

Inservice Facilitators FAQ's Professional Learning Communities

What is a PLC?

A professional learning community is an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles 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.

What constitutes the essential foundation of a PLC?

The foundation of a PLC rests upon the four pillars of mission, vision, values, and goals. Each of these pillars asks a different question of the educators within the school. When teachers and administrators have reached consensus on their collective position on those questions, they have built a solid foundation for a PLC.

What is a collaborative team in a PLC?

A collaborative team is a group of people working interdependently to achieve a common goal for which members are held mutually accountable. Collaborative teams are the fundamental building blocks of PLCs.

How should collaborative teams be organized?

There are many ways to organize collaborative teams: by content area, by grade level, as interdisciplinary teams, and more. The fundamental question in organizing teams is, "Do the members of this team have a shared responsibility for responding to the four critical questions in ways that enhance the learning of their students?"

What questions drive the work of collaborative teams within a PLC?

A collaborative team's work is driven by these four critical questions:

What is it we want our students to learn?

How will we know if each student has learned it?

How will we respond when some students do not learn it?

How can we extend and enrich the learning for students who have demonstrated proficiency?

What is a SMART Goal, and why should teams establish them?

SMART goals are strategic & specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time bound. SMART goals ensure that collaborative teams are focused on student learning and results.

What are team norms, and why should teams establish norms?

Team norms are regulations and commitments teams agree to abide by in order to guide members in working collaboratively. Norms help to clarify expectations regarding shared efforts amongst the team.

How do we monitor student learning in a PLC?

A PLC monitors each student's learning on a timely basis and provides additional time and support for learning until the student becomes proficient. Common formative assessments are an essential tool to monitor each student's acquisition of essential learning outcomes.

What should a team do with the evidence of student learning that it collects from various assessments?

Assessment data must be analyzed and the results applied to practice. Using data analysis protocols can build a team's capacity to examine evidence of student learning and apply results effectively. Protocols facilitate open dialogue on successes and failures, and focus team attention on the right work. A variety of protocols exist to help identify which individual students need intervention or enrichment in specific areas as well as which general areas students struggled with in a class or a team as a whole. Protocols also help plan next steps and instructional strategies.

What process do members of a PLC use for making decisions?

PLCs do not strive for 100% agreement on decisions. Rather, they work toward consensus. PLCs arrive at consensus on decisions by building shared knowledge and engaging in dialogue to solicit, listen to, and address concerns. When all points of view have not merely been heard, but actively solicited, and the will of the group is evident even to those who most oppose it, a decision has been made.
