

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES FACT SHEET

What is a Professional Learning Community?

A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is an ongoing process in which educators come together to work collaboratively building on their own and others' ideas and experiences to improve practice and enhance students' learning. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators. Research shows PLCs strengthen instructional practices through:

- Establishing common ground and clear priorities toward the school's vision for reform
- Establishing clear parameters and priorities toward the goal of "innovation for improved student learning"
- Promoting open discussion by involving the entire school community, and includes constructive sharing of questions, doubts, concerns and affirmations
- Focusing on student learning and instructional improvement in schools

Microsoft Partners in Learning, "Professional Learning Communities (PLC): A Brief Guide" (pages 1-12). Taken from: www.istoolkit.com/.../ProfessionalLearningCommunity_A%20Brief%20Guide.pdf

- Building a shared knowledge of critical vocabulary and concepts
- Equipping teachers with knowledge and tools necessary to model effective, reciprocal accountability
- Making honest assessments of the school by examining conventional practices from a fresh and critical perspective
- Taking immediate and specific steps to close the knowing-doing gap
- Moving beyond planning and start doing

- Building a collaborative culture through high performing teams

(Solution Tree, "Your PLC Journey Workbook")

- Addressing the most pressing instructional challenges
- Providing support from all levels of the school system
- Fostering an atmosphere of trust
- Supporting teachers' sense of efficacy and level of professionalism

(Sylvia Segura Pirtle, PhD, and Ed Tobia, EdD, "SEDL Insights", Vol. 2, No. 3, Winter 2014)

- Focusing on improving student experiences
- Involving collaborative teams
- Being action oriented
- Making a commitment to continuous improvement wherein members collectively:
 - a. gather evidence of current levels of student understanding,
 - b. develop strategies and ideas to build on strengths and weaknesses in that learning,
 - c. implement those strategies and ideas,
 - d. analyze the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not, and
 - e. apply new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement
- Focusing on results aligned with goals for student learning

(Dufour, Dufour, Eaker & Many, "Learning By Doing" (2006, pages 2-7))

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- Moving toward a whole school approach instead of the traditional “one teacher – one classroom” model
- Focusing collectively on student learning
- Sharing norms and values
- Understanding that the very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student
(Kruze, Louis & Bryk, “Building Professional Community in Schools” (1994, pages 2-6))

PLCs work because:

They are NOT a short term or “band aid” fix. They are a long-term proposition. Effective PLCs require staff working together at every level in every way to improve instructional practices. PLCs are driven by data and evidence.

There are several models of how to implement PLCs so, while schools/regions/territories can choose a model that fits their needs, the fundamentals of all models are consistent. They offer a framework to solve a problem - not a designated way of doing things. PLCs facilitate collegial critical thinking and focus on standards-based learning for all students; many minds working together to solve a common goal that affects many. They are a valuable platform for integration of the new role of a Program Support Teacher (PST), as collaborators and coaches. PLCs encourage accountability in all parts of the process pertaining to curriculum delivery and assessment: prior knowledge, lesson planning, strategies and accommodations, reflection on lesson delivery, successes and challenges, evidence of student learning and application of what’s been learned in moving forward. They promote incorporating multiple strategies into planning, delivery and assessment. This can help both experienced and new teachers alike to learn new ways of doing things while at the same time facilitating administrators to introduce new strategies. This collaboration provides a platform for introduction to, and testimony for, strategies that are evidence-based and can offer solutions for what doesn’t work when an educator may feel “stuck”. The student understanding of the standards is reviewed by the team. This is beneficial to the teacher as this work becomes less daunting, less subjective. The student benefits as modifications and instructional strategies can be reviewed or put in place to better accommodate diversity of learning needs.

To learn more about professional learning communities, visit
<http://www.allthingsplc.info/about>