An underwater photograph showing a large school of fish swimming in a circular pattern, creating a tunnel-like effect. Two divers are visible in the center, swimming towards the viewer. The water is a deep blue color.

# Leading the PLC Process: How Effective Leaders Close the Knowing-Doing Gap

March 2010

*Presenters*

*Richard DuFour, Ed.D and Rebecca DuFour, M.Ed*



Dr. Richard P. DuFour  
465 Island Pointe Lane  
Moneta, VA 24121  
(540) 721-4662 phone  
(540) 721-0382 fax

Dr. Rick DuFour was a public school educator for thirty-four years, serving as a teacher, principal, and superintendent. He served as the principal of Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois from 1983 to 1991 and as superintendent of the district from 1991 to 2002. During his tenure, Stevenson became what the United States Department of Education has described as “the most recognized and celebrated school in America.” It is one of three schools in the nation to win the USDE Blue Ribbon Award on four occasions and one of the first comprehensive schools designated a New America High School by USDE as a model of successful school reform. Stevenson has been repeatedly cited in the popular press as one of America’s best schools and referenced in professional literature as an exemplar of best practices in education.

Dr. DuFour is the author of ten books and almost eighty professional articles, and wrote a quarterly column for the *Journal of Staff Development* for almost a decade. He was the lead consultant and author for ASCD’s seven-part video series on the principalship and the author of two other videos – “How to Build a Professional Learning Community” and “Through New Eyes: Examining the Culture of Your School.” He was the first principal in Illinois to receive the state’s Distinguished Educator Award, received his states highest award as both a principal and superintendent, was named as one of the Top 100 school administrators in North America by *Executive Educator* magazine, was presented the distinguished scholar practitioner award from the University of Illinois, and was the 2004 recipient of the National Staff Development Council’s Distinguished Service Award. He has consulted with school districts, state departments, and professional organizations throughout North America on strategies for improving schools.



Rebecca B. DuFour  
465 Island Pointe Lane  
Moneta, VA 24121  
(540) 721-4662 phone  
(540) 721-0382 fax

Becky DuFour has served as a teacher, school administrator and central office coordinator. As a former elementary principal, Becky helped her school earn state and national recognition as a model Professional Learning Community. She is one of the featured principals in the *Video Journal of Education*'s program on "Leadership in an Age of Standards and High Stakes" (2001). She is also the lead consultant and featured principal for the *Video Journal* program, "Elementary Principals as Leaders of Learning" (2003).

Becky is co-author of:

*Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities* (Solution Tree, 2002),

*Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn* (Solution Tree, 2004),

*Learning By Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (Solution Tree, 2006),

*Professional Learning Communities at Work Plan Book* (Solution Tree, 2006) and  
*Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* (Solution Tree, 2008).

She is also co-editor of *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities* (Solution-tree, 2005), a collection of essays from the leading educational authors and consultants.

Becky has written for numerous professional journals, served as a book reviewer for the *Journal of Staff Development* and wrote a quarterly column for the National Association of Elementary School Principals' publication, *Leadership Compass*. Becky has consulted with and worked for professional organizations, school districts, universities, and state departments of education throughout North America.

*Leading the PLC Process:  
How Effective Leaders Close  
the Knowing-Doing Gap*

**Rick DuFour**  
**rdufour@d125.org**  
**and**  
**Becky DuFour**  
**beck.dufour@jetbroadband.com**



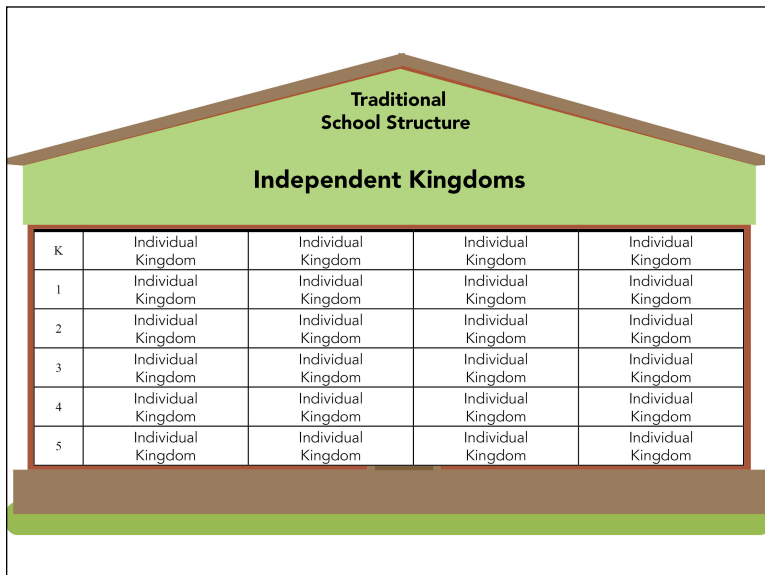
# Leading the PLC Process: How Effective Leaders Close the Knowing-Doing Gap

**Rick DuFour**  
**[rdufour@d125.org](mailto:rdufour@d125.org)**  
and  
**Becky DuFour**  
**[beck.dufour@jetbroadband.com](mailto:beck.dufour@jetbroadband.com)**

## Speaking with One Voice

If leaders are to speak with one voice, they must have a common vocabulary with terms that convey the same meaning to people throughout the organization.

- Complete the common vocabulary worksheet.**
- Share your responses with those around you.**



## A Review Of Key Terms

*Work together to answer the following key terms associated with professional learning community concepts:*

Professional Learning Community:

Simultaneous Loose and Tight School Culture:

Team:

Collaboration:

Critical Questions of Collaborative Teams:

Essential Learnings:

Common Assessment:

Formative Assessment:

Summative Assessment:

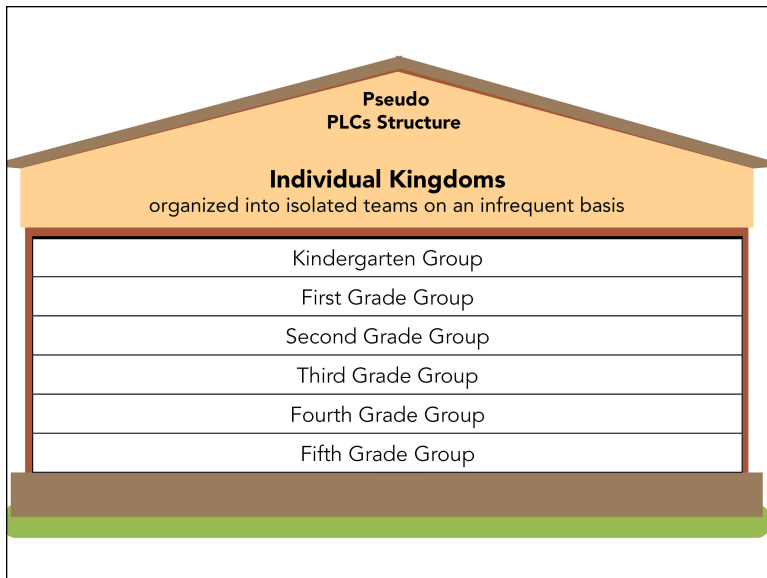
Reciprocal Accountability:

Team Norms:

SMART Goal:

Pyramid of Interventions:






---

---

---

---

---

---

---

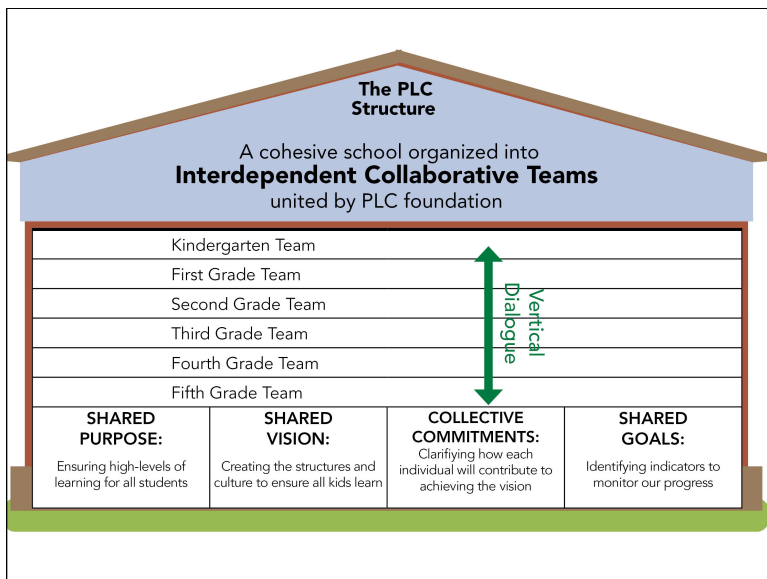
---

---

---

---

---




---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Professional Learning Community (PLC) Defined

Educators are committed to working **collaboratively** in **ongoing processes** of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better **results** for the students they serve.

**PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.**

—DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many (2006)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Essential Dilemma

The main dilemma in improvement initiatives for any organization is what I call the too-tight/too loose problem.

□ Fullan, 2007

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Top-down Does Not Work

- Top-down change does not work because it fails to garner ownership, commitment or even clarity about the nature of the change.

□ Fullan, 2007

- Top-down change does not work because it is more likely to generate compliance than commitment. Teachers and principals are adept at ignoring reform when they close their school and classroom doors and continue doing what they have always done.

□ Tyack and Cuban, 1995

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Bottom-Up Does Not Work

- Bottom-up change does not work because it fails to produce sustainable success at scale.

□ Fullan, 2007

- Teachers in schools with site-based autonomy tend to focus on marginal changes that do not directly impact the quality of student learning.

□ Richard Elmore, 2006

- Much harm has been done to public education and to the ideas of equity and excellence by poor implementation of site-based management

□ Phil Schlechy, 2005

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Simultaneous Loose AND Tight School Cultures

Simultaneous loose *and* tight cultures establish clear parameters and priorities that enable individuals to work within established boundaries in a creative and autonomous way. They are characterized by “*directed empowerment*” or what *Marzano and Waters* refer to as “*defined autonomy*” - *freedom to act and to lead within clearly articulated boundaries.*

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## LOOSE-TIGHT CULTURES REQUIRE STRONG LEADERS

The solution to the loose-tight dilemma comes from the top. It comes from leaders who embed strategies that foster *continuous and purposeful peer interaction*. Purposeful peer interaction is the glue of for achieving simultaneous loose-tight organizations. This does not mean you need less leadership at the top, but rather more - more of a different kind.

Fullan, 2008

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Keys to Simultaneous Loose-Tight Leadership

The keys to effective simultaneous loose-tight leadership are:

1. Getting “tight” about the right things.
2. Communicating what is “tight” effectively.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What is “Tight” in Your District?

- What is tight in your district?
  
- How do people know what is tight?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## What is “Tight” in Your School?

- Are there other things you are tight about in your school?
  
- How do people know?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The Guiding Principles of PLCs at Work

- The purpose of our school is to see to it that all students learn at high levels, and the future of our students depends upon our success in achieving that purpose.
- We cannot help all students learn at high levels if we work in isolation. We must build a collaborative culture and engage in a collective effort to achieve our purpose.
- We will not know if we are helping all students learn unless we focus on results and use evidence of student learning as part of a continuous improvement process.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**What Would it Look Like if We Meant it....**

....when we said we were committed to helping all students learn?

Generate a list of indicators that would demonstrate that commitment.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**What Would it Look Like if We Meant it....**

....when we said we were committed to building a collaborative culture through high-performing teams?

Generate a list of indicators that would demonstrate that commitment.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

**What Would it Look Like if We Meant it....**

....when we said we were committed focusing on results to foster continuous improvement?

Generate a list of indicators that would demonstrate that commitment.

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# **Evidenced-Based Decisions as Key to a Results Orientation in Education**

“An astonishing number of educational leaders make critical decisions about curriculum, instruction, assessment, and placement on the basis of information that is inadequate, misunderstood, misrepresented, or simply absent. Even when information is abundant and clear, I have witnessed leaders who are sincere and decent people stare directly at the information available to them, and then blithely ignore it. . . . Strategic leaders are worthy of the name because of their consistent linking of evidence to decision making. They respond to challenges not by scoring rhetorical points but by consistently elevating evidence over assertion.”

—Reeves, 2002

“School systems must create a culture that places value on managing by results, rather than on managing by programs. It is essential that leaders work to establish a culture where results are carefully assessed and actions are taken based on these assessments.”

—Schlechty, 2005

“Concentrating on results does not negate the importance of process. On the contrary, the two are interdependent: Results tell us which processes are most effective and to what extent and whether processes need reexamining and adjusting. Processes exist for results and results should inform processes.”

—Schmoker, 1999

“As schools initiate reform, they can’t back off the collection of data because they will need information more than ever. They must have a process that gathers information that is recognized as authentic and relevant. The information should provide constant evaluation that shows schools where they are getting close and where they are falling short in a way that pushes people toward continual improvement.”

—Dolan, 1994

“What does it take to close the achievement gaps? Our findings suggest that it comes down to how schools use data. Teachers in gap-closing schools more frequently use data to understand the skill gaps of low-achieving students. . . . When data points to a weakness in students’ academic skills, gap-closing schools are more likely to focus in on that area, making tough choices to ensure that students are immersed in what they most need.”

—Symonds, et al., 2004

## **Evidenced-Based Decisions as Key to a Results Orientation in Any Organization**

“The ultimate measure of a great team is results. Effective teams avoid ambiguity and interpretation when it comes to results. They decide what they want to achieve, then they clarify how they will measure their progress. They select one or two indicators they can collectively focus upon and around which they can rally. They create a scoreboard that helps keep them focused on results. These teams use the scoreboard to monitor their progress against the expected achievement.

—Lencioni, 2005

“Companies operate under the false assumption that if they carry out enough of the ‘right’ improvement activities, actual performance improvements will inevitably materialize. At the heart of this assumption, which we call ‘activity centered,’ is a fundamentally flawed logic that confuses ends with means, processes with outcomes. Payoffs from the infusion of activities will be meager at best. And there is in fact an alternative: results-driven improvement processes that focus on achieving specific, measurable operational improvements within a few months.”

—Schaffer & Thomson, 1998

“We found there was something distinctive about the decision-making process of the great companies we studied. First, they embraced the current reality, no matter how bad the message. Second, they developed a simple yet deeply insightful frame of reference for all decisions. . . . You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts.”

—Collins, 2001

“Unless you can subject your decision making to a ruthless and continuous *JUDGMENT BY RESULTS*, all your zigs and zags will only be random lunges in the dark, sooner or later bound to land you on the rocks.

—Champy, 1995

“Ducking the facts about performance for fear of being judged, criticized, humiliated, and punished characterizes losing streaks, not winning streaks. In a losing streak, facts are used for blame, not improvement; they are turned into weapons to persecute, not tools to find solutions. . . . In winning streaks, players get and use abundant feedback about their performance. Leaders can . . . ensure that measurements ultimately empower rather than punish people.

—Kanter, 2004

## **Reciprocal Accountability**

Accountability must be a reciprocal process. For every expectation I have of you to perform, I have an equal responsibility to provide you with the capacity to meet that expectation.

- Richard Elmore, 2006

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## **To Help Build the Capacity of Teams, Address...**

- Why - (Rationale)
- How - (Process)
- What - (Common Language, Tools, Templates, Materials, Resources, Examples)
- When - (Timeline)
- Guiding Questions
- Criteria for Clarifying Quality of Each Product
- Tips and Suggestions

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## **Example of a Timeline for Team Products**

By the end of the:

- 2nd Week - Team Norms
- 4th Week - Team SMART Goal
- 6th Week - Common Essential Outcomes
- 8th Week - First Common Assessment
- 10th Week - Analysis of Student Performance on First Common Formative Assessment

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---



## SMART Goals

Established a team SMART goal:

- Strategic and specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Results-oriented
- Time-bound

—Conzemius & O'Neill (2000)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Results-Oriented Goals: Keys to Effective Teams

Leaders foster effective teams when they help teams establish specific, measurable, results-oriented, performance goals. Promoting teams for the sake of teams or focusing on team-building exercises does little to improve the effectiveness of the organization. There is nothing more important than each member's commitment to common purpose and a related performance goal to which the group holds itself jointly accountable.

—Katzenbach & Smith (1993)

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Are These SMART Goals?

Strategically aligned with the school-wide goal of improving student performance in language arts, by the end of the 2009–2010 school year we will:

- **Develop and implement four (4) common assessments in the area of writing.**
- **Increase the use of cooperative learning activities in our English classrooms by 25%.**
- **Increase the number of students achieving the target score (80% or higher) on the district reading assessment from 81% to 90%.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# SMART Goal Worksheet

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Team Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Team Leader: \_\_\_\_\_

Team Members: \_\_\_\_\_

District Goal(s): \_\_\_\_\_

School Goal(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Team SMART Goal	Strategies and Action Steps	Responsibility	Timeline	Evidence of Effectiveness



## SMART GOAL ACTION PLAN

TEAM: \_\_\_\_\_ Year: \_\_\_\_\_

**District Goal 1: We will increase student achievement and close the achievement gap in all areas using a variety of indicators to document improved learning on the part of our students.**

**School Goal 1: We will improve student performance in language arts as measured by local, district, state/provincial, and National indicators.**

TEAM SMART GOAL	STRATEGIES/ACTION STEPS	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	TARGET DATES/TIMELINE	EVIDENCE OF EFFECTIVENESS
<p><b><u>Current Reality:</u></b> Last year, 85% of our students met or exceeded the target score of 3 on our District's Writing Prompt in May.</p> <p><b><u>SMART Goal:</u></b> This year, at least 90% of our students will meet or exceed the target score of 3 on our District's Writing Prompt in May.</p>	<p><b>Curriculum:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Clarify &amp; pace Essential Student Learning Outcomes in Writing utilizing Standards Documents, Curriculum Guides, assessment blueprints &amp; data, Wish-List of Skills.</li> </ol> <p><b>Assessments:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop, implement, and collaboratively score grade level formative writing prompts to:               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>frequently monitor each student's learning of essential writing outcomes</li> <li>provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate progress in meeting and exceeding learning targets in writing;</li> <li>learn with and from each other better ways to help students become proficient writers</li> </ol> </li> </ol> <p><b>Instruction:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Provide students with writing assignments in all subject areas &amp; utilize a variety of instructional strategies to help students learn all Essential Writing Skills.</li> </ol>	<p>All Members of our Team</p> <p>All Members of our Team</p> <p>All Members of our Team Principal, Resource Staff, Volunteers</p>	<p>October 15th</p> <p>October -May checkpoints at mid-point of each grading period; (district benchmark assessments at end of each semester)</p> <p>Daily: September - May</p>	<p>Lists of Essential Student Learning Outcomes &amp; Pacing Guide Increased results for all students on team, district, state/provincial, and national indicators</p> <p>Common Writing Prompts Common Writing Rubric Increased results for all students on team, district, state/provincial, and national indicators</p> <p>Commonly scored writing samples in multiple subjects; Increased results for all students on team, district, state/provincial, and national indicators</p>

<p><b><u>Current Reality:</u></b> Last year, 85% of our students met or exceeded the target score of 3 on our District's Writing Prompt in May.</p> <p><b><u>SMART Goal:</u></b> This year, at least 90% of our students will meet or exceed the target score of 3 on our District's Writing Prompt in May.</p>	<p>4. Initiate individual and small group sessions to provide additional intervention and enrichment focused on writing.</p> <p>5. Provide parents with resources and strategies to help their children succeed as writers.</p> <p><b>Staff Development:</b></p> <p>6. Develop, implement, and evaluate Our Team Action Research Project in Writing to improve our individual &amp; collective ability to help our students learn to write at high levels.</p> <p>Use information from our common formative assessments to identify staff development needs &amp; engage in ongoing, job-embedded staff development in the area of writing.</p>	<p>All Members of our Team</p> <p>All Members of Our Third Grade Team</p> <p>All Members of Our Team</p>	<p>Daily: September-May</p> <p>1<sup>st</sup> Semester Workshop: 10/20 2<sup>nd</sup> Semester Workshop: 1/19 Newsletters; End-of-Grading Period Conferences</p> <p>Weekly collaborative team meetings; staff development days; faculty meeting sessions; additional professional learning time by request</p>	<p>Intervention/Enrichment Schedule; Student Learning Results</p> <p>Number of Parents in Attendance, Study Guides &amp; Newsletters</p> <p>Common Assessments Quarterly Reviews; Mid -Year Progress Reports; End-of-Year Team Evaluations; Increased results for all students on team, district, state/provincial, and national indicators</p>
---	---	--	--	---

## Beware of Shortcuts on the PLC Journey

- The PLC process is typically not derailed by a single cataclysmic decision. It veers off track by a series of shortcuts that undermine the process. **It dies not from one fatal blow but from a hundred small wounds.**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Beware of Shortcuts on the PLC Journey

- Identify potential damaging shortcuts for each of the following areas:
  - **Clarifying what all students must know and be able to do**
  - **Monitoring each student's learning on an ongoing basis through common formative assessments**
  - **Responding when students do not learn**
  - **Enriching and extending the learning for those who are proficient**
  - **Creating high-performing collaborative teams**
  - **Establishing a focus on results to foster interdependent teams and continuous improvement**

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## The ONE THING Leaders Must Know

- The "One Thing" leaders of any organization must know to be effective is the importance of **clarity** - communicating clearly and consistently
  - **the purpose of the organization,**
  - **the primary clients it serves,**
  - **the future it is creating,**
  - **the indicators of progress it will track, and**
  - **the specific actions members can take immediately to achieve its long-term purpose and short-term goals.**

■ Marcus Buckingham

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Aligning What We Do with What We Say

Can you identify any policy, procedure, or practice of your division or school that may not align with the big ideas of a professional learning community?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

## Communications Audit

- What systems have we put in place to ensure we “do” what must be done?
- What do we monitor?
- What do we model?
- What questions do we ask?
- How do we allocate resources: time, people, money?
- What do we celebrate?
- What are we willing to confront?

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

---

# Conditions That Affect Student Learning

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conditions that adversely impact learning</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conditions that promote learning at higher levels</b></p>
<p><b>Teachers define their role as <i>teaching</i> regardless of whether students learn.</b></p>	<p>Teachers focus on <i>learning</i> rather than on teaching.</p>
<p><b>What students learn in a given course or grade level depends on the teacher to whom they are assigned.</b></p>	<p>Teachers are clear about the essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions that students must acquire. They create guaranteed and viable curricula that align with district and state standards.</p>
<p><b>Teachers and administrators use only summative assessments to measure student learning.</b></p>	<p>Teachers monitor student learning each day in individual classrooms. They use ongoing, varied checks for understanding as well as frequent common formative assessments.</p>
<p><b>Students are unclear regarding what they are to learn and guess about how their learning will be assessed.</b></p>	<p>Students understand their learning targets and the criteria to monitor the quality of their work.</p>
<p><b>What happens when students do not learn depends on the teacher to whom they are assigned.</b></p>	<p>To help students who have difficulty mastering essential learning, schools create and implement plans to give students additional time and support for learning in timely, directive, and systematic ways.</p>
<p><b>Curriculum moves at a lockstep pace regardless of the degree of student proficiency.</b></p>	<p>Schools have systems in place to extend and enrich the learning for students who are proficient.</p>

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conditions that <i>adversely</i> impact learning</b></p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Conditions that promote learning at higher levels</b></p>
<p><b>Teachers work in isolation.</b></p>	<p>Teachers work collaboratively on matters directly related to quality teaching and learning.</p>
<p><b>School improvement focuses on completion of projects rather than on evidence of student learning.</b></p>	<p>Teachers use evidence of student learning to establish SMART goals as part of an embedded continuous-improvement process.</p>
<p><b>Teachers do not receive timely, relevant data that informs their practices.</b></p>	<p>Teachers receive timely information about the learning of their students compared to similar students. They work with colleagues to build on their students' strengths and address their weaknesses.</p>
<p><b>Students believe their learning depends upon innate ability rather than willingness to work at learning.</b></p>	<p>Teachers communicate high expectations for student achievement. They convey 1) a conviction that students will succeed if they work hard, and 2) that the teacher is willing to help students until they succeed.</p>
<p><b>Practices reflect adult preferences and convenience. Appeals to “mindless precedent” sustain ineffective practices and procedures that interfere with learning.</b></p>	<p>The staff makes a concerted and continuous effort to ensure that the school's practices support and encourage student learning.</p>
<p><b>Parents are not informed regarding their students and play no role in promoting their education.</b></p>	<p>Parents receive timely information about their children's learning and have multiple avenues for becoming partners in their education.</p>



# Recommended PLC Resources

For interactive, no-commerce PLC information, visit [allthingsplc.info](http://allthingsplc.info).

For books, videos, or events, contact Solution Tree  
at [solution-tree.com](http://solution-tree.com) or (800) 733-6786.

## Books

*Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek 2009).

*Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008).

*A Leader's Companion* (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2007).

*Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006).

*Professional Learning Communities at Work Plan Book* (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2006).

*On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities* (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, Eds., 2005).

*Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, 2004).

*Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Learning Communities* (Eaker, DuFour, & DuFour, 2002).

*Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (DuFour & Eaker, 1998).

## Videos

*The Power of Professional Learning Communities at Work: Bringing the Big Ideas to Life* (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2007).

*Let's Talk About PLC: Getting Started* (DuFour, Eaker, DuFour, & Sparks, 2003).

*Through New Eyes: Examining the Culture of Your School* (DuFour, 2002).

*How to Develop a Professional Learning Community: Passion and Persistence* (DuFour, 2001).

## Articles (Available at [allthingsplc.info](http://allthingsplc.info).)

"Leadership Is an Affair of the Heart." (Rick DuFour). *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 2004.

"What Is a Professional Learning Community?" (Richard DuFour). *Educational Leadership*, May 2004, 61(8), 6-11.

"Building a Professional Learning Community." (Rick DuFour). *The School Administrator*, May 2003.

"Central-Office Support for Learning Communities." (Rebecca Burnette DuFour). *The School Administrator*, May 2003.

"How We Formed Our Community: Lights and Cameras Are Optional, but Action Is Essential." (Becky Burnette DuFour). *Journal of Staff Development*, Winter 2002.

"Pull Out Negativity by Its Roots." (Rick DuFour & Becky Burnette). *Journal of Staff Development*, Summer 2002.

"The Learning-Centered Principal." (Richard DuFour). *Educational Leadership*, May 2002, 59(8), 12-15.

## Other Resources

**National Staff Development Council:** [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org)

**American Association of School Administrators:** [www.aasa.org](http://www.aasa.org)

"Learning Communities: What Do They Look Like and How Do You Get There?" Special issue of *The School Administrator*, May 2003.

# *Additional PLC Resources*

**FINDING COMMON GROUND IN EDUCATION REFORM**  
**Professional Learning Community Advocates—**  
**A Presentation of the Research**

What would it take to persuade educators that successfully implementing professional learning community practices is the most promising path for sustained and substantive improvement of our schools and districts? The research is clear: Many esteemed experts and respected professional organizations in education endorse and advocate the development of PLCs. For those who find research persuasive, we submit the following information.

**Expert Endorsements of Professional Learning Communities**

“The most successful corporation of the future will be a learning organization.” (Senge, 1990, p. 4)

“Every enterprise has to become a learning institution [and] a teaching institution. Organizations that build in continuous learning in jobs will dominate the twenty-first century.” (Drucker, 1992, p. 108)

“Preferred organizations will be learning organizations. . . . It has been said that people who stop learning stop living. This is also true of organizations.” (Handy, 1995, p. 55)

“Only the organizations that have a passion for learning will have an enduring influence.” (Covey, Merrill, & Merrill, 1996, p. 149)

“The new problem of change . . . is what would it take to make the educational system a learning organization—expert at dealing with change as a normal part of its work, not just in relation to the latest policy, but as a way of life.” (Fullan, 1993, p. 4)

“We have come to realize over the years that the development of a learning community of educators is itself a major cultural change that will spawn many others.” (Joyce & Showers, 1995, p. 3)

“If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff.” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 37)

“[We recommend that] schools be restructured to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers; organizations that respect learning, honor teaching, and teach for understanding.” (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 198)

“We argue, however, that when schools attempt significant reform, efforts to form a schoolwide professional community are critical.” (Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996, p. 13)

Louis and Marks (1998) found that when a school is organized into a professional community, the following occurs:

1. Teachers set higher expectations for student achievement.
2. Students can count on the help of their teachers and peers in achieving ambitious learning goals.
3. The quality of classroom pedagogy is considerably higher.
4. Achievement levels are significantly higher.

“We support and encourage the use of professional learning communities (PLCs) as a central element for effective professional development and a comprehensive reform initiative. In our experience, PLCs have the potential to enhance the professional culture within a school district.” (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p. 3)

“The framework of a professional learning community is inextricably linked to the effective integration of standards, assessment, and accountability . . . the leaders of professional learning communities balance the desire for professional autonomy with the fundamental principles and values that drive collaboration and mutual accountability.” (Reeves, 2005, pp. 47–48)

“Well-implemented professional learning communities are a powerful means of seamlessly blending teaching and professional learning in ways that produce complex, intelligent behavior in all teachers.” (Sparks, 2005, p. 156)

“Strong professional learning communities produce schools that are engines of hope and achievement for students. . . . There is nothing more important for education in the decades ahead than educating and supporting leaders in the commitments, understandings, and skills necessary to grow such schools where a focus on effort-based ability is the norm.” (Saphier, 2005, p. 111)

“[In the most successful schools] leadership ensures there are integrated communities of professional practice in the service of student academic and social learning. There is a healthy school environment in which student learning is the central focus. . . . Research has demonstrated that schools organized as communities, rather than bureaucracies, are more likely to exhibit academic success.” (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007)

“Outcomes for both staff and students have been improved by organizing professional learning communities. For staff, the results include:

- reduction of isolation of teachers
- increased commitment to the mission and goals of the school and increased vigor in working to strengthen the mission
- shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for students’ success
- powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice, that creates new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learners
- increased meaning and understanding of the content that teachers teach and the roles that they play in helping all students achieve expectations
- higher likelihood that teachers will be well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire students
- more satisfaction and higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism
- significant advances into making teaching adaptations for students, and changes for learners made more quickly than in traditional schools
- commitment to making significant and lasting changes
- higher likelihood of undertaking fundamental, systemic change

For students, the results include:

- decreased dropout rate and fewer classes ‘cut’
- lower rates of absenteeism
- increased learning that is distributed more equitably in the smaller high schools
- larger academic gains in math, science, history, and reading than in traditional schools
- smaller achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds.” (Hord, 1997)

“A school-based professional community can offer support and motivation to teachers as they work to overcome the tight resources, isolation, time constraints and other obstacles they commonly encounter. . . . In schools where professional community is strong, teachers work together more effectively, and put more effort into creating and sustaining opportunities for student learning.” (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994, p. 4)

“Such a tipping point—from reform to true collaboration—could represent the most dramatic shift in the history of educational practice. . . . We will know we have succeeded when the absence of a ‘strong professional learning community’ in a school is an embarrassment.” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 431)

### **Organizations That Endorse Professional Learning Communities**

The fundamental premise of the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future is that school reform cannot succeed without creating conditions in which teachers teach well. The Commission has identified the creation of “Strong Learning Communities” as one of its three core strategies for improving both teaching and schools:

“Quality teaching requires strong, professional learning communities. Collegial interchange, not isolation, must become the norm for teachers. Communities of learning can no longer be considered utopian; they must become the building blocks that establish a new foundation for America’s schools.” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003, p. 17)

The National Board of Professional Teaching Standards was formed to advance the quality of teaching and learning by developing professional standards for accomplished teaching. Its position statement includes the following:

“Five Core Propositions form the foundation and frame the rich amalgam of knowledge, skills, dispositions and beliefs that characterize National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). The fifth proposition calls upon teachers to be members of learning communities . . . to collaborate with others to improve student learning . . . to work with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development.” (National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, 2007a)

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) was created by the Council of Chief State School Officers to develop a common core of teaching knowledge that would clarify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions all teachers should demonstrate to be considered “professional.” The standards included the following statements:

“Professional teachers assume roles that extend beyond the classroom and include responsibilities for developing the school as a learning organization. . . . Professional teachers are

responsible for planning and pursuing their ongoing learning, for reflecting with colleagues on their practice, and for contributing to the profession's knowledge base." (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 1992, p. 13)

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) called upon math leaders to do the following:

1. "Ensure teachers work interdependently as a professional learning community to guarantee continuous improvement and gains in student achievement."
2. "Create the support and structures necessary to implement a professional learning community."
3. "Ensure a systemic implementation of a professional learning community throughout all aspects of the mathematics curriculum, instruction and assessment at the school, district, or regional level." (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, in press)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has created the Professional Learning Communities at Work Series—a topical resource kit to help teachers work as PLCs as they focus on key issues such as adolescent literacy, secondary writing, and teaching English language learners. An NCTE position paper argued that PLCs make teaching more rewarding and combat the problem of educators leaving the profession:

"Effective professional development fosters collegial relationships, creating professional communities where teachers share knowledge and treat each other with respect. Within such communities teacher inquiry and reflection can flourish, and research shows that teachers who engage in collaborative professional development feel confident and well prepared to meet the demands of teaching. . . ." (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006, p. 10)

The National Science Teachers Association issued a position paper (2006) in which it asserted that a key component of high-quality staff development would "facilitate the development of professional learning communities."

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), particularly its professor emerita Shirley Hord, has been engaged in the ongoing exploration of the potential of PLCs. As SEDL reported in one of its publications on the topic:

"Professional learning communities offer an infrastructure to create the supportive cultures and conditions necessary for achieving significant gains in teaching and learning. Professional learning communities provide opportunities for professional staff to look deeply into the teaching and learning process and

to learn how to become more effective in their work with students.” (Morrissey, 2000)

The National Education Association, America’s largest teaching organization with over 2.7 million members, is committed to making teaching more rewarding and satisfying. In pursuit of its long-term vision of “a great public school for every student,” the NEA has created its own recommended school improvement model: The Keys to Excellence. The model is intended to help educators with school improvement plans and to help them meet the challenges of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Although the model never uses the term professional learning community, its six keys to a quality school are consistent with PLC principles. The NEA keys and examples of some of the specific indicators the organization has identified for each follow:

1. Shared understanding and commitment to high goals
  - “The staff has a collective commitment to and takes responsibility for implementing high standards for all students.”
  - “The school operates under the assumption that all students can learn.”
2. Open communication and collaborative problem solving
  - “Teachers and staff collaborate to remove barriers to student learning.”
  - “Teachers communicate regularly with each other about effective teaching and learning strategies.”
3. Continuous assessment for teaching and learning
  - “Student assessment is used for decision making to improve learning.”
  - “A variety of assessment techniques are used.”
4. Personal and professional learning
  - “Teachers have regularly scheduled time to learn from one another.”
  - “Professional development has a direct, positive effect on teaching.”
5. Resources to support teaching and learning
  - “Computer hardware and software supplies are adequate for students and teachers.”
  - “Support services are adequate.”
6. Curriculum and instruction
  - “Instruction includes interventions for students who are not succeeding.”
  - “Teachers are open to new learnings and rethink their approaches to teaching and assessment practices based on teacher-directed action research and other classroom based inquiries.” (NEA, 2003)



The president of the American Federation of Teachers, an organization representing 1.4 million members, called for those interested in improving schools to “make schools learning communities for teachers as well as students. Provide for master teachers, teacher centers, real professional development in the schools—with time for teachers to work with one another to overcome children’s learning problems as they come up” (Feldman, 1998).

The National Middle School Association issued a position paper titled *This We Believe*, outlining its recommended strategies for improving schools. NMSA called for the following:

“Building a learning community that involves all teachers and places top priority on the education and healthy development of every student, teacher, and staff member . . . professional development should be integrated into the daily life of the school and directly linked to the school’s goals for student and teacher success and growth. To meet these goals, people work together in study groups, focus on learning results, analyze student work, and carry out action research.” (2003, p. 11)

Principals have also been urged by their professional organizations to focus their efforts on developing their schools as professional learning communities.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals has clarified the essential responsibilities of principals in its publication *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do* (2001) in which it states:

“If adults don’t learn then students won’t learn either. . . . The school operates as a learning community that uses its own experience and knowledge, and that of others, to improve the performance of students and teachers alike. . . . They must be a place where learning isn’t isolated, where adults demonstrate they care about kids but also about each other. In such places, learning takes place in groups. A culture of shared responsibility is established, and everybody learns from one another.” (p. 5)

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) calls upon high schools to engage in an improvement process that will ensure success for every high school student. In *Breaking Ranks II* (2004), the NASSP urges principals to focus on the development of a professional learning community within each school as a primary improvement strategy. In *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* (2006), the NASSP organizes 30 recommendations for improving middle schools into three general areas, the first of which calls for “collaborative leadership and professional learning communities” (p. 23).

In citing its recommendations for effective professional development, the National Staff Development Council (2007) contends, “Effective staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district.”

The North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA) is responsible for the accreditation of more than 8,500 schools in 19 states. Concluding that its process works “hand in hand” with the PLC concept, the NCA reported:

“Working at complementary levels—the school and classroom—the NCA school improvement and PLC processes reinforce and strengthen one another. They are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually supportive. If we want to ensure that no child is left behind, we must understand the important relationship between the NCA school improvement process and PLC. . . . The use of PLC at the classroom level has dramatically increased teachers’ ability to implement a guaranteed and viable curriculum, monitor student progress with colleagues on school improvement goals and curriculum objectives, and improve the teaching and learning process. The strong link between school improvement goals and PLC at the classroom level allows all children to be successful.” (Colliton, 2005, p. 1–2)

### **Studies That Support Professional Learning Communities**

The Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools conducted a 5-year study that included analysis of data from more than 1,500 elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the United States. The Center also conducted field research in 44 schools in 16 states. Schools that were successful in linking their improvement initiatives with improved student learning were characterized by the following traits (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995):

1. A focus on an agreed-upon vision of what students should learn
2. Teaching that requires students to think, to develop in-depth understanding, and to apply academic learning to important, realistic problems
3. Schools that function as professional learning communities in which teachers . . .
  - Are guided by a clear shared purpose for student learning
  - Feel a sense of collective responsibility for student learning
  - Collaborate with one another to promote student learning
  - Enjoy increased autonomy at the school site

Another analysis of the data collected by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools agreed that development of professional learning communities was critical to improving schools and elaborated on the conditions leading to successful PLCs. Kruse, Seashore Louis, and Bryck (1994) argue that in a PLC, teachers are committed to the following:

1. Reflective dialogue based on a shared set of norms, beliefs, and values that allow them to critique their individual and collective performance
2. De-privatization of practice that requires teachers to share, observe, and discuss each other's methods and philosophies
3. Collective focus on student learning fueled by the belief that all students can learn and that staff members have a mutual obligation to see to it that students learn
4. Collaboration that moves beyond dialogue about students to producing materials that improve instruction, curriculum, and assessment for students
5. Shared norms and values that affirm common ground on critical educational issues and a collective focus on student learning

The study also reported that these five factors are supported by structural conditions such as time to meet during the school day, teachers organized into collaborative teams that work together interdependently to achieve common goals, open communication within and across teams, and teacher autonomy guided by a shared sense of purpose, priorities, and norms. Social resources that support the PLCs include commitment to continuous improvement, high levels of trust and respect, sharing of effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and focused orientation for those new to the school.

WestEd, a research and development agency focusing on how to improve schools, explored the question, "What does it take to translate teacher professional development into impressive learning gains for students?" The agency's report concluded, "Our key finding—the central importance of a professional community to adult and student learning—will be no surprise to those familiar with other educational research." (WestEd, 2000, p. 11)

### **Research That Supports the Three Big Ideas of a Professional Learning Community**

Another approach to presenting the research in support of PLCs is to break the concept down into the three big ideas explained in *Learning by Doing* (2006)—a focus on learning, a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results—and share the research on each idea. For example, the following research highlights the importance of a collaborative culture:

"The single most important factor for successful school restructuring and the first order of business for those interested

Pages 1–9 used with permission from *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

in increasing the capacity of their schools is building a collaborative internal environment that fosters cooperative problem-solving and conflict resolution.” (Eastwood & Seashore Louis, 1992, p. 215)

“The ability to collaborate—on both a small and large scale—is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society. . . . In short, without collaborative skills and relationships it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as you need in order to be an agent for social improvement.” (Fullan, 1993, pp. 17–18)

“An interdependent work structure strengthens professional community. When teachers work in groups that require coordination, this, by definition, requires collaboration. When groups, rather than individuals, are seen as the main units for implementing curriculum, instruction, and assessment, they facilitate development of shared purpose for student learning and collective responsibility to achieve it.” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, pp. 37–38)

“The key to ensuring that every child has a quality teacher is finding a way for school systems to organize the work of qualified teachers so they can collaborate with their colleagues in developing strong learning communities that will sustain them as they become more accomplished teachers.” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003, p. 7)

“Collaboration and the ability to engage in collaborative action are becoming increasingly important to the survival of the public schools. Indeed, without the ability to collaborate with others the prospect of truly repositioning schools in the constellation of community forces is not likely.” (Schlechty, 2005, p. 22)

“A precondition for doing *anything* to strengthen our practice and improve a school is the existence of a collegial culture in which professionals talk about practice, share their craft knowledge, and observe and root for the success of one another. Without these in place, no meaningful improvement—no staff or curriculum development, no teacher leadership, no student appraisal, no team teaching, no parent involvement, and no sustained change—is possible.” (Barth, 2006, p. 13)

Professional organizations for educators have also endorsed the premise that educators should work together collaboratively. Consider the conclusions of the following organizations:

“Some of the most important forms of professional learning and problem solving occur in group settings within schools and school districts. Organized groups provide the social interaction that often deepens learning and the interpersonal support and synergy necessary for creatively solving the complex problems of teaching and learning. And because many of the recommendations contained in these standards advocate for increased teamwork among teachers and administrators in designing lessons, critiquing student work, and analyzing various types of data, among other tasks, it is imperative that professional learning be directed at improving the quality of collaborative work.” (National Staff Development Council, 2007)

“High performing schools tend to promote collaborative cultures, support professional communities and exchanges among all staff and cultivate strong ties among the school, parents, and community. . . . Teachers and staff collaborate to remove barriers to student learning. . . . Teachers communicate regularly with each other about effective teaching and learning strategies.” (National Education Association, 2006)

“It is time to end the practice of solo teaching in isolated classrooms. Teacher induction and professional development in 21st century schools must move beyond honing one’s craft and personal repertoire of skills. Today’s teachers must transform their personal knowledge into a collectively built, widely shared, and cohesive professional knowledge base.” (Fulton, Yoon, & Lee [for the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future], 2005, p. 4)

“[Accomplished teachers] collaborate with others to improve student learning. . . . They work with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development.” (National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, 2007a)

“Successful middle level teacher preparation programs place a high premium on teaching prospective and practicing middle level teachers about the importance of collaboration with colleagues and other stakeholders. One of the unique characteristics of

middle level schools for teachers is the heavy emphasis on collaboration. . . . Teachers are not operating in isolation. This permits insights and understandings about young adolescent students to be shared with others and therefore maximized.” (National Middle School Association, 2006)

“Isolation is the enemy of learning. Principals who support the learning of adults in their school organize teachers’ schedules to provide opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and think together. For instance, teams of teachers who share responsibility for the learning of all students meet regularly to plan lessons, critique student work and the assignments that led to it, and solve common instructional or classroom management problems.” (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001, p. 45)

“A high school will regard itself as a *community* in which members of the staff collaborate to develop and implement the school’s learning goals. Teachers will provide the leadership essential to the success of reform, collaborating with others in the educational community to redefine the role of the teacher and to identify sources of support for that redefined role.” (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004, p. 4)

The third big idea in a PLC, a focus on results, has been endorsed by many experts. Evidenced-based decision-making is key to producing a results-orientation in education. Consider the following statements:

“An astonishing number of educational leaders make critical decisions about curriculum, instruction, assessment, and placement on the basis of information that is inadequate, misunderstood, misrepresented, or simply absent. Even when information is abundant and clear, I have witnessed leaders who are sincere and decent people stare directly at the information available to them, and then blithely ignore it. . . . Strategic leaders are worthy of the name because of their consistent linking of evidence to decision making. They respond to challenges not by scoring rhetorical points but by consistently elevating evidence over assertion.” (Reeves, 2006, p. 95)

“School systems must create a culture that places value on managing by results, rather than on managing by programs.” (Schlechty, 1997, p. 110)

“It is essential that leaders work to establish a culture where results are carefully assessed and actions are taken based on these assessments.” (Schlechty, 2005, p. 11)

“Concentrating on results does not negate the importance of process. On the contrary, the two are interdependent: Results tell us which processes are most effective and to what extent and whether processes need reexamining and adjusting. Processes exist for results and results should inform processes.” (Schmoker, 1996, p. 4)

“What does it take to close the achievement gaps? Our findings suggest that it comes down to how schools use data. Teachers in gap-closing schools more frequently use data to understand the skill gaps of low-achieving students. . . . When data points to a weakness in students’ academic skills, gap-closing schools are more likely to focus in on that area, making tough choices to ensure that students are immersed in what they most need.” (Symonds, 2004, p. 13)

In fact, evidence-based decisions are so important to establishing a results orientation in any organization that many experts outside education have advocated for using data:

“The ultimate measure of a great team is results. Effective teams avoid ambiguity and interpretation when it comes to results. They decide what they want to achieve, then they clarify how they will measure their progress. They select one or two indicators they can collectively focus upon and around which they can rally. They create a scoreboard that helps keep them focused on results. These teams use the scoreboard to monitor their progress against the expected achievement.” (Lencioni, 2005, p. 69)

“Companies operate under the false assumption that if they carry out enough of the ‘right’ improvement activities, actual performance improvements will inevitably materialize. At the heart of this assumption, which we call ‘activity centered,’ is a fundamentally flawed logic that confuses ends with means, processes with outcomes. Payoffs from the infusion of activities will be meager at best. And there is in fact an alternative: results-driven improvement processes that focus on achieving specific, measurable operational improvements within a few months.” (Schaffer & Thomson, 1998, p. 191)

“We found there was something distinctive about the decision-making process of the great companies we studied. First, they embraced the current reality, no matter how bad the message. Second, they developed a simple yet deeply insightful frame of reference for all decisions. . . . You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts.” (Collins, 2001, p. 69)

“Unless you can subject your decision-making to a ruthless and continuous *JUDGMENT BY RESULTS*, all your zigs and zags will only be random lunges in the dark, sooner or later bound to land you on the rocks.” (Champy, 1995, p. 120)

“Ducking the facts about performance for fear of being judged, criticized, humiliated, and punished characterizes losing streaks, not winning streaks. In a losing streak, facts are used for blame, not improvement; they are turned into weapons to persecute, not tools to find solutions. . . . In winning streaks, players get and use abundant feedback about their performance. Leaders can . . . ensure that measurements ultimately empower rather than punish people.” (Kanter, 2004, p. 208)



## Bibliography

- Annenberg Institute for School Reform. (2004). *Professional learning communities: Professional development strategies that improve instruction*. Available at: [www.annenberginstitute.org/images/ProfLearning.pdf](http://www.annenberginstitute.org/images/ProfLearning.pdf) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- Barth, R. (2006). Improving relationships inside the schoolhouse. *Educational Leadership*, 63(6), 8–13.
- Champy, J. (1995). *Reengineering management: The mandate for new leadership*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Collins, J. (2001). *Good to great: Why some companies make the leap . . . and others don't*. New York: Harper Business.
- Colliton, J. (2005). *Professional learning communities and the NCA school improvement process*. Available at: [http://www.ncacasi.org/enews/articles\\_apr05/prof\\_learning.pdf](http://www.ncacasi.org/enews/articles_apr05/prof_learning.pdf)
- Covey, S., Merrill, A., & Merrill, R. (1996). *First things first: To live, to love, to learn, to leave a legacy*. New York: Fireside.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (1996). What matters most: A competent teacher for every child. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 78(3), 193–200.
- Dolan, P. (1994). *Restructuring our schools: A primer on systemic change*. Kansas City: Systems and Organizations.
- Drucker, P. (1992). *Managing for the future: The 1990s and beyond*. New York: Truman Talley Books.
- Eastwood, K., & Seashore Louis, K. (1992). Restructuring that lasts: Managing the performance dip. *Journal of School Leadership*, 2(2), 213–224.
- Elmore, R. (2006). *School reform from the inside out: Policy, practice, and performance*. Boston: Harvard Educational Press.
- Feldman, S. (1998). *A teacher quality manifesto*. Available at: [www.aft.org/pubsreports/american\\_educator/issues/fall98/feldman.htm](http://www.aft.org/pubsreports/american_educator/issues/fall98/feldman.htm) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- Fullan, M. (1993). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. London: Falmer Press.
- Fulton, K., Yoon, I., & Lee, C. (2005). *Induction into learning communities* [prepared for the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future]. Available at: [www.nctaf.org/documents/NCTAF\\_Induction\\_Paper\\_2005.pdf](http://www.nctaf.org/documents/NCTAF_Induction_Paper_2005.pdf) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- Handy, C. (1995). Managing the dream. In S. Chawla and J. Renesch (Eds.), *Learning organizations: Developing cultures for tomorrow's workplace* (pp. 45–56). New York: Productivity Press.
- Hord, S. (1997). *Professional learning communities: Communities of continuous inquiry and improvement*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Available at: [www.sedl.org/pubs/change34/](http://www.sedl.org/pubs/change34/)

- Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium. (1992). *Model standards for beginning teacher licensing, assessments, and development: A resource for state dialogue*. Available at: [www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/corestrd.pdf](http://www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/corestrd.pdf) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- Joyce, B., & Showers, B. (1995, May). *The Developer*. National Staff Development Council
- Kanter, R. (2004). *Confidence: How winning streaks and losing streaks begin and end*. New York: Three Rivers Press.
- Kruse, S., Seashore Louis, K., & Bryk, A. (1994, Spring). Building professional community in schools. *Issues in Restructuring Schools*, 6. Available from the Center for School Organization and Restructuring at: [www.wcer.wisc.edu/archive/cors/issues%5Fin%5FRestructuring%5FSchools/issues\\_NO\\_6\\_SPRING\\_1994.pdf](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/archive/cors/issues%5Fin%5FRestructuring%5FSchools/issues_NO_6_SPRING_1994.pdf) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- Lencioni, P. (2005). *Overcoming the five dysfunctions of a team: A field guide*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Louis, K., Kruse, S., & Marks, H. (1996). Schoolwide professional community. In F. Newmann (Ed.), *Authentic achievement: Restructuring schools for intellectual quality* (pp. 179–203). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Louis, K., Kruse, S., & Raywid, M. (1996, May). Putting teachers at the center of reform. *NASSP Bulletin*, 80, 9–21.
- Louis, K., & Marks, H. (1998). Does professional learning community affect the classroom teachers' work and student experience in restructured schools? *American Journal of Education*, 106(4), 532–575.
- Morrissey, M. (2000). *Professional learning communities: An ongoing exploration*. Available from the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory at: [www.sedl.org/pubs/change45/1.html](http://www.sedl.org/pubs/change45/1.html) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- National Association of Elementary School Principals. (2001). *Leading learning communities: Standards for what principals should know and be able to do*. Available at: [www.naesp.org/client\\_files/LLC-Exec-Sum.pdf](http://www.naesp.org/client_files/LLC-Exec-Sum.pdf) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2004). *Breaking ranks II: Strategies for leading high school reform*. Reston, VA: Author.
- National Association of Secondary School Principals. (2006). *Breaking ranks in the middle: Strategies for leading middle level reform*. Reston, VA: Author.
- National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. (2007a). [The five core standards.] Available at: [www.nbpts.org/the\\_standards/the\\_five\\_core\\_propositions](http://www.nbpts.org/the_standards/the_five_core_propositions) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- National Board of Professional Teaching Standards. (2007b). [History of national teaching standards.] Available at: [www.nbpts.org/about\\_us/mission\\_and\\_history/history](http://www.nbpts.org/about_us/mission_and_history/history) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. (2003). *No dream denied: A pledge to America's children*. Washington, DC: Author.

- National Council of Teachers of English. (2006, April). *NCTE principles of adolescent reform: A policy research brief*. Available at: [www.ncte.org/library/files/about\\_NCTE/Overview/Adol-Lit-Brief.pdf](http://www.ncte.org/library/files/about_NCTE/Overview/Adol-Lit-Brief.pdf) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. (in press). *Principles and standards for mathematics education leaders*.
- National Education Association. (2006). *NEA's KEYS initiative*. Available at: [www.nea.org/schoolquality/index.html](http://www.nea.org/schoolquality/index.html) (retrieved January 6, 2006).
- National Middle School Association. (2003). *This we believe: Successful schools for young adolescents: A position paper*. Westerville, OH: Author.
- National Middle School Association. (2006). *National Middle School Association's position statement on the professional preparation of middle level teachers*. Available at: [www.nmsa.org/AboutNMSA/PositionStatements/ProfessionalPreparation/tabid/287/default.aspx](http://www.nmsa.org/AboutNMSA/PositionStatements/ProfessionalPreparation/tabid/287/default.aspx) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- National Science Teachers Association. (2006). *NSTA position statement: Professional development in science education*. Available at: [www.nsta.org/about/positions/profdev.aspx](http://www.nsta.org/about/positions/profdev.aspx) (retrieved August 14, 2007).
- National Staff Development Council. (2007). [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org) (retrieved January 6, 2007).
- Newmann, F., & Wehlage, G. (1995). *Successful school restructuring: A report to the public and educators by the center for restructuring schools*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.
- Reeves, D. (2006). *The Learning Leader*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Reeves, D. (2005). Putting it all together. Standards, assessment, and accountability in successful professional learning communities. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker, and R. DuFour (Eds.), *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities* (pp. 45–63). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree (formerly National Educational Service).
- Reeves, D. (2002). *The leader's guide to standards: A blueprint for educational equity and excellence*. San Francisco: John Wiley and Sons.
- Saphier, J. (2005). *John Adams' promise: How to have good schools for all our children, not just for some*. Acton, MA: Research for Better Teaching.
- Schaffer, R., & Thomson, H. (1998). Successful change programs begin with results. In *Harvard Business Review on Change*, pp. 189–212. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Schlechty, P. (1997). *Inventing better schools: An action plan for educational reform*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Schlechty, P. (2005). *Creating the capacity to support innovations* (Occasional Paper #2). Louisville, KY: Schlechty Center for Leadership in School Reform. Available at: [www.schlechtycenter.org/pdfs/supportinn.pdf](http://www.schlechtycenter.org/pdfs/supportinn.pdf) (retrieved August 27, 2007).
- Schmoker, M. (2004). Tipping point: From feckless reform to substantive instructional improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 85(6), 424–432.
- Schmoker, M. (2005). Here and now: Improving teaching and learning. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker, & R. DuFour (Eds.), *On common ground: The power of professional*

- learning communities* (pp. 137–138), Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree (formerly National Educational Service).
- Schmoker, M. (1996). *Results: The key to continuous school improvement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Schmoker, M. (1999). *Results: The key to continuous school improvement* (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed.). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Senge, P. (1990). *The fifth discipline: The art & practice of the learning organization*. New York: Currency Doubleday.
- Sparks, D. (2005). Leading for transformation in teaching, learning, and relationships. In R. DuFour, R. Eaker, & R. DuFour (Eds.), *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities* (pp. 155–175). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree (formerly National Educational Service).
- Symonds, K. (2004). *Perspectives on the gaps: Fostering the academic success of minority and low-income students*. Naperville, IL: North Central Regional Educational Laboratory.
- WestEd. (2000). *Teachers who learn, kids who achieve: A look at schools with model professional development*. San Francisco: WestEd.

## Making Time for Collaboration

It is also imperative that teachers be provided with time to meet during their contractual day. We believe it is insincere and disingenuous for any school district or any school principal to stress the importance of collaboration, and then fail to provide time for collaboration. One of the ways in which organizations demonstrate their priorities is allocation of resources, and in schools, one of the most precious resource is time. . . . The following list is not meant to be comprehensive but is merely intended to illustrate some of the steps schools and districts have taken to create the prerequisite time for collaboration.

➤ **Common Preparation** – Build the master schedule to provide daily common preparation periods for teachers of the same course, or department. Each team should then designate one day each week to engage in collaborative, rather than individual planning.

➤ **Parallel Scheduling** – Schedule common preparation time by assigning the Specialists—physical education teachers, librarians, music teachers, art teachers, instructional technologists, guidance counselors, foreign language teachers, etc.—to provide lessons to students across an entire grade level at the same time each day. The team should designate one day each week for collaborative planning. Some schools build back-to-back specials classes into the master schedule on each team’s designated collaborative day, thus creating an extended block of time for the team to meet.

➤ **Adjusted Start & End Time of Contractual Day** – Members of a team, department or an entire faculty agree to start their workday early or extend their workday one day each week to gain collaborative team time. In exchange for adding time to one end of the workday, the teachers are compensated by getting the time back on the other end of that day. For example, on the first day of each school-week the entire staff of Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois begins their workday at 7:30 a.m., rather than the normal 7:45 a.m. start-time. From 7:30 – 8:30 am, the entire faculty engages in collaborative team meetings. Student arrival begins at 7:40 am, as usual, but the start of class is delayed from the normal 8:05 until 8:30. Students are supervised by administration and non-instructional staff in a variety of optional activities such as breakfast, library and computer research, open gym, study halls, and tutorials. To accommodate for the twenty-five minutes of lost instructional time, five minutes is trimmed from five of the eight fifty-minute class periods. The school day ends at the usual 3:25 p.m., buses run their regular routes, and Stevenson teachers are free to leave at 3:30 rather than the 3:45 time stipulated in their contract. By making these minor adjustments to the schedule on the first day of each week, the entire faculty is guaranteed an hour of collaborative planning to start each week, but their work day or work week has not been extended by a single minute.

➤ **Shared Classes** – Teachers across two different grade levels or courses combine their students into one class for instruction. While one teacher/team instructs the students during that period, the other team engages in collaborative work. The teams alternate instructing and collaborating to provide equity in learning time for students and teams. Some schools coordinate shared classes to ensure that older students adopt younger students and serve as literacy buddies, tutors and mentors.

➤ **Group Activities/Events/Testing** – teams of teachers coordinate activities that require supervision of students rather than instructional expertise (i.e. videos, resource lessons, read-alouds, assemblies, testing). Nonteaching staff supervise students while the teachers engage in team collaboration.

➤ **Banking Time** – Over a designated period of days, instructional minutes are extended beyond the required school day. After banking the desired number of minutes on designated days, the instructional day ends early to allow for faculty collaboration and student enrichment. In a middle school, for example, the traditional instructional day ended at 3:00 p.m.; students boarded buses at 3:20 and the teacher contractual day ended at 3:30. The faculty decided to extend the instructional day until 3:10 p.m. rather than 3:00 p.m. By teaching an extra ten minutes nine days in a row, they “bank” ninety minutes. On the tenth day, instruction stops at 1:30 and the entire faculty has collaborative team time for two hours. The students remain on campus and are engaged in clubs, enrichment activities, assemblies, etc. sponsored by a variety of parent/community partners and co-supervised by the school’s non-teaching staff.

➤ **In-Service/Faculty Meeting Time** – Schedule extended time for teams to work together on staff development days and during faculty meeting time. Rather than requiring staff to attend a traditional whole staff inservice session or sit in a faculty meeting while directives and calendar items are read to highly educated professionals, shift the focus and use of these days/meetings so members of teams have extended time to learn with and from each other.

# Professional Learning Communities

## *An Overview*

### **Definition**

“...A Professional Learning Community is a collaboration of teachers, administrators, parents, and students, who work together to seek out best practices, test them in the classroom, continuously improve processes, and focus on results.”

Rick DuFour, 2002.

### **Fundamental Assumptions**

1. We can make a difference: Our schools can be more effective.
2. Improving our people is the key to improving our schools.
3. Significant school improvement will impact teaching and learning.

### ***The ONE Thing***

in a  
Professional Learning Community,  
“learning” rather than “teaching”  
is the fundamental purpose  
of your school.

### ***Three Big Ideas***

Focus on Learning  
Collaboration  
Focus on Results

### ***Four Corollary Questions***

1. What should students know and be able to do as a result of this course, class, or grade level?
2. How will we know that the students are not learning?
3. How do we respond when students do not learn?
4. How do we respond when students learn more?

Question 1 – What are the essential outcomes that we expect students to learn?

Question 2 – What assessment will we use to determine if the students have learned?

Questions 3 & 4 – How will we intervene when students do not learn or learn more than anticipated?

## ***Six Characteristics of a Professional Learning Community***

- **Shared mission, vision, values, goals**  
What distinguishes a learning community from an ordinary school is its collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the staff of the school believes and that govern their actions and behaviors.
- **Collaborative Culture**  
Professionals in a learning community work in teams that share a common purpose. They learn from each other and create the momentum that drives improvement. They build within the organization the structure and vehicles that make collaborative work and learning effective and productive.
- **Collective Inquiry**  
People in a learning community relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results.
  - They reflect publicly on their beliefs and challenge each other's beliefs.
  - They share insights and hammer out common meanings.
  - They work jointly to plan and test actions and initiatives.
  - They coordinate their actions, so that the work of each individual contributes to the common effort.
- **Action Orientation / Experimentation**  
Members of professional learning communities constantly turn their learning and insights into action. They recognize the importance of engagement and experience in learning and in testing new ideas.
- **Commitment to Continuous Improvement**  
Members of a learning organization are not content with the status quo and continually seek ways to bring present reality closer to future ideal. They constantly ask themselves and each other:
  - What is our purpose?
  - What do we hope to achieve?
  - What are our strategies for improving?
  - How will we assess our efforts?
- **Results Orientation**  
Professionals in a learning organization recognize that no matter how well-intentioned the efforts, the only valid judgment of improvement is observable and measurable results. Assessment and re-evaluation are the keys to continued improvement.

*Adapted from Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998), Professional Learning Communities at Work*

### **Mission, vision, values, and goals is the district/school's core ideology.**

"The core ideology clarifies what doesn't change for an organization in an environment of rapid and unpredictable change." *Built to Last* (1997, p.48)

Collaborative teams are the engine of a Professional Learning Community. Professionals in a learning community work on interdependent teams that share a common purpose. They learn from each other and create the momentum that drives school improvement.

Collective inquiry, action orientation and experimentation, commitment to continuous improvement, and results orientation are the four habits of highly effective teams.

*Adapted from Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998), Professional Learning Communities at Work*

## Professional Learning Communities at Work

Each word of the phrase “professional learning community” has been chosen purposefully. A “professional” is someone with expertise in a specialized field, an individual who has not only pursued advanced training to enter the field, but who is also expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base. The knowledge base of education has expanded dramatically in the past quarter century, both in terms of research and in terms of the articulation of recommended standards for the profession. Although many school personnel are unaware of or are inattentive to emerging research and standards, educators in a professional learning community make these findings the basis of their collaborative investigation of how they can better achieve their goals.

“Learning” suggests ongoing action and perpetual curiosity. In Chinese, the term “learning” is represented by two characters: the first means “to study”, and the second means “to practice constantly.” Many schools operate as though their personnel know everything they will ever need to know the day they enter the profession. The school that operates as a professional *learning* community recognizes that its members must engage in the ongoing study and constant practice that characterize an organization committed to continuous improvement.


Much has been written about learning organizations, but we prefer the term “community.” An organization has been defined both as an “administrative and functional structure” (*Webster’s Dictionary*) and as “a systematic arrangement for a definite purpose” (*Oxford Dictionary*). In each case, the emphasis is on structure and efficiency. In contrast, however, the term “community” suggests a group linked by common interests. As Corrine McLaughlin and Gordon Davidson (1994) write:

*Community means different things to different people. To some it is a safe haven where survival is assured through mutual cooperation. To others, it is a place of emotional support, with deep sharing and bonding with close friends. Some see community as an intense crucible for personal growth. For others, it is simply a place to pioneer their dreams.*

In a professional learning community, all of these characteristics are evident. Educators create an environment that fosters mutual cooperation, emotional support, and personal growth as they work together to achieve what they cannot accomplish alone.

*Adapted from Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker (1998), Professional Learning Communities at Work*



	Classroom Assessments	Common Assessments	District Level Assessments	External Assessments
Locus of Control	Classroom	School	District	State and National
Summative/Formative	Most Formative	More Formative	More Summative	Most Summative
Frequency	Daily (frequent, ongoing)	Quarterly (at minimum)	Periodic (pre and post)	Annual (or longer)
Description of Data	Individualizes Student Data	Standards Based Data	Benchmark Data	Autopsy Data
Highlights	Mastery of strategies and skills	Levels of Proficiency	Groups of At-risk students	Programmatic Strengths and Weaknesses
Products	Descriptive Feedback	Diagnostic Feedback	Entrance and Exit Criteria	Rank order
Outcome	Reteaching and regrouping	Systematic Interventions	Program Support	Accountability