



**When Standards for Professional Learning are adopted into policy or written into guidance statements, they help construct the essential pillars of success for every educator.**

**Joellen Killion (joellen.killion@learningforward.org) is senior advisor, author, and consultant at Learning Forward. This column is adapted from the webinar “Standards for Professional Learning at All Levels of the System,” available at [learningforward.org/webinar/standards-for-professional-learning-at-all-levels-of-the-system/](https://learningforward.org/webinar/standards-for-professional-learning-at-all-levels-of-the-system/)**

## LEARNING LANDSCAPE

Joellen Killion

# STANDARDS ARE THE BEDROCK OF A COMPREHENSIVE LEARNING SYSTEM

**I** think of professional learning like the engine of an automobile. It powers movement forward and propels the whole automobile toward the desired destination. Periodically, we tune up that engine. We provide maintenance so that the engine keeps running smoothly, effectively, and efficiently and reliably delivers its drivers and passengers to their destination.

Like an engine, professional learning drives change. Success in all aspects of education depends on continuous change. Nearly every education innovation and initiative depend on human capital — the capacity of members of the education workforce to be at their best in everything they do and to work toward clear and defined outcomes for student success and high levels of performance in their own individual roles as contributors to the education system.

The constant change in the landscape means that schools have an imperative to change to meet the increasingly diverse needs of our students. This imperative requires every educator to be engaged in learning and growing every day. In many fields, professional fields particularly, there are standards that guide practice. These standards establish the expectations of high quality. To ensure high-quality expectations for the continuous learning of the education workforce, leaders in schools and school systems, intermediate and regional agencies, ministries of education, state departments of education, educational partners, and professional associations use standards about professional learning to guide decisions they make about the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning.

Standards are the bedrock of a comprehensive professional learning system. They serve as the infrastructure upon which that comprehensive system is built. Many educational systems have some components of that comprehensive system, and yet not all have all the elements in place.

When a team of practitioners and Learning Forward consultants led an initiative many years ago to explore what constituted a comprehensive professional learning system, we identified 20 core elements. Of those 20, there are just a few that are absolutely essential. They include standards. We can't have a system without standards to guide decisions and define quality. Also among the core elements of a comprehensive professional learning system are a vision and goals, resources, roles and responsibilities for all stakeholders, and ongoing assessment and evaluation of the effectiveness of professional learning.

Together, these elements build a solid infrastructure that allows every partner in the education system to join forces, collaborate, and work with clarity toward excellent outcomes for educators and students. When Standards for Professional Learning are adopted into policy or written into guidance statements, they help construct those pillars of success for every educator. They unify stakeholders' commitment to high expectations and facilitate routine use of the standards to leverage every effort toward the success that we expect for educators and students. ■

