Establishing PLCs: Collaboration

Opening Activity:
Before viewing the video segment, discuss the following prompt with the whole learning group.

When working within a small group, what value is created when each member actively participates and contributes to the discussion? What are some of the road blocks you have found that deter members in a group from participating?

Establishing PLCs: Collaboration (6:55 in length)

- Careful cultivation of a culture that values learning, collaboration, and trust is essential for a PLC to be effective.
- The Core Skills that participants need to acquire in a PLC are:
    - Collaboration
    - Instructional Leadership
- The Areas of Support they need to receive before they can work together effectively as a group are:
    - Assessments
    - Calendaring
- Developing a culture of collaboration is very important.
- Because students today are more diverse and have different needs than past generations of students, yesterday's culture of teacher isolation is no longer feasible.
- Instead, collaboration has become a fundamental skill in today's educational environment.
- In a truly collaborative environment, all PLC members participate equally in discussions and decision-making.
- When the culture and structure of collaboration are in place in a PLC, a teacher's capacity and individuality is increased.

Implementation Exercise: Analytical Tool: Collaboration
Be sure each participant has a copy of the worksheet on the following page and allow a few minutes for everyone to complete the form individually.

1. When all forms have been completed, instruct participants to star the three most influential high-scoring items (i.e. those attributes that the participant feels most contribute to the successful collaboration of the group).
2. Next, have participants put a *0* next to the three most influential lowest-scoring items (i.e. those attributes that are the biggest barriers to successful collaboration within the group).
3. Discuss your PLC's strengths and weaknesses and how the overall unit can implement change for improvement in collaboration, while maintaining currently successful practices. Set 1-2 goals for the group.
4. Discuss: What can you do personally to improve the culture of collaboration in your PLC? Instruct each individual to set personal goals that will help achieve the group goal(s).
5. Have each participant write down the group goal(s) and their personal goals and place them in a location that will be viewed often.
6. At each meeting, conduct a brief review of the goal(s) and how improvement is coming along. Once the new behavior becomes standard procedure, choose another improvement to your group's collaboration to tackle.

Reflection/Journal Writing:
Following the discussion, ask participants to record new learning and ideas in their journals.

Analytical Tool: Collaboration

Implementation

One of the key factors in a successful PLC is collaboration. This kind of collaboration is more than just "water-cooler discussion" about schedules and behavioral problems, it requires a deeper level of trust and focus. This checklist is meant to highlight your PLC's collaborative strengths and weaknesses. Each member of the PLC should fill out this form and use it as a springboard to discuss both your collaborative weaknesses *and* strengths.

Key: 1=Strongly Disagree; 2=Disagree; 3=Neither Agree Nor Disagree; 4=Agree; 5=Strongly Agree

Collaborative Skill	1	2	3	4	5
When we meet as a PLC, all members participate equally.					
In our PLC, we feel safe sharing our professional struggles as well as our successes.					
There are no PLC members who dominate the conversation.					
There are no PLC members who refuse to participate or voice their opinions.					
We all feel safe sharing our student data with each other.					
We welcome each other into our classrooms for observations, whether formal or informal.					
When we provide feedback on each others' teaching skills, we feel safe enough to be honest.					
There is no hostility when we give and receive feedback.					
Our PLC meetings are always focused on professional practices.					
When we evaluate each others' practices, we stay focused on the goal of mutual improvement; we do not point fingers or blame.					
We have an agenda for each PLC meeting, and we follow it closely.					
All members have equal opportunity to demonstrate their teaching strengths.					
Each member is on time to our PLC meetings and we seldom have anyone leave early.					
We take turns being the "group leader."					
We come to PLC meetings well prepared with materials, reports, or other data we've been asked to gather.					
As a PLC, we willingly seek assistance from outside sources when needed (instructional coaches, curriculum support, paraprofessionals, parents, or administrators).					
We reach out to other PLCs in the school or the district to benefit from additional levels of collaboration.					
We seek opportunities to learn, and share our learning with each other, on a regular basis.					
When a member of our PLC is struggling with a professional problem, we are willing to put in extra time and effort to help.					
We regularly communicate with stakeholders about our progress, our struggles, and our ongoing needs.					
Each of us can say that we have grown professionally through our PLC participation.					
Our PLC time is always focused on an area of student achievement or professional development.					
We invite others into our PLC meetings on a regular basis because we are always willing to learn from others.					
We turn to each other first for help with classroom problems.					

Practical PLC

Featured Experts: Sanger Unified School District

Please view the following segments on PD 360:

- Segment 1: Success Story
- Segment 2: What is a PLC?
- **Segment 3: Establishing PLCs: Collaboration (pp. 4-5)**
- Segment 4: Establishing PLCs: Instructional Leadership
- Segment 5: Establishing PLCs: Common Assessments
- Segment 6: Establishing PLCs: Calendaring
- Segment 7: Overview: Working PLCs
- Segment 8: A Working PLC: Curriculum
- Segment 9: A Working PLC: Assessment
- Segment 10: A Working PLC: Instruction
- Segment 11: A Working PLC: Intervention
- Segment 12: PLC Implementation Guide

About This Program

This program discusses in detail the concept and system of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) which encourage teachers to work collaboratively and involve constant monitoring, student assessment, and extra intervention for students who are falling behind. One of the main premises behind PLCs is that every child regardless of background, race, ethnicity, color, or gender has the capacity to learn. A student may learn at a different pace or in different ways, but each child has the ability to learn.

Shifting the focus in the classroom from teaching to learning is crucial. In today's educational environment, teachers must focus on how to help every student achieve. With PLCs, teachers are trained to look deeper and find out why a student did not master a lesson and then work with other PLC members to create a solution. Through participation in high functioning PLCs, one teacher's struggling student becomes the Professional Learning Community's student. The group takes ownership of every child's academic progress and success. Effective PLCs have a direct impact on teacher confidence and student achievement.

Meet Our Experts

It is hard to believe that only six years ago, the Sanger Unified School District was on academic probation for failure to meet standardized testing goals, which could have ultimately led to a state takeover. Something had to be done.

Superintendent Marcus Johnson had an epiphany while sitting in a conference learning about a concept called, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). After implementing PLCs, and with the support and work of teachers, principals, and administrators to make these educational reforms, today 12 of the district's 13 elementary schools have met or exceeded the minimum 800-point target (out of a possible 1,000) on the state's Academic Performance Index. Many of Sanger's schools rank in the top 10-25% of schools with similar demographics. In 2009, one of Sanger's elementary schools was given the rare honor of being named a national Blue Ribbon School. And this year, eight of Sanger's elementary schools were recognized by the state's Department of Education for academic achievement.

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Publications available on this topic:

DuFour, Richard, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek. *Whatever it takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*. Moorabbin, Vic.: Hawker Brownlow Education, 2009.

DuFour, Richard, and Robert E. Eaker. *Professional Learning Communities At Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*. Bloomington, IN: National Education Service, 1998.