

Transcript for Overview of the Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning

Kimberly Audet (Kimberly): Welcome to the *Overview of the Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning* podcast. I am one of your hosts, Kimberly Audet of the Talent Office, at the Connecticut State Department of Education. This fundamental podcast is designed to build an understanding of the components of a professional learning system with specific emphasis on the *Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning*, which was adopted by the State Board of Education in May 2015. It is the first in a series to support the development of high quality professional learning opportunities as well as professional learning systems. Today, I am joined by three of my colleagues.

Jenn Benevento (Jenn): I'm Jenn Benevento with American Federation of Teachers – Connecticut.

Kate Field (Kate): And I'm Kate Field of Connecticut Education Association.

Gary Maynard (Gary): I'm Gary Maynard from Connecticut Federation of School Administrators.

Kimberly: Jenn, Kate, Gary, and I serve on the Professional Learning Advisory Committee, known as the PLAC. In addition to the four of us, we also have members from the RESC Alliance, State Education Resource Center, Connecticut Association of Schools, Connecticut Association of Boards of Education, Connecticut Association of Public School Superintendents, the Office of Early Childhood, Higher Education, and a K-12 school district.

The members of the PLAC focus on developing resources to support high quality professional learning for educators throughout CT. In the PLAC, we always make it a priority to collaborate on all of these efforts. So the four of us not only want to share the CT Standards for Professional Learning but to also describe how important collaboration is to any system, especially in K-12 schools and districts.

Each district is required by statute to have a Professional Development and Evaluation Committee, also known as PDECs. Most PDECs may have focused their work on developing and implementing their district's educator evaluation plan. However, 10-220a subsection b requires that the PDEC consists of both teachers and administrators and other school personnel. There needs to be at least one teacher selected by the exclusive bargaining representation for certified employees and at least one administrator selected by the exclusive bargaining representative. This committee, a group of both teachers and administrators and other staff such as support specialists and paraprofessionals, must develop, evaluate, and annually update a comprehensive local professional development plan. Therefore, collaboration is essential in order to design a high quality professional learning system.

Throughout this podcast we will discuss the importance of collaboration between administrators and teachers, especially on district-level PDECs. When everyone works together everyone gains greater perspective, and in turn grows.

Jenn: Often people think of unions as protecting people but we protect them by helping them grow. One of the ways we support educator growth is to help them understand that they need to build positive relationships with people in their school and district.

Kate: By sharing power, we are all in power. If it is us against them then we will never make progress. In places where this relationship exists, teachers and administrators can do powerful things. PDECs are designed to foster collaborative relationships. If you dedicate time to build these relationships it will help transform school climate and ensure greater success in implementing positive changes.

Gary: It is important to remember that administrators are members of the committee. Not the leader of the committee unless selected as co-chair. It is important to make an effort in the beginning to be collaborative. Showing good faith, respecting people's opinions, and supporting individuals that are selected to serve on the committee are just some ways to build trust. Other ways in the PDEC to build trust is by creating norms collaboratively, in which all members hold each other accountable. Creating the decision-making process and consensus is another important way to build and maintain trust and create an atmosphere supportive of open conversations. As administrators, we coach people, and we build relationships. Ultimately, the kids will be the ones to benefit from the collaboration on the PDEC.

Kimberly: We have specific learning targets for this podcast today, but it is important to remember the critical role the PDEC plays in translating the CT Standards for Professional Learning into action.

We hope you will be able to describe the attributes of standards-based professional learning, define the eight *Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning*, and be able to apply these standards to practice in order to enhance professional growth and student learning.

There are eight *Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning*: Cultural Competence, Learning Communities, Leadership, Resources, Data, Learning Designs, Implementation, and Outcomes. These standards were adopted by the CT State Board of Education in May of 2015. In this overview, we will discuss key elements of each standard and practical examples of what the standard looks like in use. As we address each standard, it is important to remember that the eight standards work co-dependently to support quality professional learning within a system.

The *Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning*, which are based on Learning Forward's Professional Learning Standards, are designed to inform the planning, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of professional learning within a district. Not only do these standards support a high-quality system, but they also define the characteristics of high-quality professional learning opportunities for PK-12 educators. Using these standards to align professional learning in your district will ensure that educators engage in job-embedded and relevant professional learning.

Connecticut's *Definition of Professional Learning* is "High-quality professional learning is a process that ensures all educators have equitable access throughout their career continuum to

relevant, individual and collaborative opportunities to enhance their practice so that all students advance towards positive academic and non-academic outcomes.”

The term educators in this context refers specifically to all certified employees but can also extend more broadly to all school and district staff. A highly effective professional learning system should engage all stakeholders including family and community members.

All eight standards are essential within a professional learning system. They are not presented in any particular order meaning that one is not more important than another. However, when evaluating your district’s current system and looking at areas for improvement, it can be overwhelming if you try to address all eight standards at once. Tackling all eight standards at once can be a daunting task, so take the time to develop a plan to align your professional learning system to the standards, within a realistic timeframe.

Over the next 20 minutes, the four of us will talk more about the key ideas of each standard and share examples of the standard in action.

The first professional learning standard we’ll discuss is cultural competence. If you are familiar with Learning Forward’s standards you may notice that the Cultural Competence standard is unique to Connecticut. The basic idea behind this standard is that the PLAC believed that in order to be truly responsive to the needs of our children, and to sustain a cohesive, supportive educational team, our educators must engage in professional learning that enhances their culturally responsive practices.

Before I share the Cultural Competence standard, I would like to mention that each standard begins with the same stem, which is “Professional learning that enhances both educator practice and outcomes for each and every student...” Therefore, each one of these standards address the professional learning that the educator, the adult, experiences in order to support and advance student growth.

So returning to the Cultural Competence: the standard states professional learning that enhances both educator practice and *outcomes for each and every student...* facilitates educators’ self-examination of their awareness, knowledge, skills, and actions that pertain to culture and how they can develop culturally-responsive strategies to enrich the educational experiences for all students.

As a starting point, we’d like to provide a working definition of culture. We can think of culture as a set of values, beliefs, or behaviors shared by a group of people based on race, geography, socioeconomic status, experiences, or other unifying denominators. Cultural norms guide the ways that individuals assign meaning to, interact with, and adapt to different contexts. Culture is ever evolving and is affected by an individual’s development, experiences, and surroundings.

Jenn: The Cultural Competence standard is really meant to stress a commitment to the continuous pursuit of skills, knowledge, and to invest in the personal growth needed to establish a meaningful connection with people from various cultural backgrounds. I think it is important

that our professional development and evaluation committees sit down and identify a strategic plan to address the fact their teachers may not reflect the student population.

Kate: So Jenn you're suggesting that the committees' conversations should be facilitated around cultural beliefs and values and unconscious biases and how to design professional learning to support educators in their understanding of one's own cultural identity, biases, prejudices, and experiences of both privilege and marginalization. The professional learning system should provide opportunities for reinforcing the commitment to the continuous pursuit of skills, knowledge, and personal growth needed to establish a meaningful connection with people from various cultural backgrounds.

Jenn: Yes, Kate, I think that educators should work together to engage teachers in meaningful conversations about their role in advancing racial, economic, and social justice. All districts should work with their students, teachers, administrators, and community members to engage all stakeholders in creating diverse, culturally sensitive, and enriching educational experiences that are equitable for all students.

Gary: Jen and Kate, I agree with you both on ways to build Cultural Competence. Building Cultural Competence should be a twofold mission for administrators. The first area would center around recruiting and hiring staff with diversity in mind for school districts. It may be difficult at times to have PDEC teams work together on diversity without having a diverse staff to discuss cultural beliefs. The administrator also works with the PDEC members together to engage teachers in conversation about their personal role to address racial, economic and social justice.

Kate: And Gary, we shouldn't forget that actively recruiting with diversity in mind for things like PDECs and TEAM mentors will also have exponential benefits. Creating a diverse group means changing our mentality from only asking for volunteers to actively engaging and inviting people with a wide array of different beliefs and perspectives. You might think that people are not involved because they don't want to be but the real reason may be that no one ever asked them.

Kimberly: The next standard is Learning Communities. The standard states Professional learning that enhances both educator practice and outcomes for each and every student...occurs within learning communities committed to continuous growth, collective responsibility, family and community engagement and alignment of district and school vision and goals.

Learning communities is defined as groups of educators, families and community members who collaborate together to identify and implement teaching and learning strategies and practices that enhance the growth of educators and the academic and non-academic growth of students. Research shows a standards-based professional learning system that encourages groups of teachers to support, reflect, observe each other teach, share ideas, and push each other to become better educators benefits the entire school community, especially students.

Kate: A collaborative school culture rooted in continuous learning provides a strong foundation for effective teaching and increased student achievement and emotional well-being. PDECs across Connecticut are beginning to incorporate exciting professional learning practices that

promote strong learning communities and increased collaboration among teachers. A vibrant learning community – comprised of educators, school and district leaders, students’ families, and community leaders –committed to high-quality professional learning and aligned to the professional learning standards promotes continuous growth and benefits the students.

Gary: Kate, it is extremely important to create a strong and effective adult collaboration model for effective teaching and increased student achievement. Committee norms should be created to allow for honest and rich discussions to occur with positive feedback for an effective Professional Learning Community.

Kate: Exactly! Professional Development and Evaluation Committees (PDECs) looking to revise existing or create new professional learning plans, should consider how best to incorporate sustained and on-going opportunities for teachers to collaborate in meaningful and innovative ways. Teachers are a wealth of knowledge and support and so too are parents and community members. Rather than spend a lot of money to bring in an external expert, there are so many opportunities to call on teachers and other stakeholder groups to be leaders and to share their expertise by leading professional learning activities.

One of our districts has moved away from the use of complementary observers and has instead introduced peer coaching, which they use not to evaluate teachers, but to provide ongoing constructive feedback and ample opportunities to continually reflect on and refine teaching practices in a supportive environment.

Jenn: No matter what strategies a district uses to engage adults in collaboration, learning communities require a commitment to continuous growth, collective responsibility, and the alignment of goals among all stakeholders – educators, school and district leaders, family members, and community leaders.

Kimberly: The Leadership standard states Professional learning that enhances both educator practice and outcomes for each and every student...requires and develops leadership capacity at all levels to advocate for and create systems for professional learning.

To have a quality professional learning system, a district and school must have leaders, which include building leaders but also teacher leaders, to steer and guide the work of the learning community.

Leadership is the act of motivating and guiding others toward a specific goal. In professional learning, the goal of leadership is to create, sustain and advance teaching and learning strategies and practices that enhance educator practice and student growth.

Jenn: Leaders can be found anywhere - in the classroom, school and district levels and are not reliant on titles or job positions. In fact by including educators, administrators, and other stakeholders in leadership positions, it allows for the development of professional learning that is well-informed and comprehensive in nature for all school personnel. From participating in a district PDEC to becoming a mentor for a new teacher, there are many opportunities to recruit, develop and strengthen educator leaders.

Gary: The PDEC provides an opportunity for leadership development among educators. For administrators, one of your roles should be to create an atmosphere of trust where people feel valued and empowered to step up and be leaders. All members of the PDEC have equal voice and are partners in supporting teaching and learning. The administrator is a member of the PDEC who needs to be open to members serving in leadership roles.

Jenn: The model that the PDEC provides is a useful one for the entire school community. Leadership roles should be available to all members of the school community. Part of the PDECs responsibilities is to design professional learning that expands leadership opportunities to a wider audience.

Kimberly: The Resource standard states *Professional learning that enhances both educator practice and outcomes for each and every student...requires purposeful planning for the identification, coordination, monitoring, evaluation, and equitable use and allocation of resources to support educator learning.*

Resources are the various means and supports needed to enhance the growth of educators and the academic and nonacademic growth of students. Resources include funding, people, time, technology and materials.

Resources is the one standard most often missing when PDECs meet to create their Professional Learning Plan. Without funding, people, time, technology, and materials, professional learning can become a “one and done” type model where the learning is infrequent and irrelevant to educators. So in order to manage professional resources effectively, it is necessary to prioritize the needs, allocate and coordinate, and monitor the use of these resources.

Kate: One of the first steps that PDECs must understand is what resources are available to them in planning professional learning. While that seems obvious, sometimes this is overlooked, and as a result, many PDECs end up creating a professional learning plan that is unattainable because they were not aware of the district and school resources. One of the ways to avoid this is to make sure PDECs know what the professional learning budget and have input into the budget so that they can create a realistic plan based on existing resources.

Gary: Kate, you are correct about funding the PDEC to be successful. The appropriate funding is a key factor to create a successful Professional Learning Community. Providing a needs assessment from the PDEC and the staff will greatly direct and enhance the need for the resources needed to be allocated. Resources can be gained by carefully reallocating funds that may no longer be needed or adjust funds to meet other areas of focus.

Jenn: I agree, that is a great point. Resources means more than just a budget, however. It’s also important that PDECs look at the calendar and the district provided time to creatively plan flexible professional learning activities throughout the year. This provides an opportunity to utilize the time and maximize learning to create a continuous cycle of professional learning.

Kate: Gary and Jenn, I agree with you both. Time, space, and access to information are also all critically important resources if PDECs are to create comprehensive professional learning plans that genuinely reflect the needs of their teachers and students.

Kimberly: The next standard is Data. The standard states Professional learning that enhances both educator practice and outcomes for each and every student...requires the use of both quantitative and qualitative student, educator and system data to plan, implement, monitor and assess professional learning. Data refers to the evidence gathered that can be used to plan, implement, monitor, assess, and refine professional learning designs and practices. When qualitative and quantitative data are used, educators and students experience high-quality teaching and engage in high-quality learning.

Jenn: In terms of data, PDECs should align their Professional Learning activities with the collective and individual needs of teachers and students based on student achievement data, observation of teacher professional practice, staff and parent surveys. The important thing is the use of multiple sources and types of data offers a more balanced and comprehensive analysis of student, educator and system performance.

Kate: In addition to using Student Data, eliciting educators' learning needs is essential for meaningful professional learning. Consider multiple ways to assess Educators interests and needs such as surveys, focus groups, World Café, Educator Evaluation data, and lunch and learns. Based on this data, the PDEC can create opportunities for educators to tailor their experiences and share it with their colleagues.

Jenn: I also think it is important to support PDEC members to know how to analyze and use data to inform program improvement. PDECs should think about different ways to capture any data or feedback related to Professional Learning because sometimes it is difficult to see the direct impact on professional learning.

Gary: The challenge of the PDEC members is not only the use of both quantitative and qualitative data. It is reviewing current practices and reflecting on what is most effective. Is the data accurate and useful? This may be the most important area of need for professional learning.

Kimberly: The next standard is Learning Designs. Professional learning that enhances both educator practice and outcomes for each and every student...integrates research on effective adult learning and uses flexible learning designs to achieve intended outcomes. The important thing to note with this standard is that effective learning designs support change in knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practice. Therefore the design of professional learning can integrate active engagement, modeling, reflection, application, assessment, and ongoing feedback and support.

Not all teachers have the same goals and professional learning needs, and therefore should be allowed some flexibility to design a professional learning plan that is meaningful and relevant to them. While some professional learning may need to be in a whole group setting for all educators, most of it should be designed to support individual and small group professional

growth; keeping in mind that individual and small group learning objectives should be aligned to district and school goals.

Kate: Effective professional learning should be based on flexible learning designs rooted in how adults learn. Busy adults want to learn new things as efficiently as possible and also want new learning to result in something immediately useful. A professional learning plan that is, to a large extent, rooted in teacher choice is the most effective approach.

Jenn: Choice is important. PDECs should offer teachers a variety of professional learning options over the course of the year to allow educators to personalize learning that is aligned to their individual and school goals. Teachers could, for example, participate in instructional rounds, engage in regular lesson study, or conduct a series of peer observations.

Gary: The culture of trust is an essential need for effective professional learning and learning designs to take place. We want teachers to make professional learning choices that meet their individual needs for growth and development. Feeling comfortable in making their choices will result in a successful experience.

Kimberly: The Implementation standard states Professional learning that enhances both educator practice and outcomes for each and every student...applies change research and uses tools to identify and support the developmental stages of change and ensures the fidelity of implementation.

Within this standard, implementation is defined as the process of identifying, incorporating, monitoring, and continually refining professional learning that helps educators enhance their practice and support student growth.

Implementation of an effective Professional Learning system requires the continual support of all involved from teachers to district leaders as well as school board members and community members. An effective system is adaptable, continually assessed, refined based on feedback, and reinforces long-term learning for sustainable implementation.

Jenn: PDECs should devote as much time and attention to planning the implementation of the new initiative as they do in the initiative itself. Implementing a new initiative requires time and support for educators to embed it in their practice. Good implementation requires appropriate planning and resources. Supporting change includes providing and safeguarding time that allows for educators to practice, give and receive feedback, reflect, and then refine their skills.

Kate: Too often, we expect educators to walk out of a workshop and automatically be proficient. We would not expect this of students, and it doesn't work that way for adults, either. Educators need time to practice new skills or adapt them to different circumstances. It is important to remember that true professional growth and learning is a continuum where craft is cultivated, not manufactured.

Gary: Jen and Kate, you are correct in that educators need time and support for successful implementation, and administrators have a key role in that. Proper implementation of a new

initiative is essential for success. The staff should be aware of the planning that has occurred in this process. They need to know how their feedback has been embedded in the professional learning plan. The initiative will take time to implement and evolve with feedback and time. Resources need to be made available to meet various plans while time is provided to reflect on practices.

Kimberly: The Outcomes standard states Professional learning that enhances both educator practice and outcomes for each and every student...is aligned with district/school goals, relevant Connecticut standards, and other agreed-upon standards for educator practice and student growth.

Outcomes are the expected results of professional learning. It describes the essential learning that occurred and, within time and opportunity, that can be translated into practice. Outcomes can be identified for educator practice as well as student growth.

Before measuring the outcomes of annual professional learning activities, it is important to look at the PL system as a whole and to understand the extent to which it is aligned with the *Connecticut Standards for Professional Learning* and school, district, and educator goals. School districts with high functioning PDECs have identified objectives aligned to the standards, created sequenced professional learning activities linked to the objectives, and conducted measurements to determine the effectiveness and whether the objectives were ultimately met. Critical to this process is ongoing reflection and use of one year's outcomes to help inform the following year's goals.

Kate: Evaluating the outcomes of professional learning is no simple undertaking, and results may take several years to be fully evident. Therefore, districts should not rely on any single instrument of measurement or put too much weight on one year's worth of data. Surveys, while seemingly the easiest way to measure outcomes, tend to be overused, are often poorly designed, and generally yield very low response rates.

Jenn: Similar to what we discussed in Learning Designs, districts, therefore, should consider multiple ways of measuring the outcomes of their annual professional learning plan, including focus groups, learning walks, teacher evaluation data, and "world café" type feedback sessions. Using the same methods for multiple years in a row will provide ample data to track the long-term outcomes of sustained professional learning initiatives.

Gary: The outcomes will need to be a collaboration of all individuals who planned and implemented the programs. All factors need to be reviewed to assess what worked and where adjustments or training may need to take place. Have students demonstrated growth in both academic and non-academic measures? Are students benefitting and how can you quantify that?

Kimberly: It is important to remember that all eight standards work together in a professional learning system. Members of the PDEC should know the standards and be able to connect that within their district's context.

When considering how the standards influence the work of the district and the PDEC, it is important to remember that the standards should be reflected in a shared vision, the school and district professional learning plan, in the norms and values of your PDEC, and serve as the foundation for your educator evaluation and support plan. With that being said, I would like to thank my Jenn, Kate, and Gary for joining today.

Jenn, Gary, and Kate: Thank you for having us.

Kimberly: If you want more information please contact the Talent Office, 860-713-6820.