



Annual Conference opens the door to possibilities

There's been a lot of talk lately about all the money wasted on professional development. Critics would have us believe that very little of what is labeled as professional learning is worth the investment.

There are times when I can appreciate their frustration and fury and commit to work even harder to see professional development improved for more educators. Then I think about the many educators I have met that can speak articulately about their professional learning plans, programs, and products. They understand the real purpose of professional learning, hold themselves to high standards, and produce the results they expect from it.

We can find these individuals in communities and school systems across North America and beyond. Fortunately, many of them take time away from their important day-to-day work to share their learning, resources, and results at Learning Forward's Annual Conference. These are the unsung heroes of professional learning. At the conference and within our publications, you can hear and read about learning and improvement efforts in:

- **Fort Wayne, Indiana**, the fastest-growing and improving school system in Indiana. The district attributes its success to

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its investment in its central office staff and school principals as lead learners and coaches for others.

- **Long Beach, California**, a former award-winning Broad school system. Long Beach embraces the process of continuous improvement and going slow to go fast in order to bring personalized and data-driven professional learning to its staff.
- **50-plus school systems in the state of Washington** committed to generating better results from their professional learning investments by redesigning their systems, articulating their theory of action, establishing accountable results, and implementing a steady course of action and being publicly accountable to their colleagues committed to the same agenda.

We use conferences and publications to identify, elevate, and showcase the best work on the continent and beyond. While we know that information alone does not provide adequate support to sustain change — particularly in our most challenging situations — it is absolutely critical to opening doors and maintaining momentum.

Through these venues, we can highlight powerful data, powerful stories, and powerful tools.

Powerful data remind us of what is possible and ask us to check our own assumptions. These data allow us to see how others made progress at similar moments, how they didn't give up, and



how we might collect it to celebrate how far we've come.

Powerful stories inspire us to think differently about the directions we might take. They remind us of why we are doing this work and what we might expect around the next corner.

Powerful tools give the first step we need to try something different and experience the benefit of new pathways and possibilities. They help us overcome immediate barriers and maintain our pathway forward.

These are the kinds of help we get at conferences and in publications. While we would never suggest that adult learners can survive on conferences and publications alone, they are for many the essential ingredients that launch their learning and lead to the results we all desire.

My hope for you is that someday you have the opportunity to attend a conference that provides this level of change experience and community and that our magazine fills in the rest throughout the year. I look forward to seeing you in D.C. ■