

## The Professional Learning Community Continuum

Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<b>Mission:</b> <b>Is it evident that learning for all is our core purpose?</b>	No effort has been made to engage faculty in identifying what they want students to learn or how they will respond if students do not learn. School personnel view the mission of the school as teaching rather than learning.	An attempt has been made, typically by the central office, to identify learning outcomes for all grade levels or courses, but this attempt has not impacted the practice of most teachers. Responding to students who are not learning is left to the discretion of individual teachers.	Teachers are clear regarding the learning outcomes their students are to achieve. They have developed strategies to assess student mastery of these outcomes, they monitor the results, and they attempt to respond to students who are not learning.	Learning outcomes are clearly articulated to all stakeholders in the school, and each student's attainment of the outcomes is carefully monitored. The school has developed systems to provide more time and support for students experiencing initial difficulty in achieving the outcomes. The practices, programs, and policies of the school are continually assessed on the basis of their impact on learning. Staff members work together to enhance their effectiveness in helping students achieve learning outcomes.
<b>Shared Vision:</b> <b>Do we know what we are trying to create?</b>	No effort has been made to engage faculty in describing preferred conditions for their school.	A vision statement has been developed for the school, but most staff are unaware of or are unaffected by it.	Staff members have worked together to describe the school they are trying to create. They have endorsed this general description and feel a sense of ownership in it. School improvement planning and staff development initiatives are tied to the shared vision.	Staff members routinely articulate the major principles of the shared vision and use those principles to guide their day-to-day efforts and decisions. They honestly assess the current reality in their school and continually seek effective strategies for reducing the discrepancies between the conditions described in the vision statement and their current reality.

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<b>Shared Values:</b> How must we behave to advance our vision?	Staff members have not yet articulated the attitudes, behaviors, or commitments they are prepared to demonstrate in order to advance the mission of learning for all and the vision of what the school might become. If they discuss school improvement, they focus on what other groups must do.	Staff members have articulated statements of beliefs or philosophy for their school; however, these value statements have not yet impacted their day-to-day work or the operation of the school.	Staff members have made a conscious effort to articulate and promote the attitudes, behaviors, and commitments that will advance their vision of the school. Examples of the core values at work are shared in stories and celebrations. People are confronted when they behave in ways that are inconsistent with the core values.	The values of the school are embedded in the school culture. These shared values are evident to new staff and to those outside of the school. They influence policies, procedures, and daily practices of the school as well as day-to-day decisions of individual staff members.
<b>Goals:</b> What are our priorities?	No effort has been made to engage the staff in setting and defining school improvement goals related to student learning. If goals exist, they have been developed by the administration.	Staff members have participated in a process to establish goals, but the goals are typically stated as projects to be accomplished or are written so broadly that they are impossible to measure. The goals do not yet influence instructional decisions in a meaningful way.	Staff members have worked together to establish long- and short-term improvement goals for their school. The goals are clearly communicated. Assessment tools and strategies have been developed and implemented to measure progress toward the goals.	All staff pursue measurable performance goals as part of their routine responsibilities. Goals are clearly linked to the school's shared vision. Goal attainment is celebrated and staff members demonstrate willingness to identify and pursue challenging stretch goals.
<b>Communication:</b> How do we communicate what is important?	There is no clear, consistent message regarding the priorities of the school or district. Initiatives are changing constantly and different people in the organization seem to have different pet projects.	A small group of leaders in the school or district is declaring the importance of a program or initiative. Their efforts have yet to impact practice to any significant degree.	The school or district is beginning to align practices with stated priorities. New structures have been created to support the initiative, resources have been re-allocated, and systems for monitoring the priorities have been put into place. Evidence of progress is noted and publicly celebrated.	The priorities of the school or district are demonstrated in the everyday practices and procedures of the school and the assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the staff. The priorities are evident to students, parents, new staff members, and even visitors to the school or district. Stories of extraordinary commitment to the priorities are part of the lore that binds people together.

## Where Do We Go From Here? Worksheet Effective Communication

Describe one or more aspects of a professional learning community that you would like to see in place in your school.	What steps or activities must be initiated to create this condition in your school?	Who will be responsible for initiating or sustaining these steps or activities?	What is a realistic timeline for each step or phase of the activity?	What will you use to assess the effectiveness of your initiative?
<p>The school communicates its focus on learning consistently and persistently. It develops specific plans to improve levels of learning.</p> <p>The school monitors learning on a timely basis. Staff members model a personal commitment to learning. The driving questions of the school focus on learning.</p> <p>Resources are allocated to promote learning.</p> <p>Evidence of learning is celebrated. There is a systematic response to students who are not learning.</p> <p>Staff members who are inattentive to student learning are confronted.</p>				

## Part Six Questions to Guide the Work of Your Professional Learning Community

### For Clarifying the Mission of Your School or District, Ask:

1. What is our fundamental purpose?

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2. Why was this school built? What have we been brought here to do together?

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3. Does the concept of public education for all children mean that all students shall learn or merely that they will be required to attend school?

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4. What happens in our school or district when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

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### For Clarifying the Vision for Your School or District, Ask:

1. Can you describe the school we are trying to create?

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2. What would our school look like if it were a great place for students? What would it look like if it were a great place for teachers?

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3. It is 5 years from now and we have achieved our vision as a school. In what ways are we different? Describe what is going on in terms of practices, procedures, relationships, results, and climate.

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4. Imagine we have been given 60 seconds on the nightly news to clarify the vision of our school or district to the community. What do we want to say?

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**For Clarifying the Collective Commitments (Values) of Your School or District, Ask:**

1. What are the specific commitments we must honor to achieve our purpose and vision?

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2. What are the specific behaviors we can exhibit to make a personal contribution to the success of our school?

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3. What commitments are we prepared to make to each other?

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4. What commitments or assurances are we prepared to make to every student in our school?

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5. What are the "must dos" and the taboos for this staff?

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6. What agreements are shared among all of us?

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**For Clarifying the Goals of Your School or District, Ask:**

1. How will we know if we are making progress toward achieving our vision?

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2. How will we know if we are more effective 3 years from now than we are today?

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3. If we achieve our shared vision, what will student achievement look like in our school?

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4. What are the most essential conditions and factors we must monitor on an ongoing basis?

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**For Clarifying How Effective You Are at Communicating Priorities, Ask:**

1. What are the most important factors that drive the day-to-day decisions in our school or district?

2. What are the priorities in our school or district?

3. What systems have been put in place to monitor progress in our priority areas?

4. What gets paid the closest attention in this school or district?

**Final Thoughts**

The consideration of these questions can help a staff lay the foundation for a professional learning community, but important work remains to be done. A staff that embraces the premise that the very purpose of the school is to help all students learn will face the very challenging questions of, "Learn what?" and, "How will we know if each student has learned?" We turn our attention to these critical questions in the next chapter.

