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ONLINE COURSE SPOTLIGHT

Chad Schmidt, instructor, Professional Learning Essentials

LEARN THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SYSTEM

Whether you're new to your role or want to improve your professional learning skills, Learning Forward's four-hour self-paced course, Professional Learning Essentials, can boost your knowledge of the fundamentals of leading high-quality professional learning. It delves into the key attributes of a comprehensive professional learning system and the roles within it.

Through videos, vignettes, readings, and reflection activities, participants learn how to help move their system from a "PD mindset" to one of embedded professional learning. The course explores how to plan, implement, and evaluate professional learning that results in better teaching and improved student outcomes.

Instructor Chad Schmidt provided insight into what participants can glean from this asynchronous learning opportunity.

WHO SHOULD TAKE THIS COURSE?

The course helps participants establish and maintain a vision for professional learning. One of the main goals is to support people who find themselves in a leadership position where they are responsible for coordinating or directing professional learning in a district or system. Often, they're coming from a variety of experiences without a lot of formal knowledge or preparation for high-quality, standards-based professional learning.

Participants might be in district or school leadership positions, like a director, principal, or coordinator, or they might be a teacher leader, such as an instructional coach who designs and facilitates professional learning in their school. Sometimes new leaders are only partially focused on professional learning coordination along with other responsibilities and duties such as coordinating their Multi-Tiered System of Supports or the English learner program.

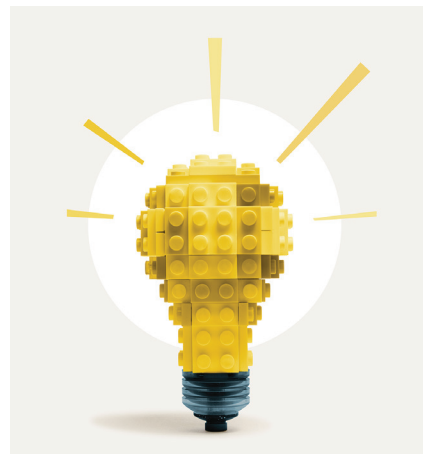
One of our motivations for creating the course was to help ground people in what has changed in our field in the last 20 years. It used to be called staff development, and then it became commonly known as professional development.

We help them understand that professional learning is different than professional development and that professional learning requires a systemic approach. We push them to reflect on and evaluate their current system and how that's similar to or different from the components and practices of a more comprehensive professional learning system.

HOW IS THE COURSE STRUCTURED?

It's eight modules in length, estimated to be slightly less than four hours. It's built in a way that it's asynchronous so that an individual can go through it independently. But going through it with a partner or collaborative team would be valuable so they can check in with each other.

In laying out the foundations of what a comprehensive professional learning system entails, we guide participants through a deep dive into the roles and responsibilities of district and school leaders. We discuss who holds responsibility for the different parts of the system, including guiding and leading professional learning.



The course includes a module focusing on the team cycles of learning. When we built that module in particular, we wanted it to be a practical tool for people in a variety of different positions that they can use and apply in their system fairly quickly.

Reflective practices are built in throughout the course. There are opportunities to assess and reflect on current structures, policies, and practices and reflect on the essential elements of a comprehensive professional learning system.

We prompt learners to think about

different aspects of their systems. For example, how does a specific element look in your system? Where does it already exist? What might be your next move? Reflection is embedded into all modules.

A highlight of the reading is the three core texts we rely on, all published by Learning Forward. Most modules have some introduction of content through a video or reading, then we ask how that looks in their systems. We want participants to think about where the concepts from those resources exist in their system and

identify potential gaps.

ARE THERE ANY PREREQUISITES?

There is no prerequisite. You could start with this course or a different Learning Forward course — other courses will be supplementary and helpful, but not required. The essentials course doesn't rely on knowledge of the Standards for Professional Learning, but it does refer to them multiple times. Whether someone begins with the course on the standards or this one, it really is a choose-your-own-adventure, a challenge by choice. ■

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Professional Learning Essentials

The Intersection of Equity and Professional Learning

Introduction to Standards for Professional Learning



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