

CREATE LEARNING SYSTEMS, NOT SILOS

BY STEPHANIE HIRSH, KAY PSENCIK,
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In a learning system, central office personnel assume collective responsibility for schools and go about their work very differently.

They are responsible not only for departments and programs, but also for student learning. They demonstrate that responsibility by engaging in data-informed conversations about student achievement.

These conversations model a culture of collective responsibility for schools. When district administrators regularly and actively engage with site-based staff, they eliminate any mystery about how district leaders are facilitating, coaching, and supporting schools' work.

Effective central offices have transitioned from a commanding and controlling management style to one focused on support and solutions. As professional learning has moved from a centralized to a school-based function, central office staff members' work has changed from determining content and delivering the learning to assisting school staff.

In a learning system, leaders

Excerpted from: **Hirsh, S., Psencik, K., & Brown, F. (2014).** *Becoming a learning system*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

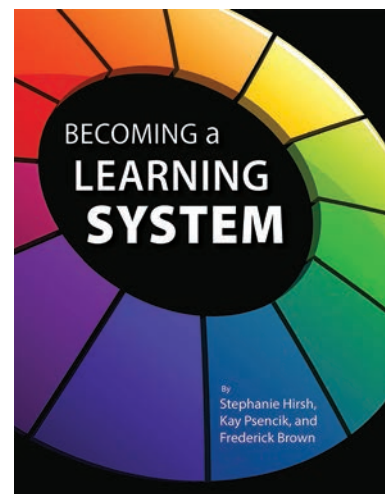
collaborate rather than compete, build systems rather than silos, and exchange rather than hoard information. As Margaret Wheatley notes (1992), control is not the connective tissue; dynamic interconnectedness matters.

Central office personnel in a learning system set expectations, build capacity, provide resources that help schools achieve goals, monitor results, hold educators accountable when outcomes are not met, and meet the challenge of complex work.

Use the following tools to describe the roles and responsibilities of district-level leaders in a learning system and assess district leadership support for professional learning, a distinguishing characteristic of learning systems.

REFERENCE

Wheatley, M. (1992). *Leadership and the new science: Learning about organization from an orderly universe*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.



BECOMING A LEARNING SYSTEM

By Stephanie Hirsh, Kay Psencik, and Frederick Brown

In a learning system, every educator in the district focuses intently on learning. Those educators share responsibility for student and adult learning, dedicate themselves to continuous improvement, use data to drive decisions, and monitor and adjust their practices based on feedback.

Based on Learning Forward's definition of professional learning and Standards for Professional Learning, the book outlines the knowledge, skills, attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors district leaders need to lead, facilitate, and coach school leaders and leadership teams to embed the definition and standards into schools' daily routines.

Online tools accompany each of the book's 24 chapters.

To order, call 800-727-7288 or visit www.learningforward.org/store. Price: \$80 nonmembers; \$64 members.

TOOL 1: DECLARE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES USING KASAB

PURPOSE: Describe the roles and responsibilities of district-level leaders in a learning system.

TIME: Two 1½-hour sessions

MATERIALS: Chart paper, markers, sticky notes, pens or pencils, KASAB thinking chart (p. 64).

STEPS		
SESSION I		TIME
1	Clearly establish the purpose of a KASAB and the process the team will use to draft its KASAB.	5 minutes
2	Review with all the definition of professional learning and leadership that the district developed and ask team members to generate ideas about how they have begun to align with these definitions in their daily actions.	5 minutes
3	Explain each component of the KASAB.	10 minutes
4	Ask each participant to work alone at first and on one letter at a time.	10 minutes
5	Begin with the role of school leadership teams in implementing effective school-based professional learning aligned with the district's definition of professional learning and leadership.	20 minutes
6	Model working through the KASAB for school leaders with one descriptor under each letter.	5 minutes
7	Ask team members to work as a group to clarify their thinking and come to consensus.	15 minutes
8	Ask them to follow the same process to describe what district leaders must do well in order to ensure school teams meet their expectations. Use the KASAB thinking chart.	20 minutes
9	Remind everyone that what they produce is a rough draft. They will think about it and make notes of changes before the second session.	5 minutes
SESSION II		TIME
10	Remind everyone of the purpose of the work — to clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities for every leader in the organization to ensure that everyone is learning every day so that every student achieves significant results.	10 minutes
11	Walk through each letter of the KASAB until the team clearly articulates the expectation and everyone agrees.	50 minutes
12	Establish a theory of action of how to engage other district and school leaders in the conversation so that it becomes a shared expectation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What must we do first? Second? • What barriers will we face? What steps will we need to overcome them? • What will we need to do to give people the best opportunity to change practice? • How will we know? 	15 minutes

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TOOLS

TOOL 1, continued: KASAB THINKING CHART

	SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAMS	DISTRICT LEADERS
K _{nowledge}		
A _{ttitudes}		
S _{kills}		
A _{spirations}		
B _{ehaviors}		

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TOOL 2: SUPPORT THE ELEMENTS OF LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

PURPOSE: Assess district leadership support for professional learning, a distinguishing characteristic of learning systems.

TIME: 1½ hours

MATERIALS: A copy of the assessment chart for each participant (p. 66).

PROCESS		
1	Ask participants to think about each factor that contributes to a high-quality system of professional learning. Ask them to rate the degree of support district-level leaders give each factor and share specific examples to support the rating. Remind them that examples are important even if the rating is low in order to have meaningful conversations and set thoughtful goals.	15 minutes
2	Divide the team into six groups and assign each group one factor. Ask groups to come to consensus about their rating and to be specific about the rating and examples.	30 minutes
3	Have each group share out and work toward whole-group consensus.	30 minutes
4	Share one or two steps that district leaders should take to increase support around each factor.	15 minutes

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TOOLS

TOOL 2, continued: ASSESSMENT CHART

Factor	Description	Degree of support in each area (1=low; 4=high)				Specific examples
		1	2	3	4	
A compelling vision of professional learning	High-achieving districts ensure a common shared vision of professional learning as a means of increasing student achievement.					
Standards-driven professional learning	District and school-level professional learning is designed to align with the Standards for Professional Learning.					
A definition of professional learning	District and school leaders work together to define and come to consensus on professional learning.					
Declaring new roles and responsibilities	District and school leaders work together to define leadership and identify new roles and responsibilities to ensure the vision of professional learning is fulfilled.					
Evaluation	District and school leaders establish clearly articulated evaluation systems for professional learning to ensure the designs and implementation achieve the intended results.					
Resources	District and school leaders ensure adequate resources are allocated to professional learning.					

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