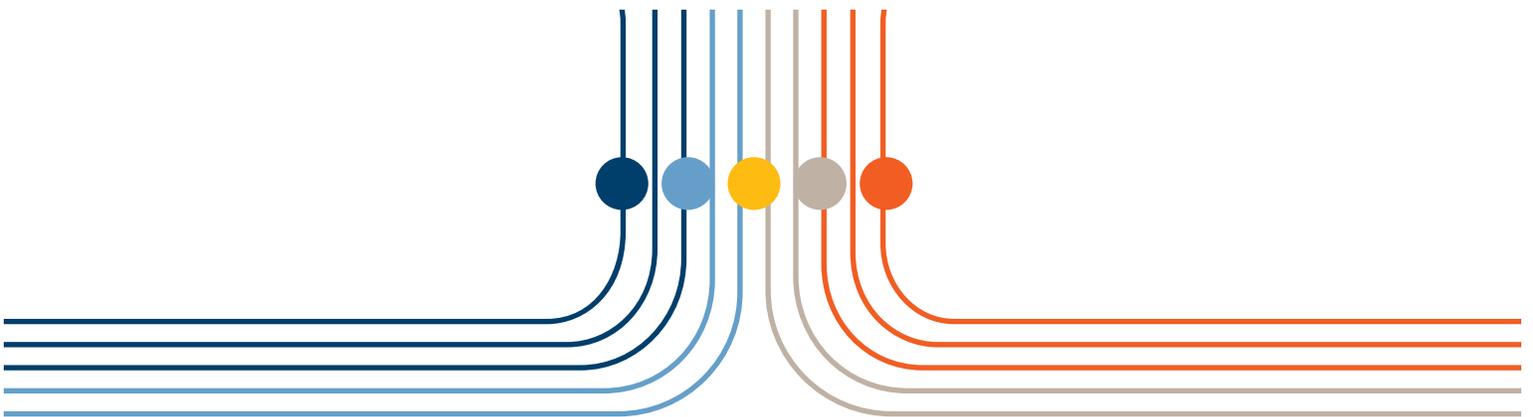


THE STATE OF TEACHER PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Results from a Nationwide Survey



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH





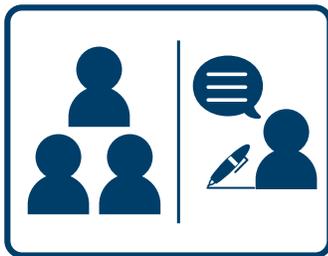
KEY FINDINGS

Teacher Perceptions:



Teachers report that leaders in their schools and systems are committed to professional learning.

Teachers report that their schools use student achievement data to plan professional learning, but they don't use a variety of data to assess its effectiveness.



Teachers are not deeply involved in decisions about their own professional learning.

Teachers report that they are not provided adequate time during the school day to follow-up on their professional learning by practicing and applying new skills in the classroom.





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Effective teacher learning is vital to student success. Teachers who continually improve their practice by using data to inform instructional decisions see improved results for their students. In the tradition of supporting effective professional learning, in 2016 Corwin launched a nationwide survey in partnership with Learning Forward and the National Education Association (NEA) to ascertain the state of teacher professional learning and how to best support educators where they are.

Teachers responded to a 60-item survey measuring how the professional learning they experience in their schools and districts aligns with the attributes known to improve teaching practice and student achievement expressed in the Standards for Professional Learning. The results from this nationwide survey indicate that, while there is cause for much optimism, there is also much work to be done to support teachers in their professional growth.

More than 6,300 teachers from across the United States responded to the survey. The results provide insight into how teachers view their own learning and the supports they receive. Teachers indicate that school and district leaders in their systems are committed to professional learning and the professional growth of teachers, but don't necessarily include them in decision-making about it. They report that while student outcome data drive the planning of professional learning, data don't seem to be used as much to assess the effectiveness of professional learning. Teachers agree that practicing and applying new skills in the classroom are seen as important in their schools, yet few of them report receiving adequate time for job-embedded professional learning, such as opportunities to get or give actionable feedback through observing a colleague teaching or being observed while teaching a class.

The recommendations in this report include giving teachers increased decision making in their professional learning, using a variety of data sources to plan and assess professional learning, and providing increased support for continuous, job-embedded professional learning.





What Is Effective Professional Learning?

For school-based educators, collaborative, job-embedded, standards-driven professional learning is the single most accessible means they have to develop the new knowledge, skills, and practices necessary to better meet the diverse learning needs of their students. Educators who are committed to effective professional learning engage in a cycle of continuous improvement in which they are active partners in determining the focus of their learning, including how their learning occurs and how they evaluate its effectiveness. This increases the quality of educator learning, improves the performance of all educators, and increases student learning. Increased educator effectiveness makes possible a shift from current reality to the preferred outcomes of enhanced student-learning results—a goal to which all educators subscribe.

In 2011, Learning Forward, in collaboration with 40 professional associations and education organizations, developed the most recent iteration of the Standards for Professional Learning. The Standards describe the essential attributes of professional learning that lead to





effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and improved student results. The Standards make explicit that the purpose of professional learning is for educators to develop the knowledge, skills, practices, and dispositions they need to help students perform at higher levels.

The seven Standards (see Figure 1) represent the essential elements of professional learning that function ***in synergy*** to enable educators to increase both their effectiveness and student results. Implementation of each Standard is required to realize the full potential of educator professional learning.

When professional learning incorporates the indicators of effectiveness defined in the Standards, educator effectiveness and student learning increases. Numerous research studies over the last 20 years confirm that there is a strong relationship between teacher practice and student learning. Studies also suggest that professional learning positively influences teacher practice. Research studies examining school and district leadership conclude that there is a relationship between leadership practices, teaching effectiveness, and student learning. Some studies have also found a relationship between professional learning and student achievement.

Many studies of school improvement and education reform name professional learning as one of the top components of reform efforts. The body of research about effective schools identifies collaboration and professional learning as two characteristics that consistently appear in schools that substantially increase student learning. In fact, high-quality professional learning—when thoughtfully conceived, well-designed, and supported—is at the heart all successful educational improvement efforts. And, according to one well-known educational expert, research consistently finds that significant improvements in education rarely occur in the absence of professional learning.

But understanding what high-quality educator professional learning looks like does not guarantee that teachers experience it. How does the professional learning that educators experience in their schools and districts measure up to the ideal set by the Standards?

In the interest of starting a national conversation about the type and quality of professional learning teachers experience, Corwin partnered with the National Education Association (NEA) and Learning Forward to invite teachers nationwide to voice their opinions about their professional learning.





Figure 1. Standards for Professional Learning

Learning Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.
Data	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Source: www.learningforward.org/standards



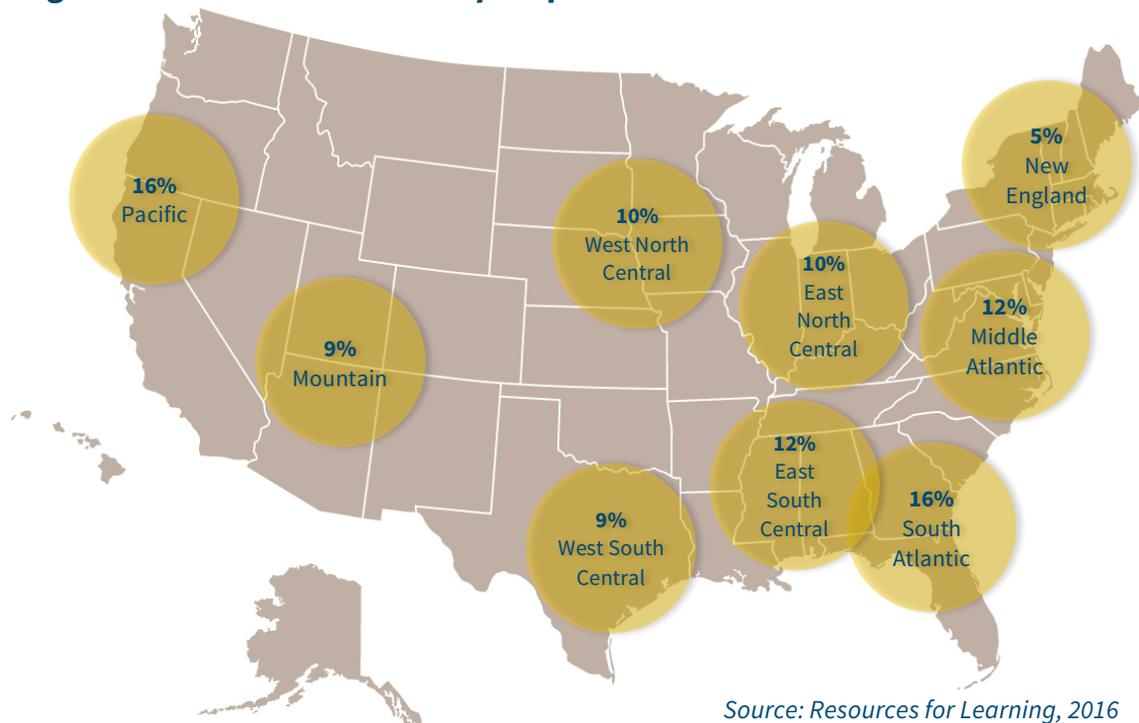
METHODOLOGY

Survey Respondents

In winter 2016, over 6,300 educators nationwide (see **Figure 2**) completed an online survey focused on their professional learning. While the survey was not designed to create a scientifically representative sample of the entire national teacher population, it is noteworthy that the teachers who responded to the survey resembled the national population on several key demographics. A majority of respondents were white/Caucasian (73%), 60% worked at high-poverty schools (i.e., most students receive free or reduced price meals), and nearly two-thirds taught in a core-content area (e.g., math, science, social studies, language arts). More elementary school teachers responded (46%) than high school teachers (24%) or middle school (18%) teachers, and 96% worked at a public, rather than a private, school. The vast majority were female (83%), which reflects the national population of teachers (84%).

Respondents were fairly evenly distributed throughout the United States, as shown in **Figure 2**. The Pacific and South Atlantic Regions provided slightly higher numbers of responses, while the New England region provided a slightly lower number of responses.

Figure 2. Distribution of Survey Respondents

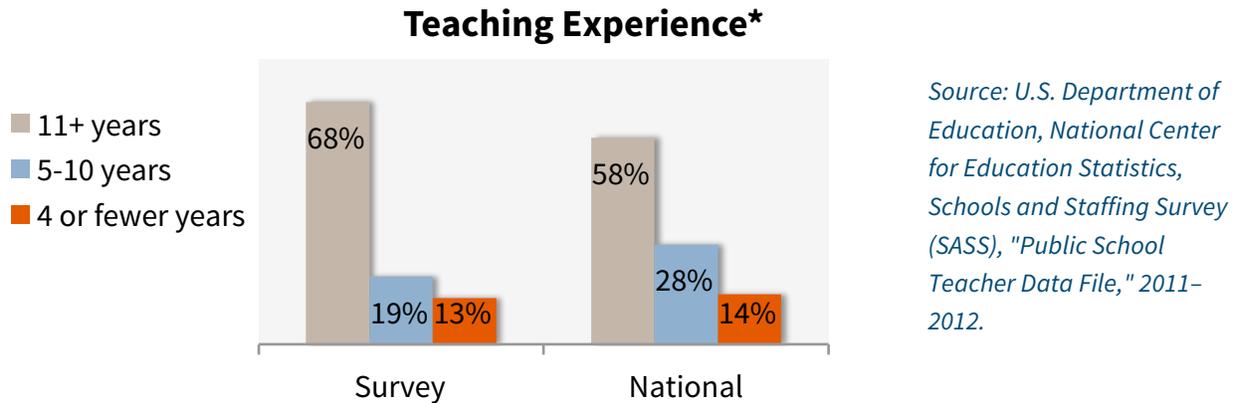


Source: Resources for Learning, 2016



The number of years of teaching experience ranged from less than a year to more than 25 years. **Figure 3** depicts the distribution of years of experience in the survey sample compared to national averages.

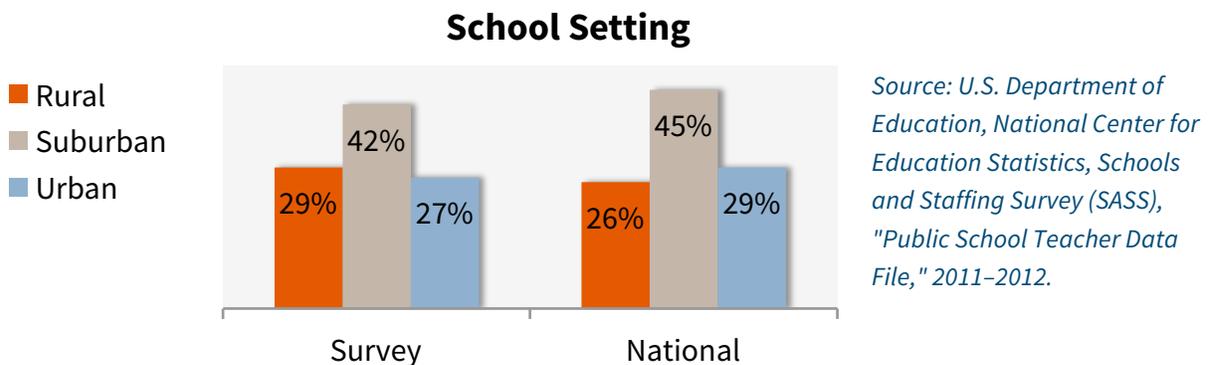
Figure 3. Teaching Experience Compared to National Averages



*National data categories vary slightly from survey data categories. NCES categorizes teacher experience as "less than 4", "4-9", "10-14", and "15+".

The distribution of survey respondents was similar to national averages in terms of school setting, with 29% reporting that they teach in a rural setting compared to 26% nationally, 42% indicating that they teach in a suburban setting compared to 45% nationally, and 27% indicating that they work in an urban setting compared to 29% nationally. **Figure 4** illustrates the similarity in distribution across school settings in both the survey sample and nationally.

Figure 4. School Settings Compared to National Averages





The survey sample is also similar to national data on several key variables, such as the overall distribution of teacher experience, proportion of female to male teachers, and the proportions of teachers who work in rural, suburban, and urban settings. Public school teachers and teachers with more than 10 years of experience are slightly overrepresented in the survey sample, while mid-career teachers are slightly underrepresented.

Survey Instrument

The survey was created using a combination of researcher-developed questions and the Standards Assessment Inventory to learn more about how teachers view their professional learning. The Standards Assessment Inventory (SAI) is a 50-item survey developed by Learning Forward to measure teacher perceptions of the extent to which their professional learning aligns with the Standards for Professional Learning. States, regional service centers, and school systems use this valid and reliable tool to identify areas of strength and need related to their professional learning, as well as to guide the planning, facilitation, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning in order to maximize its impact and investment.

The SAI includes 7–8 items aligned to each of the seven Standards, with indicators covering the three key areas of focus for each Standard, as outlined in **Figure 1**. Respondents rate their levels of agreement with each item on a scale of one (“Never”) to five (“Always”). For example, to measure alignment with the Learning Designs Standard, teachers are asked how much they agree with a series of statements (e.g., “The use of technology is evident in my school’s professional learning”). Examining the average responses under each standard helps identify areas of perceived strength and perceived weakness in professional learning. The SAI yields a score for each individual item and an average score for each standard. An average score of 4.0–5.0 on an indicator indicates that professional learning related to that standard is “skillful.” An average of 3.0–3.9 suggests that professional learning related to that standard is “progressing.” And an average of 1.0–2.9 suggests that professional learning related to that standard “needs attention.”

In addition to the complete SAI items, researchers included several additional questions that probed further into issues such as the setting and the amount of time typically devoted per week for professional learning, as well as demographic data designed to provide differentiation of results by region, experience level of respondents, etc.





FINDINGS

Teachers report that leaders in their schools and systems are committed to professional learning.



When asked whether they agree that their school leaders “regard professional learning as a top priority for all staff” and “speak about the important relationship between improved student achievement and professional learning,” educator responses average 3.7 on a scale of 1.0–5.0 for both items. Teachers recognize that their school leaders advocate for resources that support their professional learning. Additionally, teachers tend to agree that their school leaders have confidence that all staff members are capable of being professional learning leaders. This finding is encouraging because a strong professional environment that includes a supportive principal is key to continued teacher growth beyond the first few years of teaching.

Teachers tend to agree that their school leaders have confidence that all staff members are capable of being professional learning leaders.





Teachers report that their schools use student achievement data to plan professional learning, but they don't use a variety of data to assess its effectiveness.



With an average score of 3.4, teachers appear to largely agree that a variety of student achievement data informs professional learning for school improvement. Although it is commendable that schools have increased their use of student outcome data in their school improvement efforts, professional learning should also include data related to what teachers need to improve their instructional practices as well.

Furthermore, teachers do not necessarily see their schools as committed to using a variety of data in planning and evaluating professional learning. Many teachers indicate that their backgrounds, experience levels, or learning needs are not considered in the planning or design of their professional learning. Teacher responses are fairly low when asked whether professional learning programs in their schools are continuously evaluated to ensure quality results. Teachers indicate that assessment of a professional learning experience is not even determined prior to the experience.

Many teachers indicate that their backgrounds, experience levels, or learning needs are not considered in the planning or design of their professional learning.

Finally, teachers indicate only lukewarm levels of agreement that their school, “has a consistent professional learning plan in place for three to five years.” On average, their response to this survey item is a 2.5 of possible 5.0 points.

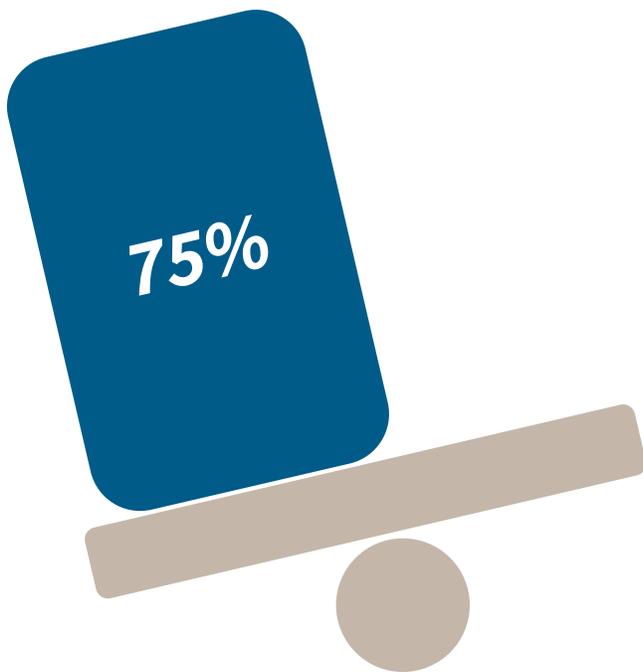




Teachers do not appear to be deeply involved in decisions about their own professional learning.

Just over half of teachers surveyed indicate that they have “some say” in professional learning decisions, and nearly 20% indicate that they have no input at all. Teachers overwhelmingly (75%) identify principals and district leaders as the primary decision-makers regarding professional learning, while only 4% of respondents named teachers as the primary decision-makers.

Additionally, teachers report that professional learning expenses are not necessarily openly discussed at schools, and teachers do not feel particularly involved in the decision-making about the allocation of learning resources.



Identify principals and district leaders as the primary decision-makers regarding professional learning





Teachers report that they are not provided adequate time during the school day to follow up on their professional learning by practicing and applying new skills in the classroom.



Although they express a strong preference for on-campus collaborative learning during the workday, just 25% of teacher respondents indicate that the majority of their professional learning takes place during school hours. Collaborative learning during the workday can occur in many ways, including teacher teams getting together to problem-solve or plan lessons, and job-embedded, sustained professional learning such as coaching. Teachers recognize the importance of practicing and applying new skills with students in the classroom, yet few teachers report receiving adequate time for this type of job-embedded professional learning, such as getting or giving actionable feedback to assure implementation of new skills with fidelity by through classroom observations. When asked to what extent they agree that they “give frequent feedback to colleagues,” teachers’ level of agreement averages 2.8, which indicates an area needing attention.

Nearly half of survey respondents report that a majority of their professional learning experiences occur on in-service days or in the summer, and nearly 25% report spending fewer than 1 hour each week on professional learning. These findings conflict with the recommendations made by Learning Forward and other professional educator organizations. According to the U.S. Department of Education, ongoing, high quality, job-embedded professional development is clearly tied to improving instruction. Job-embedded professional learning provides a direct connection between what is happening in the classroom and the professional development a teacher experiences.





RECOMMENDATIONS

- ✓ **Provide opportunities for continuous, job-embedded professional learning.** Effective job-embedded professional learning connects the acquisition of new knowledge, skills, and practices with their application in daily practice—encouraging teacher self-reflection and collaboration with peers. One type of job-embedded professional learning is instructional coaching in which a coach gives ongoing support and feedback to the teacher in the form of modeling, demonstrations, observations, and follow-up conversations about teaching strategies. Another type of job-embedded professional learning is participation in professional learning communities or school-based teams, which allow teachers time to collaborate with colleagues, think about their instruction, talk about new strategies to test in the classroom, and share back to the community.
- ✓ **Use a variety of sources of data to plan and assess professional learning.** Experts recommend that school leaders “begin with the end in mind.” Student learning is the ultimate goal, and therefore, it is encouraging when teachers see student achievement data being used to plan professional learning. This practice of data-driven decision-making can extend to teacher learning, as well. Both student and teacher implementation data can and should inform objectives for professional learning, and ongoing monitoring can reveal whether teachers are effectively applying this new learning in the classroom.
- ✓ **Include teachers in decision making about their own professional learning.** School leaders are faced with the challenge of providing effective professional learning for all of their staff. At the same time, good leaders build the capacity of those around them. Teachers want to be decision-makers in their professional learning and growth. Many teachers already perceive that their school leaders consider them capable of being professional leaders and trust them to contribute to their own learning. As an acknowledgement of this trust, school leaders can invite teachers to reflect on their practice, listen deeply to their concerns, and bring them to the table to consider solutions, with a focus on collaboration and improved student learning.





About the Partners

Corwin

Corwin, a SAGE company, is the premier provider of professional learning products and services that equip educators to improve teaching and learning. Corwin has a long-standing tradition of advocating for effective professional learning and offers print books and ebooks, digital products, and on-site consulting services for all types of educators at all stages of their careers. Corwin resources are authored by experts on the topics most relevant to education; formatted for hands-on, practical guidance; research-based and peer reviewed for quality; and designed for professional learning. www.corwin.com

Learning Forward

Learning Forward's mission is to build the capacity of leaders to establish and sustain highly effective professional learning. Our 13,000 members represent every position in the education field, and we have more than 40 state and regional affiliated worldwide. Learning Forward established the *Standards for Professional Learning* to support school systems in planning, organizing, and implementing comprehensive systems of professional learning. Learning Forward publishes research and practical tools for educational leaders, and provides learning experiences focused on creating and sustain cultures of continuous improvement.

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National Education Association (NEA)

The National Education Association (NEA), the nation's largest professional employee organization, is committed to advancing the cause of public education. NEA's more than 3 million members work at every level of education—from pre-school to university graduate programs and are deeply committed to the success of every student. Joined by parents, students, elected officials and community leaders all across the country, NEA members are raising their hands in support of student success, accomplished and empowered educators, and dynamic collaboration. We believe great public schools are a basic right for every student. NEA has affiliate organizations in every state and in more than 14,000 communities across the United States. www.nea.org

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