

Jane Best, PhD'04

Navigator of Educational Policy

Jane Best, a self-described “political junkie,” says she became “addicted” to working in federal and state education politics and policy while serving as a fellow in Vanderbilt’s Office of Federal Relations in Washington, D.C. Taking a semester off from her Peabody Ph.D. studies with the blessings and support of her dissertation chair, Professor James W. Guthrie, she worked in the Federal Relations Office for Assistant Vice Chancellor Jeff Vincent, writing daily briefs on federal and state education policy actions. “That was a pretty formative time for me,” Best says. “I caught the bug of federal and state education policy. I still stay in touch with Jeff and visit him when I travel to D.C.” After earning her doctorate, Best accepted a job as a senior educational policy specialist for the National Conference of State Legislatures in Denver, providing research, technical assistance and opportunities to policymakers throughout the nation. Best now travels most frequently throughout seven states in the Midwest as a senior policy associate for Learning Point Associates, a nonprofit educational organization headquartered in Naperville, Ill. Learning Point Associates manages one of the 10 federally-funded regional education laboratories (REL-Midwest).

In her work for REL-Midwest, Best travels to state capitals and talks with the governors’ education policy advisors, state legislators and state education agencies.

“I try to navigate the political dynamics of those three groups and understand the state’s need,” Best says. “They are not always on the same page about how best to approach issues. I come in as an outsider to discuss what the hot education topics are in the state, find out what information they might need, offer to bring in outside experts if warranted, and talk to them about what other states are doing to tackle similar challenges.”

She still stays in touch with Peabody faculty members. Learning Point Associates sometimes contracts with Peabody researchers to collaborate on studies or serve as outside experts.

“It has been a fulfilling experience to be able to take the friendships and relationships I built at Vanderbilt and have them now in my professional life as well,” she says. “When you talk about the one person in your life who made an enormous difference, I would say for me it is Jim Guthrie. He had a relationship with Learning Point Associates long before I came here a couple of years ago. It’s great to continue to work with Jim.”

—Lew Harris



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