Professional Learning Communities: How Principals Can Make A Difference

West Virginia
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Woodlawn Middle School
Impact of a becoming a PLC

Student achievement improved from 85% to 95% of all students meeting or exceeding state standards.

Elementary School Principals Endorse PLCs

When principals apply NAESP’s six professional standards of instructional leadership, they will fulfill their primary responsibility: leading learning communities.

- NAESP, Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do, 2001

Secondary School Principals Endorse PLCs

Breaking Ranks II outlines the need for current high schools to engage in the process of change that will ensure success for every student. Its first set of recommendations and tools focuses on the development of professional learning communities.

- NASSP, Breaking Ranks II, 2004
NSDC Endorses PLCs
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.
- NSDC, Standards for Staff Development, 2001

The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community.

Milbrey McLaughlin

Creating a Professional Learning Community is a journey...
A Professional Learning Community IS...

an infrastructure, or a way of working together, which results in continuous improvement!

From: Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work...

We define a professional learning community as educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. Professional learning communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.

2008, p.14

Big Ideas of a Professional Learning Community

1. Focus on Learning
2. Collaborative teams
3. Results orientation
Today’s Desired Growth

“America offered the world a new perspective on making education available to all; now the challenge is ours to offer the world the perspective that we can educate all.”

Michael Fullan, Summit, 2005

Today’s Expectations

“The rules changed. Where once we were asked to sort and select, now we are asked to guarantee all.”

Rick Stiggins, Assessment Trainer’s Institute

Collaborative Teams

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.

They build the structures and vehicles within the organization that make collaborative work effective and learning productive.
The Four Critical Questions Teams Ask

• What do we want students to know and be able to do?
• How will we know if they can?
• What will we do if they can’t?
• What will we do for those who already can?

Purposeful, Skillful Collaboration Is Enhanced by...

SMART GOALS

Creating a Professional Learning Community is a journey...
You Are on the Right Journey!

Barriers to PLC’s
Inability to establish clear and focused educational purpose and goals.

Aims of the School and District
Goals/Initiatives
Random Acts of Improvement
Principals must articulate the vision of the school with “boorish redundancy.”
Rick DuFour

The purpose of our school is to see to it that all our students learn at high levels, and the future of our students depends upon our success.

We must work collaboratively to achieve that purpose because it is impossible to accomplish if we work in isolation.

And we must continually assess our effectiveness in achieving our purpose on the basis of results—tangible evidence that our students are acquiring the knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential to their future success.
Today’s Agenda

• What is different about leadership in a PLC?
• How can you use a guiding coalition to build the culture to sustain the work of a PLC?
• How can you begin to build the culture that supports PLC? What do you do to sustain the momentum you’ve developed?
• What changes should you make in supervising teachers? Supervising teams?

Let’s Have Some Fun…With a Case Study!

• Read the attached case study on page
• Discuss what Principal Smith did wrong.
• What should he do to respond to the teacher group?
• What should he do next?
• Can he change teachers’ minds?

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From “Instructional Leader” to “Learning Leader”

If the fundamental purpose of schools is to ensure that all students learn at high levels, then schools do not need instructional leaders--they need learning leaders who focus on evidence of learning.


Building Shared Leadership

Common Goals

LEADERSHIP in the Professional Learning Community

“No institution can survive if it needs geniuses or supermen to manage it. It must be organized to get along under a leadership of average human beings.”

Peter Drucker
Leadership Models

- Principal is the coach for the staff
- Principal is the coach for the leadership team; leadership team run their team meetings
- Shared leadership

What Great Leaders Do...

- Create a strong team with complementary strengths
- Understand the importance of shared leadership

Rick DuFour calls this a guiding coalition...

What is a Guiding Coalition?

An alliance of key members of an organization who are specifically charged to lead a change process through the predictable turmoil.

Members of the alliance should have shared objectives and high levels of trust.

The principal must be the champion for the belief …
Building a Guiding Coalition

“We’ve yet to find a single instance in which one talented person…accounted for most, let alone 100%, of the success. “You can’t do it alone.” Leadership…is a team performance… The winning strategies will be based on the “we not I” philosophy. Without people we can’t get extraordinary things done in organizations.”


Three Keys to Building a Guiding Coalition

1. Choose the right people.
   People with strong position power, broad experience, high credibility, and real leadership skill
2. “Grow” the coalition strategically.
   Diversity of views and voices
3. Work as a team, not just a collection of individuals.
   Do the real work together, share a vision and commitment

John Kotter (1998), Winning at Change

Who Should These People Be in Your School?

How do you decide?
What is Loose-Tight Leadership?

- Occurs simultaneously
- Determined ahead of time
- Lays out the expectations
- What gets monitored is what matters

Loose-Tight Leadership

“...Effective leaders don’t simply encourage schools to go off and do whatever they want, but rather establish clear parameters and priorities that enable schools to work within established boundaries in a creative and autonomous way.”

Rick DuFour

Activity!

- Individually, read the list and determine if you believe this is something a leader should be loose (L) about or tight (T) about.
- Work with your colleagues to determine what the group agrees is the appropriate leadership style for each area.
Chapter 7: Teaching Matters: Leadership that Improves Professional Practice

Chapter 5: A Passion-Driven PLC: Putting Faith Into Action
Using a Guiding Coalition Effectively:

We can’t wait for unanimity

- We must encourage others to express their concerns, seek to understand them, and address them honestly.
- We can acquire important insights from those who challenge us.
Using a Guiding Coalition

“We can’t ignore the willingness and readiness of a staff to implement PLC concepts in order to devote all of our time and energy to convincing a few holdouts of the worthiness of the initiative.”

> DuFour, et al. (2006)

How to Get People to Move Forward...

- Belief
  - ...is shaped by
- Experience
  - ...is a result of
- Behavior

We Can Behave Our Way Into New Beliefs

There is a great deal of literature demonstrating that attitudes follow behavior. People accept new beliefs as a result of changing their behavior.

> Pfeffer and Sutton, The Knowing-Doing Gap, p. 65
“...You don’t change people’s minds, you change people’s practices which change people’s minds.”

Tom Guskey

A Willingness to Lead

A common failing of leaders at all levels is the failure to be emphatically assertive when necessary. Abilities to persuade, build consensus, and utilize all the other arts of influence are important - but they don’t always do the job. Sometimes it simply comes down to using the power of one’s position to get people to act.

» Daniel Goleman

Culture Shift: From Teacher To Team
Two Types of Change

- First Order—incremental, it represents the obvious, next step.
- Second Order—dramatic departure from the expected.

Leadership (behaviors) for Second Order Change

- Be knowledgeable about how the innovation will affect instructional practice
- Be the DRIVING FORCE behind the innovation
- Continually monitor the impact of the innovation
- Challenge the status quo and be willing to move forward without guarantee of success
What principals should do...

- Create a master schedule that supports team meetings.
- Protect team meeting times.
- Communicate the importance of this time to parents and staff.
- Consider changing staff development and staff meeting practices.

NORMS
The standards of behaviors by which we agree to operate while we are in this group.

NORMS
What will we do when someone violates a norm?
What is Consensus…

Consensus occurs when everyone’s view has been heard and the will of the group is obvious.

- Rick DuFour

Consensus means that everyone agrees to support the decision, publicly and privately, once the decision is final.

- Anne Conzemius and Jan O’Neill

What Conflicts????

- What to teach (essential outcomes)
- How to teach it
- Pacing
- What assessments to use
- What proficiency looks like
- How to grade students

Crucial Conversations

1. Clarify what you want and what you do not want to result from the conversation
2. Attempt to find mutual purpose
3. Create a safe environment for honest dialogue
4. Use facts because “gathering facts is the homework required for crucial conversation”.
5. Share your thought process that has led to the conversation
6. Encourage recipients to share their facts and thought process
Crucial Conversation Practice
Structured Inquiry
In triads, identify person ‘A’, ‘B’, and ‘C’.
- 2 minutes
  • ‘A’ describes the situation and dilemma
- 7 minutes
  • ‘A’ role plays the challenging party in the dilemma
  • ‘B’ models a crucial conversation
- 2 minutes
  • ‘C’ describes what he/she observed – giving specific evidence
- 3 minutes
  • Open discussion

Your meetings have become a “Gripe” session. Christine dominates the conversation with her criticism of the administration and the way things are “run around here”. It’s keeping the team from getting work done.

Robert is a math teacher who regularly asks to have kids move down a level. He says they don’t belong in his class because he believes they don’t have the ability to do the work. He says she can’t be expected to cover all the material when she has kids like this in his class. You want to send a message to the math department that all kids can learn.
“Recognize the importance of actions”*

- Decision making policies
- Personal time allocation
- Are your meetings “collaborative”? 
- How do you handle resistance?
- What behaviors do you model?
- What do you celebrate?

*Leading to Change, Ed. Leadership, 2007

If you Demonstrate What You Value By What You Pay Attention To...

- Agendas/Minutes???
- Common Assessments???
- SMART Goals???
- Pacing Guides???
- Norms??
- Data???

What products will you monitor?

Team SMART Goals

- Must align with school and district goal(s)
- One or two goals
- Create interdependence which leads to more high functioning teams.
- Allow teams to engage in collective inquiry because they must determine the “action steps” they will take to accomplish their goal.
- Moves teams farther along to a culture of “They are all our students.”
Activity!!

Your fourth grade team submits a team goal. How do you respond?

Building the Capacity for Change

Stages of Concern

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Keys to Responding to Resisters

- Assume good intentions.
- Identify specific behaviors essential to the success of the initiative.
- Focus on behavior not attitude. Monitor behavior.
- Acknowledge and celebrate small victories.
- Confront incongruent behavior with specific concerns and communicate logical consequences.

Put Your Heads Together:

If you know that teachers have to behave in a certain way in order to change their beliefs, what behaviors might you require rather than encourage? When do you confront?

“Stretching” your best teachers

- Powerful practices include lesson study
- Create leadership opportunities
- Encourage them to write journal articles
- Create opportunities to showcase what they’re doing
- Set up sharing and mentoring opportunities