**What is a Professional Learning Community?**

“A PLC is defined as educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLC operate under the assumption that they key to improve learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.”

**Building Blocks of a PLC**

Mission-why do we exist?

Vision-what do we hope to become?

Commitments-what commitments must we make to create the school or district that will improve our ability to fulfill our purpose?

Goals-what goals will we use to monitor our process?

**School’s Fundamental Purpose**

To ensure that all students learn at high levels and the future success of students will depend on how effective educators are in achieving that fundamental purpose.

**Members of a PLC work together to do the following:**

* Clarify exactly what each student must learn
* Monitor each student’s learning on a timely basis
* Provide systematic interventions that ensure student’s receive additional time and support for learning when they struggle
* Extend and refine learning when students have already mastered the intended outcomes

**Essential Questions:**

* What is it we want our students to learn? What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do we expect them to acquire as a result of this course, grade level, or unit of instruction?
* How will we know if each student is learning each of the essential skills, concepts, and dispositions we have deemed most essential?
* How will we respond when some of our students do not learn? What process will we put in place to ensure students receive additional time and support for learning in a timely, directive, and systematic way?
* How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are already proficient?
* What would it look like if we really meant what we said?
* What specific actions can we expect to see in light of our priorities?

**Quotes:**

“More commonly, however, educators fail to build upon the foundation. They mistake writing a mission statement for living a mission, substitute crafting a vision statement for taking purposeful steps to create a more powerful school or district, settle for identifying collective commitments rather than honoring them, or confuse the announcement of joint projects with the collective pursuit of results-oriented goals that foster interdependence and mutual accountability. Written documents will never improve an organization unless they serve as a catalyst for action.”

“It is impossible for a school or district to develop the capacity to function as a professional learning community without undergoing profound cultural shifts.”

“A district that embraced the Genius of And would not seek a middle ground; it would hope to have strong leaders *and* empowered teachers, insist on consistency in important elements of district practice *and* champion both school-based and individual autonomy.”

“The words of a mission statement are not worth the paper they are written on unless people begin to do differently.”

“Great schools “row as one”; they are quite clearly in the same boat, pulling in the same direction in unison. The best schools we visited were tightly aligned communities marked by a palpable sense of common purpose and shared identity among staff-a clear sense of “we.”

“If the school improvement train must wait until every member of the staff is on board, it will never leave the station. We achieve consensus when all points of view are heard, and the will of the group is evident even to those who most oppose it.”

“When members of an organization understand its purpose, know where it is headed, and then pledge to act in certain ways to move it in the right direction, they do not need prescriptive rules and regulations to guide their daily work [here the promises we made to one another, and we need you to honor them].”

“Even worse, educators can spend an entire career in the profession and never know how well they teach a particular concept in comparison to their colleague teaching the same concept in the classroom across the hall. The scant indicators of learning that do exist are often dismissed as irrelevant. For example, anyone who has been in this profession for any length of time has witnessed teachers justify a significantly higher failure rate than their peers in the same school with the explanation that they have “higher standards.” Those same teachers routinely either expect the administration to resist the pleading of students and their parents for transfers to another classroom, or they are indifferent to the exodus that occurs on an annual basis. They are indeed protected or “buffered” from inspection of or interference in their classrooms. As a result, classroom teachers are far too often immersed in a “culture of privacy and non-interference (that) is the best friend of the status quo.”

“Teachers can be working together in close proximity in rooms adjacent to one another. They can be working very hard in pursuit of the same goals—helping all students learn their math facts in third grade or write a persuasive essay in ninth grade. Nevertheless, they are not a team. In both instances the missing element is *interdependence.* The success or failure of a teacher in one classroom has no impact on the others.

“First, educators often substitute congeniality for collaboration. If the members of a group get along with one another or perhaps read the same book, they are satisfied they are a collaborative team. They are not-just as good friends or the members of Oprah’s Book Club are not collaborative teams.”

“Collaboration in a PLC entails working together interdependently in systematic processes to analyze and impact professional practice to improve individual and collective results.”

“It is not “do we collaborate,” but rather “what do collaborate about?”

“After the team has reached agreement on what students must learn and on the strategies for assessing their learning, each member of the team has the autonomy to select and implement the instructional strategies he or she believes will yield the best results.”

“Placement of one student above another is often determined by a hundredth of a percentage point. This very precise ranking is, of course, based on the disjointed and dissimilar criteria used by dozens of teachers who are not required, expected, or even encouraged to come to a common understanding of how students should be assessed, the rigor of their classroom assessments, the criteria to be used in determining the quality of student work, or the factors to be used in deciding student grades. Hundreds of subjective judgments by disconnected teachers contribute to the establishment of a final class rank that is then presented under the pretext of objectivity.

“The use of common assessments increases the likelihood that students will have access to the same curriculum, acquire the same essential knowledge and skills, take assessments of the same rigor, and have work judged according to the same criteria. “If every teacher has license to assess whatever and however he or she wishes, according to criteria unique to and often known only by that teacher, schools will never be institutions that truly model a commitment to equity.”

“Which assessment is likely to be of higher quality—one written by a teacher working in isolation or one developed by a team working together to clarify what students must know and be able to do, studying and discussing the best strategies for gathering evidence of student learning, developing common criteria for judging the quality of student work, and critiquing, challenging, and expanding upon one another’s suggestions for assessing their students?

“Therefore, as teachers in a PLC approach each unit, they begin with the end in mind. They make certain their students understand 1) what they will know and be able to do as a result of the unit, 2) why it is important, 3) how they will demonstrate their knowledge and skills, and 4) what specific criteria are being used to assess the quality of their knowledge and skills.