

## Professional Learning Communities

"To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results." (DuFour, 2004, 6).

**Below are excerpts from Richard DuFour's article, "What is a Professional Learning Community"?**

### **Big Idea #1: Ensuring that Students Learn**

The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift—from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning—has profound implications for schools.

School mission statements that promise "learning for all" have become a cliché. But when a school staff takes that statement literally—when teachers view it as a pledge to ensure the success of each student rather than as politically correct hyperbole—profound changes begin to take place. The school staff finds itself asking, What school characteristics and practices have been most successful in helping all students achieve at high levels? How could we adopt those characteristics and practices in our own school? What commitments would we have to make to one another to create such a school? What indicators could we monitor to assess our progress? When the staff has built shared knowledge and found common ground on these questions, the school has a solid foundation for moving forward with its improvement initiative.

### **Big Idea #2: A Culture of Collaboration**

Educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture.

The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement.

### **Big Idea #3: A Focus on Results**

Professional learning communities judge their effectiveness on the basis of results. Working together to improve student achievement becomes the routine work of everyone in the school. Every teacher team participates in an ongoing process of identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing a goal to improve the current level, working together to achieve that goal, and providing periodic evidence of progress. The focus of team goals shifts. Such goals as "We will adopt the Junior Great Books program" or "We will create three new labs for our science course" give way to "We will increase the percentage of students who meet the state standard in language arts from 83 percent to 90 percent" or "We will reduce the failure rate in our course by 50 percent."

The rise or fall of the professional learning community concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school—the commitment and persistence of the educators within it.

DuFour, Richard, Educational Leadership, "What is a Professional Learning Community"? pp. 6-11.

