

Professional Learning Communities

A professional learning community provides teachers the opportunity to be collaborative. Educational author William DeFour describes a professional learning community as a process that shifts the focus from teaching to learning. In this process, the school community begins to review its practices inside the classroom and how students learn best.

A superintendent must embrace any concept that improves student achievement. The professional learning community model provides the structure for the instructional staff to discuss learning inside the classroom. This type of professional development can become deeply embedded into the school culture if implemented correctly.

The three components of the PLC model:

- Ensuring Students Learn – Many school mission statements promise “learning for all” but fall short of this promise through practice. The school staff will begin asking questions such as: What characteristics and practices have worked well for students? How can our school institutionalize those practices? The greatest impact in this process is the creation of interventions for struggling students. The interventions vary from more time to learn a new concept, to providing additional assistance through tutoring. The teams develop systematic plans for students to become successful.
- Culture of Collaboration – Many teachers continue to work in isolation and do not welcome others into their classroom. This practice must be stopped in order for classroom instruction to improve. The professional learning community model encourages dialogue through a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. The teams consistently meet throughout the year to discuss goals, strategies, pacing, materials, and concerns about individual students.
- Focus on Results – The development of professional learning communities in a school district will shift the focus on results in the classroom. Instructional teams become results oriented and begin to hold each other accountable for student learning. The instructional teams develop measurable goals so data will drive the decision making for the team.

This model treats teachers as professional educators. Teachers are the best clinicians at their craft and should be given the autonomy to discuss best practices. A professional development model that is inclusive, collaborative, and results oriented will improve academic achievement.