WANTED: 100 schools to join the Learning School Alliance

NSDC recently announced a critical initiative to further the fulfillment of NSDC’s purpose. The Learning School Alliance will be a network of 100 model schools committed to professional development practices that promote student achievement. Educators from these 100 schools will support one another in applying the principles and standards of professional development grounded in NSDC’s definition of professional learning, NSDC’s Standards for Staff Development, and the principles for professional learning described in The Learning Educator: A New Era for Professional Learning (NSDC, 2007).

Participants in the Alliance will learn together in their own schools, with other schools through webinars and facilitated conversations, and at face-to-face meetings. They will share their goals, their progress, and, over time, their results. NSDC Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh noted, “These schools will serve as models of what effective professional learning looks like in practice and the impact it can have on students.” NSDC facilitates a similar effort with 12 Under 12, a network of schools that committed in 2002 to meet the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act before 2014.

The goals of the Alliance are:
• To improve the professional practice of the educators who participate, and as a result, to increase the academic success of the students in their schools;
• To hold up a mirror to professional learning and learn from the decisions and actions of the participants;
• To make the case that schools where educators learn are places where students excel;
• To recognize and celebrate the commitment of educators to professional learning in service to their students; and
• To generate national attention to the importance of educator learning in schools.

To those schools that become members of the Learning School Alliance, NSDC will provide tools and materials, coaching, facilitation, a dedicated web site, and network meetings at NSDC conferences.

HOW TO APPLY

The application and more information are at www.nsdc.org/alliance/. Send questions to lsa@nsdc.org.

Applications are due by March 31. The primary requirement is a commitment to NSDC’s standards and principles. The application must present evidence that the school is serious about increasing the capacity of teachers to meet the needs of students. Collaborative learning requires time to learn, connect, and collaborate with other schools. Potential applicants must be supported by their school district, philosophically and financially, and have access to high-speed Internet connections.

THANKS TO THE SPONSORS OF NSDC’S 40TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE

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My Learning Plan
• Virginia Staff Development Council
• The Washington Post
• Washington Teachers’ Union
OUR PURPOSE CAN BUILD LEADERS

Show me an effective school or effective school system that does not have an effective leader, and I will show you a school or system where an effective leader recently left. And I will show you a school or system that will not remain effective for very long.

Anyone care to argue that premise? If so, you’ll need to take on NSDC’s strategic plan as well, because it clearly emphasizes the critical role that leadership must play if we are to realize our purpose.

One of our beliefs is that “sustainable learning cultures require skillful leadership.” Strategic Priority 4 is Developing School Leaders. The assumption underlying that priority is that “knowledge, skill, and will of school leaders are essential to improving professional learning and student achievement.” So it’s clear that our strategic plan places great emphasis on leadership.

Let me hasten to add that the leadership we need must come from many places. Positional power is not sufficient. Much of the leadership we must have is not tied to authority or title. Instead, it can come from anyone who is compelled by NSDC’s purpose to lead from wherever they are. The teacher, the professor, the professional development specialist, the regional service center provider—all can exert influence in his or her daily work.

I will say, however, that while positional power is not sufficient, it is necessary. If for no other reason, let’s acknowledge that principals and superintendents exert a great deal of control over resources such as time, money, and focus. So it is in everyone’s interest for those who lead from positions of authority to do so with an understanding of the critical role that professional learning plays in school improvement.

That’s why, in the next year, I want NSDC to increase the number of principals and superintendents who understand our purpose and see how NSDC can help them be more successful in their leadership roles.

As the Board and I work with Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh to set and meet high goals throughout this year, I ask all members to share with me ideas on how we might attract more school administrators to NSDC and to our work.

Wouldn’t it be great if, over the next few years, we hear more and more stories recounting how principals and superintendents have become champions of effective professional learning, and how, as a result, their students are learning more than ever and their teachers are deriving greater satisfaction from their work?

Let me end with a challenge.

Did you know NSDC offers free three-month memberships to encourage educators to give us a try? Think about the principals and superintendents you know who would benefit from an alliance with NSDC. Sign them up online for a free membership in NSDC at www.nsdc.org/commerce/taste.cfm. If each of you can give away three memberships in the next 30 days, we will have taken a very big step in enlisting principals and superintendents in our purpose to create schools where every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.
FRESH LOOK, MORE OPTIONS AT www.nsdc.org

NSDC recently unveiled a fresh new look for www.nsdc.org. Designed to make NSDC's hundreds of pages easier to locate, the web site also includes a front-page animation to highlight NSDC’s latest news and resources. Dates and deadlines are listed on the home page to ensure that members don’t overlook important application opportunities or events.

In addition, NSDC is publishing a new blog as part of the web site. The blog will feature multiple authors, including Hayes Mizell and Stephanie Hirsh, along with other staff members and NSDC friends. Look for new posts each week. NSDC invites readers to share comments on the blog entries in order to build a lively discussion among members.

NEW PUBLICATION FOR POLICY MAKERS

NSDC’s strategic goal of affecting policy around the most powerful forms of professional development recently took a giant leap with the launch of a new newsletter. Made possible through funding from College Board, NSDC Policy Points will be sent to members of Congress and their staffs to help them develop greater understanding of government’s role in supporting teacher learning that directly affects student achievement. Each issue will examine a specific aspect of professional development and its relevance to policy making.

The quarterly newsletter will be publicly accessible online at www.nsdc.org/news/policypoints/ for members to read and download. NSDC invites members to share these newsletters with state-level policy makers and other key decision makers within their own spheres of influence.

The first issue, published in January, establishes the importance of professional development for our nation and illuminates what we can learn from high-performing school systems in the U.S. and other countries. Future issues will explore NSDC’s definition of professional learning and the link between professional learning and student achievement.

NSDC CALENDAR

March 31: Deadline for applying to join the Learning School Alliance. www.nsdc.org/alliance/

April 1: Deadline for submitting nominations for 2009 NSDC Awards. www.nsdc.org/getinvolved/awards.cfm

April 30: Deadline for early registration for NSDC Summer Conference for Teacher Leaders and the Administrators Who Support Them.

May 1: New NSDC catalog mails to members. Save money in this year’s budget to make purchases!


July: Registration opens for NSDC’s 40th Annual Conference in St. Louis, Mo., in December 2009.


Dec. 5-9: NSDC’s 41st Annual Conference, St. Louis, Mo.
Foundation set to award grants and scholarships

Impacting the Future Now Foundation is preparing to award its second group of grants and scholarships, thanks to the generosity of foundation donors. The foundation raised $21,416.88 for the 2008 fiscal year. More than $11,000 will be used for scholarships to the NSDC Academy, for a principal to attend NSDC conferences, for the E6 Grant, and other initiatives identified by the foundation’s board.

The funds include more than $6,700 raised at the IFN silent auction at the NSDC Annual Conference. Thanks go to the former NSDC board members who organized the auction and to conference goers who bought items. Their names, and those of donors to the foundation, are listed here. We have made every effort to provide a complete list of 2008 donors and sincerely regret any errors or omissions. Please call 513-523-2283 with corrections.

The foundation is dedicated to growing a new generation of leaders who act on their belief that continuous learning by educators is essential to improving the achievement of all students.

To learn more, visit www.nsdc.org/getinvolved/foundation.cfm or e-mail Sybil Yastrow at sybil@yastrow.com.