to use this funding flexibly in alignment with their vision for professional learning and college and career-ready instruction.

Particularly for states whose Title II allocation will decrease as a result of the formula change beginning in FY17, states may need to make a compelling case for why taking advantage of the 3% set aside will provide efficiencies and value to districts.

**STATE CHECKLIST: DEVELOP LEADERSHIP THROUGH THE 3% SET-ASIDE**

- Seek stakeholder input and conduct leadership program and policy reviews to identify gaps, redundancies, and fragmentation to determine if the state can add real value through this new funding opportunity.
- Ensure these investments are part of a coherent aligned vision for professional learning as opposed to an opportunity to fund a new program.
- Engage a statewide advisory team (such as superintendents and influential school and teacher leaders) in determining the highest needs for the 3% as aligned to the statewide vision. These individuals are critical to investing others in the decision.
- Draft compelling messaging to explain your plans for these funds and how they will add value to all LEAs in advancing professional and student learning. Test the messaging to improve it and ensure the field recognizes how the use of these funds will advance student learning.
- Ensure stakeholders have an authentic opportunity to weigh in on options for uses of funding.
- Create a feedback mechanism to gauge LEA satisfaction with programs enabled by the 3% set-aside.

**SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE: DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP**

In 2014, the Maryland Department of Education launched the Promising Principals Academy to train two of the most promising assistant principals from each district. The Department created the program to ensure that its most talented leaders were prepared and then tapped to lead schools through the significant shift to higher standards from day one on the job. Each aspiring school leader selected by the superintendent receives coaching from a former principal. All members of the cohort meet multiple times each year for multiday retreats focused on instructional leadership and core competencies like developing staff and communicating effectively. Last year, 100% of participants rated the experience as valuable to their development. More than 40 alumni have been promoted within their districts, feeling more prepared to lead better learning for students and teachers.

**OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP:****Title I School Improvement Funds**

States must ensure that the neediest schools are equipped with the most effective leadership. ESSA establishes School Improvement Funds (to replace School Improvement Grants), to support the lowest-performing schools. Seven percent of these funds are reserved for states to employ evidence-based interventions in the lowest performing schools. One potential intervention is developing leaders — whether school leaders, teacher leaders, or both — who are prepared to effectively develop staff in the lowest performing schools. Studies have shown that there is no evidence of an effective school turnaround without instructional leadership. Building the capacity of leadership in the most underserved schools has strong potential to support improved outcomes for students in these schools.

**RESOURCE: RAND REPORT ON EVIDENCE-BASED LEADERSHIP INTERVENTIONS**

A [recent report from the RAND Corporation](#) (commissioned by the Wallace Foundation) analyzed a number of leadership-focused interventions aligned to ESSA's evidence requirements. Many of these interventions are relevant to school improvement efforts. The report details evidence-based strategies for preparing leaders for high-need settings or to lead turnaround efforts, as well as strategies for developing current school leaders.

**STATE CHECKLIST**

- Conduct a landscape analysis to determine where there are opportunities to improve the way that leaders in the lowest-performing schools are prepared, mentored, supervised, and developed.
- Identify successful programs that may be expanded or built upon or whether a new initiative will be needed.
- Analyze the evidence base (e.g. use Rand and the Wallace Foundation's recent report, "[School Leadership Interventions Under the Every Student Succeeds Act](#)" to identify interventions that meet evidence requirements and align with surfaced needs).
- Engage stakeholders, including districts, school leaders, and teachers, to gather feedback about potential approaches.
- Establish a community of practice or networked improvement community for supervisors or principals from improvement schools.

**OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP:****Teacher and School Leader Incentive Fund**

**E**SSA's Title II National Activities section authorizes funds for the Teacher and School Leader Incentive Fund. The language revises an existing competitive grant program focused on designing and implementing human capital management systems, which specifically includes professional development under the law, in addition to educator and leader evaluation.

This fairly well-funded grant program creates opportunities and additional resources for state and district grantees to rethink human capital management systems for teachers and leaders. Applicants must describe how they will evaluate teachers and school leaders using measures of student academic achievement, so states and districts without these systems may not be eligible. The most recent grant opportunity closed in July 2016. Budget appropriations will determine when funds will next be available for new grants, but the grant opportunity typically occurs every two to three years.

High-quality professional learning should be a component of this work, including aligning professional learning to educator performance standards.

**STATE CHECKLIST: DEVELOP LEADERSHIP THROUGH TLIF**

- Consider whether this competitive grant may provide additional resources to support your state's vision for professional learning (see Section #3 Align Resources to your Vision, p. 26).

**HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT LEAs**

- Encourage leading districts to apply for competitive funds.
- If appropriate, provide feedback on district applications.
- Disseminate lessons learned from participating districts.
- Support a community of practice among those systems awarded this funding to support amplifying and scaling lessons learned.

**SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE: DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP**

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) used its \$62 million Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant to establish new teacher leadership roles (allowing teachers to remain in the classroom but take on coaching and team leadership roles) and to strengthen school leadership. DCPS launched the Teacher Leadership Innovation program with these funds, establishing paid teacher leadership roles in a third of its schools —most in turnaround or high-need — and providing intensive, ongoing professional learning experiences to prepare teachers for new roles. DCPS also established its own principal residency program, providing top instructional leaders with a year of training and support before taking on residencies within the district. TIF funds also allowed DCPS to subsidize a master’s degree in Executive Leadership from Georgetown to ensure the district’s highest performing school leaders were challenged and had opportunities to grow. This comprehensive strategy of leadership development — for teacher leaders, aspiring school leaders, and top performers — has been a critical component in DCPS’s dramatic improvement.

## 5

CONDITIONS FOR CULTIVATING LEARNING AND IMPROVEMENT SYSTEMS

**SUSTAIN IMPLEMENTATION THROUGH EFFECTIVE CHANGE MANAGEMENT**

**W**hen there isn't a strong plan for implementing professional learning, PD can feel like a series of unconnected and irrelevant initiatives. When implemented in this way, teachers may feel disempowered, and professional learning is unlikely to achieve intended results.

ESSA provides the opportunity for states and districts to develop a coherent, integrated system for developing adults in school buildings. Instead of a series of disappointing one-size-fits-all workshops, focused professional learning can be tightly connected to the real needs of students and teachers, so that all teachers can grow their practice. Teacher and other stakeholder voices will be essential in ensuring that professional learning reflects real needs and gets results.

Often “stakeholders” are defined as individuals who reside outside the system who have points of view and constituencies who must be considered when a state and/or local school system is considering a substantive move. Equally important and less frequently referred to as “stakeholders” are the key people within the system whose support is needed to succeed. Learning Forward has built a [set of stakeholder management tools](#) that state and local leadership teams can use to ensure all the right people are involved in decision making and ready to support implementation.

## OPPORTUNITY IN ESSA TO DEVELOP LEADERSHIP: Stakeholder Engagement Process

ESSA requires states and districts to engage in “consultation,” a process where teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, specialized instructional support personnel, charter school leaders, parents, community partners, and other organizations inform the state’s Title applications and/or consolidated plans. In Title II specifically, these stakeholders should be asked how the state or district can better meet the purpose of the title (e.g. increasing student achievement, improving the effectiveness of educators, increasing the number of effective educators, and improving access to effective educators).

The consultation process provides an opportunity for SEAs and LEAs to engage early with key stakeholders. These groups might provide insight not only on the current state of professional learning and its root causes, but also identify key barriers to navigate and essential supports. If facilitated thoughtfully, this process may also yield critical public champions of the state’s plan.



### RESOURCE: ESSA STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT GUIDES

A number of organizations have published ESSA stakeholder engagement tools to support states in designing a meaningful consultation process. These include:

- Partners For Each and Every Child’s [Handbook for Meaningful Stakeholder Engagement](#)
- CCSSO’s [Let’s Get this Conversation Started: Strategies, Tools, Examples, and Resources to Help States Engage with Stakeholders](#)

Both resources provide clear steps states can take to engage stakeholders. The Partners Handbook also contains a number of examples of organizations that might be engaged as the state develops its plan, and the key ESSA decision points at which these organizations should be involved.



### STATE CHECKLIST: SUSTAIN IMPLEMENTATION AND MANAGE CHANGE THROUGH STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

- Engage stakeholders early in the development of your plan(s). Use your current state vision, professional learning standards, and the new federal definition of professional development to initiate conversations and solicit feedback. Ask stakeholders to explain how they currently experience the system and what they think is needed to improve practice.
- Consider how the state might model a strong consultation process that LEAs can, in turn, replicate.
- Commit to ongoing stakeholder engagement as opposed to limiting to the application/plan development process by establishing formal advisory groups who understand how they will be consulted throughout implementation.



### HOW STATES CAN SUPPORT LEAs

- Provide LEAs with guidance and technical assistance to develop their own robust stakeholder engagement process (with specific connections to their approaches to professional learning) that surfaces authentic voices from parents, teachers, school leaders, and other community members.
- Elevate and disseminate exemplars of local stakeholder engagement activities.



### SPOTLIGHT ON PRACTICE: ENGAGING STAKEHOLDERS TO MANAGE CHANGE AND SUSTAIN IMPLEMENTATION

In Kentucky, the SEA has a delivery unit that builds the agency's capacity in project management, data analysis, and data-driven decision making. The SEA developed a research plan for each priority in its strategic plan, and the delivery unit monitors progress. Unit staff members participate in cross-functional teams as part of the agency's overall strategic planning process. A statewide teacher advisory council also provides the state commissioner of education with input on progress and needs. The SEA has used various types of data to inform its work, including program evaluations that analyze the impact of professional development initiatives on teacher knowledge and practice as well as student outcomes. Recent evaluations have included a 2015 report on an external evaluation of Kentucky's 2012-13 Literacy Design Collaborative and Mathematics Design Collaborative implementation and an internal evaluation of the SEA's implementation of the Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System. The SEA provides direct, real-time feedback to local leaders on their efforts through its regional instructional specialists and as part of its work with district teams in the Leadership Networks initiative.

Excerpted from "*Professional Learning: Trends in State Efforts*," a report from the Southern Regional Education Board.



# TOOLS

The preceding parts of this toolkit describe the steps that states can take to advance effective learning systems down to the school level. This section of the toolkit provides resources to help states implement these steps within their own unique contexts.

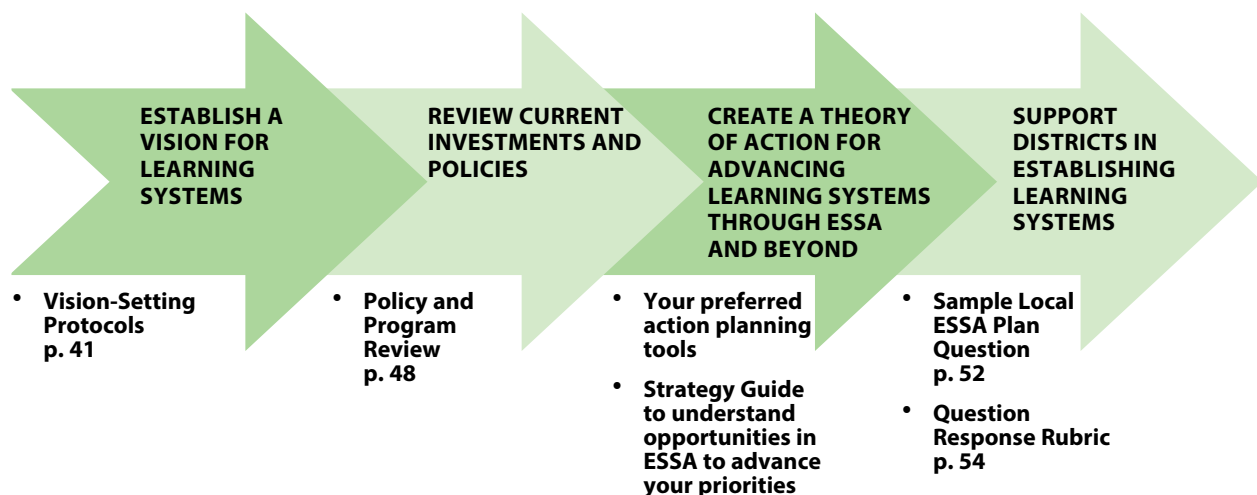
## THE TOOLS INCLUDE:

**VISION-SETTING PROTOCOLS:** High-quality professional learning systems are anchored in a clear, compelling, and shared vision for what adult learning looks like at the school level. These protocols provide a process for articulating that definition and identifying how school, district, and state leadership and policies can each contribute to school-based systems.

**PROGRAM AND POLICY REVIEW:** State and district leaders may conduct an initiative analysis to understand how existing efforts and policies align with the state vision for professional learning. This analysis will help to identify potential opportunities as well as gaps you may want to address using federal funds through your ESSA state plan.

**SAMPLE LOCAL PLAN QUESTION:** In 2017, states will develop the local plan template that districts will need to complete to receive federal funds. This development process provides an important opportunity for states to lead districts in comprehensive, thoughtful planning to improve education systems and the professional learning that can support desired shifts at the local level. This toolkit includes a sample local plan question that states may adapt to help districts do this work. A thoughtful and detailed question (with response) provides the state with insight into district plans and allows the state to monitor progress. The ESSA plan guidance also allows the state to provide helpful feedback to the district so that intentions are more likely to result in improvement.

## SUGGESTED SEQUENCE FOR USING TOOLS



## TOOL

## 1

## VISION-SETTING PROTOCOLS



This tool is designed to support a group in establishing a draft vision for systems of professional learning, and identifying state and district roles for supporting these systems. States can also use Tool 2: Policy and Program Review (p. 48) to determine how current investments align with the vision and where there may be gaps.

### DEFINE HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

**Time:** 45 - 90 minutes

**Materials:** Handout - State definitions of professional learning (pp. 44-46), chart paper, markers, tape, sticky notes

1. Ask each member of the group to write attributes of their definition of professional learning on self-adhesive “sticky notes,” one attribute or idea per note.
2. In groups of four or five, share the attributes on sticky notes, clustering similar ideas together.
3. Report similarities and record them on chart paper.
4. Use the federal definition of professional learning on p.14 to compare your own characteristics.
5. Alternatively (or, in addition, if time allows), review the Kentucky, Michigan, and Connecticut definitions of professional learning and note the similarities and differences.
6. Come to consensus on the key points to include in a definition of professional learning.
7. Invite a small group to craft the definition using the key points generated and bring it back to the next meeting for review and revision. The group can move on to the next vision-setting exercise in the same day if needed. During the discussion, be sure to consider what words may be confusing to others who don’t fully understand what you’re aiming to do around professional learning.
8. Encourage members to share the definition with stakeholders to seek feedback. It is important to acknowledge that stakeholders will not have the same depth of background knowledge and the opportunity to cultivate an understanding about the different terms that team members have experienced, so the task is not to seek their agreement, but rather to assess if the definition makes sense and to collect the questions it generates.

## CREATE A CLEAR PICTURE OF WHAT THE DEFINITION LOOKS LIKE IN ACTION

**Time:** 1 - 2 hours of prep and 1 hour of facilitation

**Materials:** Handout - Sample definition in action

1. Based on the definition the group has developed, the group (or a subset) may develop a document, such as a chart, narrative or anecdote, that shows what the definition looks like in a school. Try to describe the experience of educators in a school with a high-quality learning system aligned to the definition. If the group decides to create a chart, one column might list what the vision for professional learning looks like, while a second column explains what it is not. Regardless of the format, the document might address:
  - How frequently educators meet to discuss and improve their practice;
  - How educators decide what to focus on;
  - The qualifications of those who are leading professional learning, and how they were trained and supported;
  - How educators give and receive feedback;
  - How educators know whether their efforts are resulting in improvements in practice and student learning;
  - What a professional learning conversation might sound like;
  - How leadership has created a culture that supports learning and improvement.
2. Share the document draft with the planning team and additional key stakeholders, either through written feedback or in person.
3. Revise based on feedback. If needed, facilitate a call or in-person meeting to reconcile feedback.
4. If time allows, we recommend engaging additional stakeholders in discussing the second iteration of the document.
5. Prepare to publish the document more widely so that it serves as a concrete picture of what the vision would look like in practice. In preparation, consider:
  - How can we ensure that all staff share a common vision and understanding of quality professional learning?
  - Who are our best champions and messengers?

## CLARIFY HOW EACH LEVEL OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEM — SCHOOL, LOCAL, AND STATE — CAN UNIQUELY CONTRIBUTE TO HIGH-QUALITY LEARNING SYSTEMS

**Time:** 90 - 120 minutes

**Materials:** Handout – “Essential Roles in our Professional Learning Ecosystem” graphic organizer (p. 47), chart paper, markers, tape, sticky notes

1. Facilitate a group discussion, capturing roles within a pyramidal graphic organizer (with schools at the base as the most important level in the ecosystem):
  - Based on our vision for professional learning at the school level, what must be in place — in terms of culture, leadership, expertise, systems for measurement, time structures, and resources — to effectively implement our definition/vision of professional learning in every school?
  - How can districts establish the necessary conditions to support schools in this work? How can they support increased personalization of professional learning that may be unfeasible in an individual school (e.g. providing content-focused professional learning for subjects with only one teacher in the building)?
  - What is the state’s role in contributing to this system? What are they uniquely suited to do?
2. Consult the handout if helpful to get discussion started. Be sure to cite specific examples that are unique to your context.

**HANDOUT FOR DEFINING HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  
AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL PROTOCOL****KENTUCKY: DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

(704 kAr 3:035. Annual professional development plan)

**Section 1. Definitions.**

- (1) "Professional development" means professional learning that is an individual and collective responsibility that fosters shared accountability among the entire education workforce for student achievement, and
- (a) aligns with Kentucky's Core Academic Standards in 704 kAr 3:303, educator effectiveness standards, individual professional growth goals, and school, school district, and state goals for student achievement;
  - (b) focuses on content and pedagogy, as specified in certification requirements, and other related job-specific performance standards and expectations;
  - (c) occurs among educators who share accountability for student growth;
  - (d) is facilitated by school and district leaders, including curriculum specialists, principals, instructional coaches, mentors, teachers or teacher leaders;
  - (e) Focuses on individual improvement, school improvement, and program implementation;
  - (f) occurs several times per week.

"Professional development program" means a sustained and coherent professional learning process that is measurable by indicators and includes professional learning and ongoing support to transfer that learning to practice.

- (2) Professional development shall:
- (a) be related to the teacher's instructional assignments and the administrator's professional responsibilities.
  - (b) be aligned with the school or district improvement plan or the individual professional growth plans of teachers;
  - (c) occur within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment;
  - (d) be facilitated by skillful leaders who develop capacity and [,] advocate and create support systems for professional learning;
  - (e) be prioritized and monitored by the district;
  - (f) Use a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning;
  - (g) Integrate theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes;
  - (h) Apply current research on systems change and sustain support for implementation of professional learning for long-term instructional improvement as evidenced by student growth;
  - (i) Align its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards; and
  - (j) Focus resources on areas of identified need.

**HANDOUT FOR DEFINING HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  
AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL PROTOCOL****CONNECTICUT: DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

(Professional Development Defined in PA 12-116)

According to Connecticut's Education Reform Act of 2012, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) must ensure that Local boards of Education provide each certified employee the guidance and resources to participate in a program of professional development which shall:

- "(1) be a comprehensive, sustained and intensive approach to improving teacher and administrator effectiveness in increasing student knowledge achievement;
- (2) Focus on refining and improving various effective teaching methods that are shared between and among educators;
- (3) Foster collective responsibility for improved student performance; and
- (4) Comprise professional learning that
  - (a) aligns with rigorous state student academic achievement standards;
  - (b) is conducted among educators at the school and is facilitated by principals, coaches, mentors, distinguished educators, or other appropriate teachers;
  - (c) occurs frequently on an individual basis or among groups of teachers in a job-embedded process of continuous improvement; and
  - (d) includes a repository of best practices for teaching methods developed by educators within each school that is continuously available to such educators for comment and updating" (PA 12-116, Section 138 (a).

**HANDOUT FOR DEFINING HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  
AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL PROTOCOL****MICHIGAN: DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Professional learning is a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving educators' effectiveness in raising student achievement. Professional learning provides opportunities for professional discourse, analysis, application, and reflection. It is relevant learning that is essential to ongoing improvements in professional practice and job effectiveness.

Systemic design, development, and implementation of effective professional learning must meet the following quality indicators:

- Build upon learning goals and objectives identified and developed throughout the educator's career, beginning in pre-service preparation, and aligned to the educator certification process;
- Align with Michigan's Standards for Professional Learning, rigorous student content standards, and educator performance standards and with local school improvement plans to improve job performance and student growth and proficiency;
- Engage personnel in a process of continuous improvement in which evidence and data are used to assess needs, define learning goals, design learning opportunities, and evaluate the effectiveness of the professional learning on job performance and student growth and proficiency;
- Facilitate sustained, collaborative, job embedded professional learning, including opportunities to participate in communities of practice
- Provide continuous learning to support and sustain the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the work place;
- Provide increased opportunities among stakeholder organizations for collaboration and collective support for the learning of children, youth, and adults; and
- Utilize and leverage the necessary resources for continuous professional learning, ensuring that local, state, and federal funds are aligned and in compliance with professional learning policy.

The State board of Education recommends that each Michigan school and district establish sustained, job embedded, relevant professional learning opportunities that meet the above criteria for all school and district staff based on this Professional Learning Policy. (Michigan's Professional Learning Policy, 2012).

**HANDOUT** ESSENTIAL ROLES IN OUR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ECOSYSTEMESSENTIAL ROLES: **STATE**

- 

ESSENTIAL ROLES: **DISTRICTS**

- 

ESSENTIAL ROLES: **SCHOOLS**

-



**TOOL**  
**2**

**PROGRAM AND POLICY REVIEW**



**A**fter articulating a vision for professional learning systems and state, district, and school-based roles in implementing these systems, begin to consider how your current policies and investments align with your vision.

The first inventory focuses on existing professional learning programs and how they align to the definition of professional learning. Insert the criteria from your definition into the gray columns. In the rows, list out your state’s various professional learning investments, considering any significant state-wide investments by other organizations (e.g. statewide unions, nonprofits).

The second inventory provides the opportunity to explore the policies that can incent or be barriers to systems of professional learning. List relevant policies, and use the gray columns to identify how these policies establish the conditions needed in a healthy professional learning ecosystem.

After completing the charts, look across the gray columns in each inventory. Are there programs or policies with no discernible impact? Do measures need to be established and data collected, or should the program or policy be strategically abandoned? Are there gaps in the conditions for professional learning systems that must be addressed? Or are there programs that don’t seem to align with the definition of professional learning that has been established? Use the discussion questions at the end of this tool to focus the discussion.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROGRAM INVENTORY								
Program	Sponsor/ Organizer	Implementation Status	Evidence of Impact for Students and Educators	Definition Criteria: Expert Leadership	Definition Criteria: Job- embedded	Definition Criteria:	Definition Criteria:	Maintain, Adjust, or Abandon?
<b>Example:</b> Early Learning Educator Series	SEA/Head Start	Implemented in 20% of schools; uneven quality	None yet		x			

<b>POLICY INVENTORY (AND ECOSYSTEM ANALYSIS)</b>						
<b>Policy</b>	<b>Implementation Status</b>	<b>Evidence of Impact</b>	<b>Supports Vision</b>	<b>Builds PL Leadership</b>	<b>Measures Impact</b>	<b>Aligns Resources</b>
<b>Example:</b> Adoption of Professional Learning Standards	In statute — no capacity building yet	None yet	x			

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Looking across the policy inventory, where are there potential **gaps** in the conditions that support professional learning systems? It may be helpful to look across the columns in gray; note if there are any columns that have no supportive policies or programs. These may be opportunities to strengthen the ecosystem that supports professional learning.
2. Looking across the policy inventory, are there any **redundancies** that might be eliminated to free up funds for a more impactful use?
3. Are there any policies which may potentially be a **barrier** to the professional learning systems you envision?
4. How do policies **incentivize** districts to establish professional learning systems in alignment with your vision? How could incentives be strengthened? For example, which state policies and supports help to create a culture of collective responsibility for student learning, and what policies and supports may need to be put in place in our state?



## ADDITIONAL TOOLS

To go deeper with this analysis, refer to Learning Forward's [Professional Learning Policy Review](#). For states that are not Learning Forward members, contact Tracy Crow ([tracy.crow@learningforward.org](mailto:tracy.crow@learningforward.org)) for a copy.

**TOOL**  
**3****SAMPLE LOCAL PLAN QUESTION**

**I**n 2017, districts will complete consolidated or title plans to access federal funds. States have an important responsibility to support districts in developing strategic plans for these funds that will have an impact on student learning.

Professional learning is a critical lever to developing the capacity needed to effect change, and this tool is designed to help locals consider how they can best employ their resources to strengthen teaching and leadership in alignment with their big-picture goals for equity and excellence.

Given your vision for professional learning systems and the opportunities and gaps you plan to address through your ESSA plan, adapt the question below and the rubric that follows to meet your needs. This question assumes that LEAs will describe their goals and vision for student learning elsewhere in their plan.

Describe your system of professional growth and improvement at the school level and your district’s strategies to support professional growth and improvement. In your description, please address:

- How your system uses **data and other evidence** to identify teacher and student needs and inform your professional development strategy; also, describe how **stakeholder feedback** was incorporated into your plan;
- How district policies provide sufficient time and **resources** to ensure professional development is sustained, ongoing, and job-embedded
- How the system builds the requisite **leadership capacity** for those who facilitate professional development (and sustains support for them over time);
- How the district is moving toward **evidence-based** professional development that aligns with the new definition of professional development; and
- What measures will be used to determine whether district and school efforts are resulting in improvements in teaching and student outcomes, and your plan for how you will **continuously improve** implementation.

*ESSA establishes a new definition of professional development and new evidence requirements. This question asks districts to consider how their investments align with these new requirements, and prompts them to consider how existing investments may need to change or be abandoned.*

<b>ITEMIZE YOUR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT INVESTMENTS AND DESCRIBE HOW EACH IS ALIGNED TO THE REVISED FEDERAL DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT</b>					
<b>Program/Investment</b>	<b>Sustained and Intensive</b>	<b>Classroom-Focused</b>	<b>Job-Embedded</b>	<b>Data-Driven</b>	<b>Collaborative</b>

*This chart allows districts to conduct their own analysis, and consider the ways their programs might be strengthened to better meet student and teacher needs. We recommend states define these terms — see our examples on p. 56 as a starting point.*

**FOR ANYTHING THAT IS NOT FULLY ALIGNED TO THE DEFINITION, PLEASE PROVIDE A RATIONALE BELOW.**

*If this rationale section is blank, consider contacting the district for more information.*

QUESTION RESPONSE RUBRIC PART 1			
States may use and adapt this rubric for the sample local plan question to inform districts of expectations, review submitted plans and monitor ongoing results. This rubric may represent more criteria than the state will use in its local plan template, but the tool is designed to show a range of criteria states might select for their process.			
CRITERIA	DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS	MEETS EXPECTATIONS	EXEMPLARY
<b>System Alignment</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The professional growth and improvement system described does not clearly <b>align</b> with broader goals for achieving equity and excellence</li> <li>The system does not represent a <b>coherent and coordinated</b> approach to achieving the district's goals around equity and excellence</li> <li>The district's plan for its professional learning and investment doesn't reflect <b>meaningful consultation</b> with a variety of stakeholders and doesn't include a plan for ongoing engagement</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The professional growth and improvement system described clearly <b>aligns</b> with broader goals for achieving equity and excellence</li> <li>The system represents a <b>coherent and coordinated</b> approach to achieving the district's goals around equity and excellence</li> <li>The district's plan for its professional learning and investment reflects <b>meaningful consultation</b> with a variety of stakeholders and includes a plan for ongoing engagement</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to Meets Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The LEA's plan is informed by significant <b>reflection</b> about what has and hasn't worked in the past</li> <li>All federal, state, and local <b>funding sources are aligned</b> to achieve the district's goals; no status-quo spending that is no longer aligned</li> </ul>
<b>Use of Data to Improve</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The system described in the plan isn't <b>informed by the district's data</b> and other evidence</li> <li>The plan doesn't describe the LEA's strategies to <b>identify individual teacher needs</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The system described in the plan is <b>informed by the district's data</b> and other evidence</li> <li>The plan describes the LEA's strategies to <b>identify individual teacher needs</b></li> </ul>	<p>In addition to Meets Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan describes how the district is using <b>data about student needs</b> to determine teacher learning needs</li> </ul>
<b>Capacity: Leadership Expertise, Resources, and Time</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan doesn't demonstrate the district has sufficient <b>expertise and leadership</b> to successfully implement the plan, or there is an incomplete plan to build the requisite expertise and leadership</li> <li>The plan doesn't allocate sufficient <b>resources</b> to successfully implement at the LEA and/or school levels</li> <li>The plan doesn't provide sufficient <b>time</b> for educators' learning, in alignment with the revised definition of professional development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan demonstrates the district has developed sufficient <b>expertise and leadership</b> to successfully implement the plan, or the plan details strategies to build the requisite expertise and leadership</li> <li>The plan allocates sufficient <b>resources</b> to successfully implement the plan at both the LEA and school levels</li> <li>The plan provides sufficient <b>time</b> for educators' learning, in alignment with the revised definition of professional development (particularly "job-embedded," "sustained" and "ongoing")</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to Meets Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan contains <b>ample evidence</b> to demonstrate that the LEA has sufficient expertise, leadership, resources, and time to successfully implement its plan</li> <li>The plan contains <b>measures/metrics</b> to assess whether leadership, expertise, resources, and time are sufficient and leading to positive results</li> </ul>

<b>QUESTION RESPONSE RUBRIC PART 2</b>			
States may use and adapt this rubric for the sample local plan question to inform districts of expectations, review submitted plans and monitor ongoing results. This rubric may represent more criteria than the state will use in its local plan template, but the tool is designed to show a range of criteria states might select for their process.			
<b>CRITERIA</b>	<b>DOES NOT MEET EXPECTATIONS</b>	<b>MEETS EXPECTATIONS</b>	<b>EXEMPLARY</b>
<b>Use of Evidence</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>PD investments do not align with the four tiers of <b>evidence</b> as defined by ESSA</li> <li>Strategies aligned to the <b>fourth tier</b> of evidence (as defined by ESSA) do not include a strong rationale and/or a plan for ongoing monitoring</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Professional development investments align with one of the four tiers of <b>evidence</b> as defined by ESSA</li> <li>Strategies aligned to the <b>fourth tier</b> of evidence (as defined by ESSA) include a strong rationale and a plan for ongoing monitoring</li> </ul>	<p>In addition to Meets Expectations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan also contains a strategy for <b>ongoing monitoring of new research</b> in the top three tiers of evidence</li> </ul>
<b>Continuous Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan includes insufficient <b>measures</b> to allow the LEA to determine whether Title II investments are leading to increased educator effectiveness</li> <li>The plan insufficiently describes how the LEA will monitor and <b>continuously improve implementation</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan includes <b>measures</b> that will allow the LEA to determine – as required in ESSA – whether Title II investments are leading to improvements in educator effectiveness</li> <li>The plan describes how the LEA will monitor and <b>continuously improve implementation</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The plan addresses how the district will act and adjust based on new data</li> <li>The plan describes the process the district will regularly use to review data across teams to scale what's working and address unsuccessful initiatives</li> </ul>
<b>Alignment to PD Definition</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The description doesn't align with ESSA's definition of PD, and/or any exceptions do not align with the state's business rules for exceptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The description aligns with ESSA's definition of PD (such as "sustained," "classroom-focused," "job-embedded," "data-driven," and "collaborative" and any exceptions align with the state's business rules for exceptions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>All strategies described in the plan are aligned with ESSA's definition of PD</li> </ul>



## POTENTIAL DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS IN ESSA'S DEFINITION OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

To ensure districts fully understand each of the terms used in the definition of professional development, states should develop and disseminate their own definitions. A few examples, based on Learning Forward's standards and publications, are included below to jump start states' thinking:

**Sustained** professional development involves intentional and focused learning for the period of time required for successful implementation. Learning Forward clarifies that professional development that is sustained lasts more than the term of one day or a short, self-contained workshop.<sup>1</sup>

**Collaborative** involves teams of educators who share a common goal or problem and commitment to learn, work, and problem solve together. Most effective when it leads to shared responsibility for the success of the members as well as the students represented by the group.

**Job-embedded** professional development (JEPD) refers to teacher learning that is grounded in day-to-day teaching practice and is designed to enhance teachers' content-specific instructional practices with the intent of improving student learning (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin, 1995; Hirsh, 2009). It can be referred to as "just-in-time" or "real-time" learning because the support occurs during the actual teaching process.

**Data-driven** includes using a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to identify learning needs, set goals, plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning, preferably in a cycle of ongoing learning and improvement.

**Classroom-focused** professional development is specifically focused on the curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments that teachers are learning to implement during instruction and the outcomes that students are expected to master.

<sup>1</sup> Ensure Great Teaching for Every Child. (Apr. 2009). Learning Forward, NSDC Policy Points, 1(2). Retrieved from <https://learningforward.org/docs/pdf/policypoints4-09.pdf?sfvrsn=0>