MindSpark®

2024
The State of Professional Learning

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Executive Summary

Why does professional development matter? Amazon and Gallup asked this question to over 15,000 adults in the U.S. and found out the main reason: it helps advance careers. American workers who participated in an upskilling program have, on average, annual incomes 8.6% higher than those who did not and 75% report career advancement.

As an organization dedicated to upskilling, MindSpark conducted market research to understand evolving market needs, aiming to identify preferences and aspirations regarding professional growth and development. This report is essential because it delves into various hypotheses about professional development (PD), such as preferences for in-person versus online PD, motivations behind seeking PD, and preferred topics. The insights received from "The State of Professional Learning" serve as the compass guiding us towards crafting tailored and exceptional learning experiences aligned with the evolving needs of professional development.

How inclined are you to pursue voluntary professional learning experiences that are not mandated?

Likely
59.74%

Highly Likely
29.29%

Unlikely
8.8%

Highly unlikely
2.16%
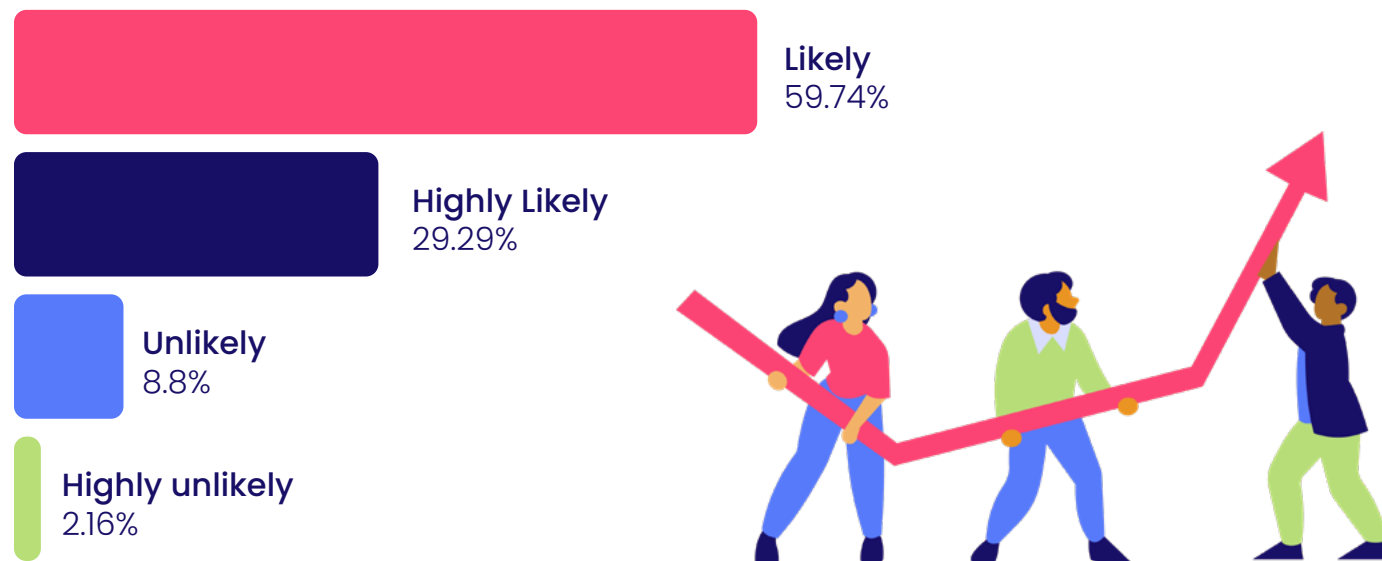
The research revealed valuable insights into professionals' learning goals and preferences. 89% of respondents said they were likely or highly likely to pursue voluntary professional learning experiences that are not mandated. Also, the primary reason for seeking professional development is career advancement, closely followed by the desire for recognition upon completion. These findings reveal the proactive approach individuals take towards learning and inform strategies to meet their evolving needs and aspirations.

With 56% of our research respondents being educators (administrators and teachers), their aspirations are vital for shaping our understanding of professional learning preferences. Among these educators, 70% preferred "during regular school or business hours" for professional learning, indicating a preference for integrating learning into their regular schedules. Furthermore, monetary incentives or stipends emerged as the second-highest motivator for seeking professional development among teachers. These insights provide guidance for crafting professional learning experiences for educators.

The State of Professional Learning research study uncovered three significant macrotrends in professional development:

1
Collaborative Professional Development

2
Adaptive Professional Development

3
Stewardship Professional Development
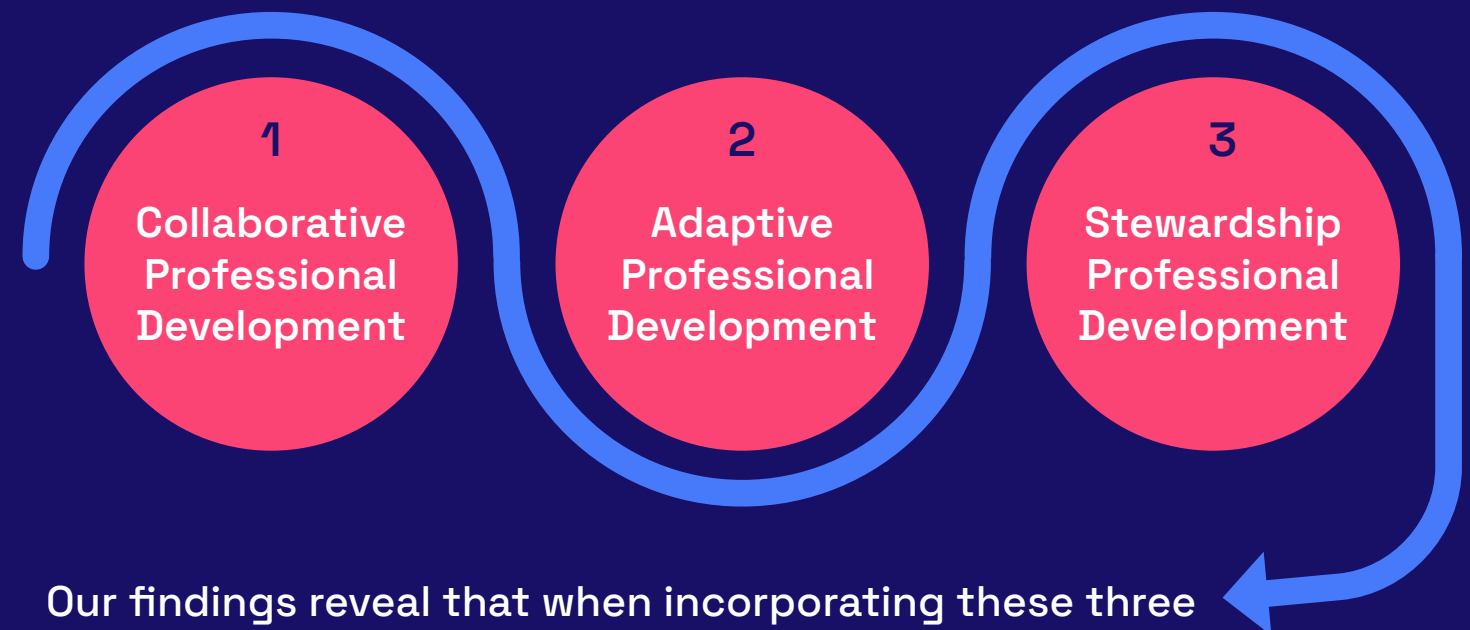
Our findings reveal that when incorporating these three macrotrends, professional learning has the power to increase retention, productivity, and innovation.

Collaborative Professional Development

Collaborative Professional Development (PD) involves individuals working in groups and developing skills together. These types of professional learning experiences not only enhance collaboration skills crucial for effective teamwork but also equip individuals to address shared challenges, exchange best practices, and gain insights from collective experiences.

The Power of Community in Professional Learning

Collaborative learning thrives with community, an environment where professionals share experiences. Online communities act as a bond in collaborative PD, creating continuous connectivity and learning. While asynchronous learning offers convenience and accessibility, the need for deep connections remains. The State of Professional Learning research study reveals two-thirds of respondents prioritize "access to an online community of their peers" as a top reason for seeking PD. Among those respondents, 80% prefer "online courses and certifications with an optional in-person component" as their training modality.

MindSpark: A Catalyst for Collective Growth and Belonging

MindSpark embraces the power of belonging from collaborative learning as a force that drives professional success and fulfilment. MindSpark stands out by creating environments where individuals seamlessly fit into a bigger community, fostering a strong sense of belonging.

Our impact research affirms this narrative:

84% of clients feel less isolated as part of the MSL community.

92% of clients agree that MindSpark's learning experiences cultivated a sense of belonging among their peers.

By promoting collaborative learning and a culture of belonging, MindSpark continues to shape learning experiences that go beyond the ordinary, helping individuals to thrive in communities that value growth, connection, and collective success.

The Impact of Belonging

Collaborative learning fosters connection, trust, and ultimately belonging. A sense of belonging is key—it impacts professional recruitment, retention, and overall productivity. Studies from BetterUp reveal a 50% decrease in turnover risk and a 56% boost in performance among employees who feel a strong sense of belonging in their workplace.

2 out of every **3** respondents selected "access to an online community of their peers" as a top reason for seeking PD.

92% of clients agree that MindSpark's learning experiences cultivated a sense of belonging among their peers.

84% of clients feel less isolated as part of the MSL community.

Adaptive Professional Development

The State of Professional Learning research study reveals another macrotrend: a growing demand for adaptive professional development. Adaptive PD is a response to the urgent need for professionals to swiftly adapt their skillsets in fast-paced environments. The focus is on accommodating diverse learning preferences and fostering continuous skill refinement and growth, forming dynamic and adaptable workers and organizations.

A Call for Dynamic Learning and Practical Implementation

In the context of rapid skill refinement, professionals seek dynamic learning journeys tailored to their changing needs. Online self-paced learning opportunities provide autonomy, letting individuals craft unique skill journeys that respond directly to evolving professional demands. However, professionals don't just want to gain new skills, they also need guidance and hands-on experience to effectively apply these skills.

In The State of Professional Learning research, 77% of respondents ranked "online self-guided courses and certifications" in their top training modalities, highlighting the desire for flexible professional development, giving professionals control over their learning journey. Additionally, most respondents ranked "support for implementation of new skills or knowledge" as their top reason for seeking professional development. This data reveals the need for ongoing support and resources to smoothly incorporate new skills into professional practices and practical application.

Championing Adaptive Learning: MindSpark's Approach

MindSpark is a leader in adaptive PD, committed to understanding and meeting the changing needs of professionals.

Our impact research reveals the effectiveness of MindSpark's learning experiences:

90% of MindSpark clients agree that the experience gave them the confidence to tackle challenges in their work.

91% of MindSpark clients agree that the learning experience gave them ideas about how to positively transform and expand their work.

MindSpark's professional learning opportunities are created to reflect the idea of adaptive learning. They foster agility and productivity through a dynamic environment. They uplift individuals to navigate change and succeed in their professions.

Cultivating Change Agility for Workforce Productivity

Adaptive professional learning is important in developing agility, resilience, and increased productivity among professionals. According to research by The Josh Bersin Company, organizations demonstrating change agility are 17 times more likely to adapt to change and 20 times more likely to achieve elevated levels of workforce productivity.
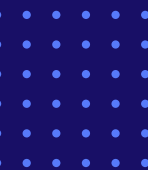
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Stewardship Professional Development

A third and final macrotrend in The State of Professional Learning research study was stewardship PD. It is an approach that synergistically creates space for intention and attention to solve community problems, helping individuals recognize and solve these challenges as action-oriented humans. Stewardship PD is an important step towards achieving the United Nations' 2030 Agenda Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that address global challenges and promote a more sustainable and equitable world.

Sustainability: A Driving Force for Stewardship PD

Stewardship PD uplifts individuals to focus on others and serve communities and society. In the State of Professional Learning research study, sustainability was the number one topic that individuals were interested in seeking for PD, reflecting participants' recognition of its pressing nature and their readiness to address it. Sustainability in professional learning involves meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.

Addressing complex community issues and adopting a stewardship-led mindset naturally gives rise to the imperative for sustainability. The goal of education for sustainable development is to create future citizens who can make smart choices and take responsible action to solve problems. This approach ensures that our efforts aren't just quick fixes but lasting practices that prioritize the wellbeing of future generations.

MindSpark's Impact: Catalyst for Change

MindSpark champions stewardship PD, sparking a shift from thinking to doing and promoting a culture of innovation and creativity to solve problems.

Our impact research amplifies this sentiment:

95% of clients agreed that after their time with MindSpark, they are motivated to be a champion of the work in their community.

88% of clients agreed that the learning experience has shown them how to incorporate the voices of stakeholders, other than themselves, in this work.

MindSpark's commitment goes beyond generating ideas; it symbolizes a deep change in mindset. Clients don't just solve problems but become champions of positive change in their communities.

Action Competency to Solve Problems

Stewardship PD includes an inter-generational perspective to fulfill stakeholders' needs and understand sustainability across environmental, societal, and economic dimensions. Stewardship PD turns thinkers into doers, creating action-oriented individuals. According to a study from the National Taichung University of Science and Technology, action orientation in professional learning helps individuals identify and understand sustainability challenges, create and evaluate innovative and ethical solutions, and reflect and learn from their experiences. This process encourages individuals to take action, promoting innovation and creativity in solving complex problems to be active and responsible citizens for sustainable development.

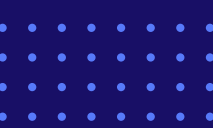**#1** topic participants chose for seeking PD: sustainability.

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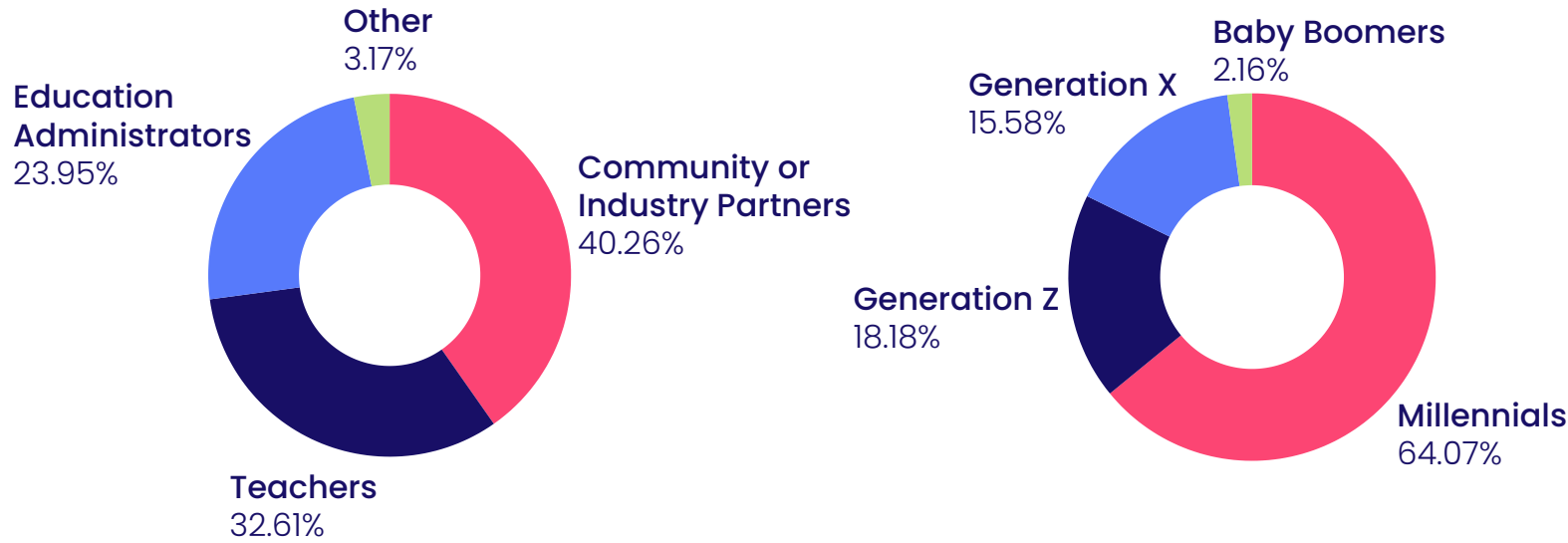
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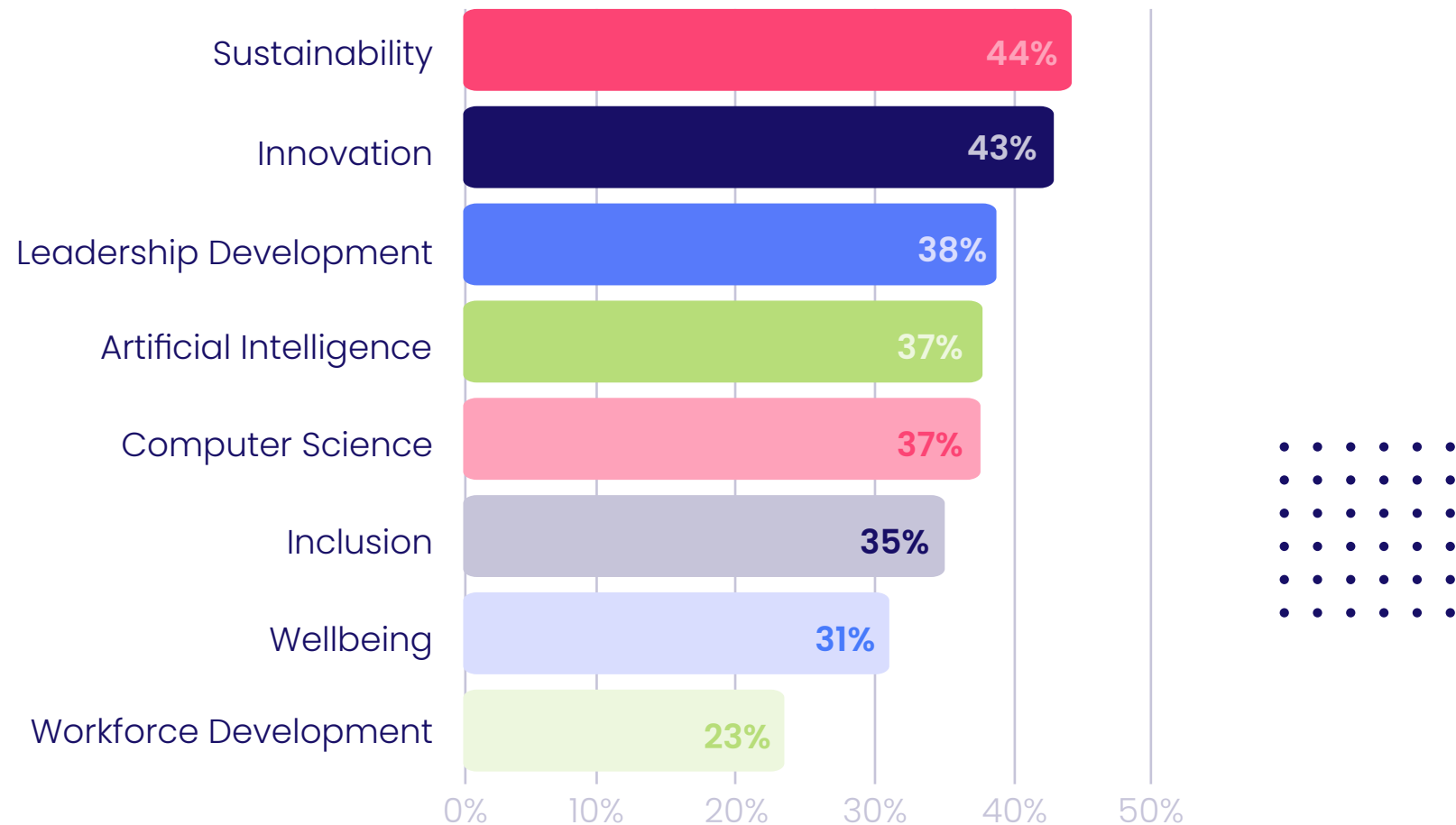
Research Insights

Our research sought to provide insights and recommendations based on the survey responses from a diverse group of 693 individuals across 40 of the 50 states in the U.S. The respondents identified themselves within one of four categories: community or industry partners, education administrators, teachers, or other.

Other 3.17%

Education Administrators 23.95%

Community or Industry Partners 40.26%

Teachers 32.61%

Baby Boomers 2.16%

Generation X 15.58%

Generation Z 18.18%

Millennials 64.07%

Which topics would you seek for professional development?

Topic	Percentage
Sustainability	44%
Innovation	43%
Leadership Development	38%
Artificial Intelligence	37%
Computer Science	37%
Inclusion	35%
Wellbeing	31%
Workforce Development	23%

0% 10% 20% 30% 40% 50%

What reasons would motivate you to seek professional learning experiences?

#1 Access to an online community of my peers

#2 Recognition or certification upon completion

#3 Support for implementation of new skills or knowledge

#4 Opportunities for collaboration with industry and community partners

#5 Feedback and evaluation of your personal and professional growth

#6 Enhanced career opportunities and advancement

#7 Monetary incentives or stipends

#8 Access to industry grade tools and technology

#9 Keeping up with trends

Recommendations

Our macrotrends and research from The State of Professional Learning study have revealed recommendations for specific use cases and groups of individuals. These recommendations are insights, practical advice, and actionable steps that align with the unique needs and objectives of each of the following audiences.

Individuals Seeking Upskilling:

- **Personalize Your Learning Journey:** Take charge of your upskilling journey with rapid skill refinement, creating a path that fits your professional needs.

- **Explore Online and In-Person Learning:** Embrace learning opportunities that combine online courses with in-person components, providing a comprehensive and enriched educational experience.

- **Embrace Collaborative Learning:** Join online communities or forums aligned with your goals for collaborative learning, where professionals share insights and resources.

Team Leaders Who Need to Upskill their Staff:

- **Cultivate Practical Application:** Provide opportunities for staff to practice their learning in real-world scenarios, recognizing the importance of hands-on experience in skill development.

- **Support Self-Directed Learning Paths:** Encourage employees to explore self-paced courses aligned with their interests and professional needs, fostering autonomy and personalized growth.

- **Foster a Culture of Continuous Learning:** Create an environment of ongoing coaching and development, emphasizing the iterative nature of upskilling and its contribution to long-term success.

Organizations Building Learning Experiences:

- **Align with Macrotrends in Professional Learning:** Incorporate collaborative, adaptive, and stewardship-led professional learning trends into your learning experiences, ensuring relevant learning that accompanies current needs and aspirations.

- **Integrate Flexible Learning Models:** Offer flexible learning options by combining online courses with in-person components, catering to diverse learning preferences and needs.

- **Prioritize Belonging and Recognition:** Create learning experiences that foster a sense of belonging and offer recognitions or certifications upon completion, enhancing motivation and commitment to ongoing skill development.

Education Admins Seeking Upskilling Opportunities for their Employees:

- **Champion Education for Sustainable Development:** Integrate sustainability into the curriculum, addressing environmental, societal, and economic challenges to prepare students for a more responsible future.

- **Timing for Educators' Professional Learning:** Traditionally, educators were given professional development during their breaks; however, our research reveals that educators prefer PD after school or work or during regular school or business hours.

- **Incentives for Professional Learning:** Industry believes that professional learning is included during work hours, but educators do professional learning outside of work hours. Invest in educators' professional development by offering paid opportunities, acknowledging the importance of compensating them for their commitment to ongoing learning.

Who is MindSpark?

MindSpark Learning® is a nonprofit that activates educators to solve society's biggest challenges by providing transformative professional learning experiences. MindSpark creates and facilitates professional development opportunities using a foundation of innovation, inclusion, wellbeing, and workforce literacy. Since 2017, MindSpark has impacted over 90K educators and 2.7M students in all 50 states including D.C., as well as 88 countries. MindSpark nurtures meaningful relationships with more than 1K industry and community partners.

MindSpark offers comprehensive professional learning opportunities designed to equip educators, team leaders, and organizations with the skills, knowledge, and resources they need to excel in their fields. MindSpark OnDemand is an all-in-one destination for courses and certifications crafted for educators. These learning experiences support educators with cutting-edge skills in highly sought after topics like Applied AI, Responsible AI, and Career Connected Learning. Gain expertise and certification in your chosen field effortlessly with MindSpark OnDemand.

9 out of **10**
Net Promoter Score