



Turn your networking into powerful professional learning

I love connecting people who care about the same thing or can help each other with a particular task or goal. So, as you can imagine, I love networking. However, you may be surprised to learn that I am an introvert. I tried to overcome this for years until I discovered that this is where I get my energy for networking. I enjoy meaningful networking, not superficial cocktail talk.

While we all have many opportunities to connect to others, there is a hierarchy of connections that can turn networking into powerful professional learning. When it comes to learning, I want our networking decisions to be intentional.

First and foremost, let's maintain our commitment to the colleagues with whom we work every day. In some schools, this may mean grade-level or subject-area colleagues. It could mean a particular department in the district office. It could mean colleagues with whom we share a long-term assignment.

Within every community, there is untapped talent and expertise. We become stronger organizations when we recognize this and use our time together to identify, elevate, and spread that expertise. We also become stronger when we are honest and acknowledge that we have problems for which the group does not have a solution

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and must look beyond the group for alternatives.

Beyond our immediate colleagues is the network of like-minded professionals with whom we share a common passion or interest. There are countless opportunities to engage with these networks. Typically we find them beyond our workplace — for example, in professional associations and, increasingly these days, online. These networks offer deep expertise in areas that we don't necessarily encounter in our daily surroundings. We find ourselves motivated and engaged by these opportunities to connect, learn, and act. These connections recharge and inspire us to take on the substantive challenges we face on a daily basis.

Finally, there are networks that we follow — some may say lurk or observe. We find it important to stay connected to these in case the subject turns to something that will benefit us. We listen in to occasional conversations or posts or retweet messages once in

a while. We don't define ourselves as members of these networks but perhaps as interested bystanders considering whether we want to invest more. These relationships allow us to watch for trends and listen for new, more fulfilling networking opportunities.

At Learning Forward, we try to serve all three purposes. We provide resources and support to ensure your closest daily networks perform at high levels and serve you well. We offer a professional home and support to a variety of networks for you to join such as the Academy and Affiliates. And, finally, we offer free weekly news updates and social media postings to capture your attention and give you a reason to invest more deeply with us.

If you have an idea for a network that you believe Learning Forward should offer, we want to hear from you. We aspire to be one of your primary professional networks to assist and support you to do your best every day. ■