

## Professional Learning Communities

PLCs have been characterized as having shared missions, visions and values; typically involving collective inquiry, collaborative teams, action orientation/experimentation, continuous improvement and a results orientation that focuses on student learning (DuFour, 2004; Hord, 2008). Fulton, Doerr, and Britton (2010) identified five dimensions that practitioners and researchers consistently identify as important for success in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) PLCs:

- 1) *Common vision and shared values* emerge from a collaboratively defined understanding of what constitutes worthwhile student learning, with all members of the PLC working together on related problems.
- 2) *Collective responsibility* requires participants to contribute and share their expertise, and also share a sense of accountability for the student learning that is being supported.
- 3) *Leadership support* is the support of principals and other school leaders, who give school members space and dedicated time to meet. Continuity over time is important, since it takes time for trust to be built and more time to build a common language, norms, and protocols that work for the particular PLC.
- 4) *Good facilitation* contains three types of facilitator roles: knowledge facilitation to direct participants to information or strategies; process facilitation to attend to the structure and interaction of the group; and focus facilitation to keep the group on target.
- 5) *The use of data and student work* is central to the effectiveness of the PLC.

Because the work of the PLC is focused on student learning, members of the PLC need to become comfortable with working with a variety of authentic measures for gauging changes in student learning and teaching effectiveness. Observing each other's teaching and providing feedback loops and protocols for reflecting on practice are also often used as key elements in the work of the PLC (Fulton et al., 2010).

## References

- DuFour, R. (2004). What is a "professional learning community"? *Educational Leadership*, 61(8), 6-11.
- Fulton, K., Doerr, H., & Britton, T. (2010). *STEM teachers in professional learning communities: A knowledge synthesis*. Washington, D.C.: National Commission on Teaching & America's Future & West Ed.
- Hord, S. M. (2008). Evolution of the professional learning community: Revolutionary concept is based on intentional collegial learning. *Journal of Staff Development*, 29(3), 10-13.

## Instructional Rounds

"Instructional Rounds" is an idea adapted from the medical rounds model that doctors use in hospitals (Teitel, 2009). Educators use instructional rounds to look closely at what is happening in classrooms in their schools and systematically work together to

try to provide high-quality teaching and learning for all their children (Teitel, 2009). Teachers and administrators use instructional rounds to observe teachers in order to compare instructional practices (Marzano, 2011). The discussion that takes place among observing teachers and administrators at the end of the observation as well as in subsequent self-reflection are the main benefits of this approach (Marzano, 2011). In this approach teachers and school administrators agree on what teachers and students would be saying and doing if critical thinking skills were being demonstrated, or what content students would be working on if their tasks were really rigorous. And when these signs of critical thinking or rigor are not visible, the teachers and administrators do not blame teachers, students, parents, or other external factors. Instead they look within the school and district to suggest new and powerful ways educators can work together to achieve the student-learning outcomes that are desired (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Teitel, 2009).

#### References

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- Marzano, R. J. (2011). The art & science of teaching: Making the most of instructional rounds. *Educational Leadership*, 68(5), 80 – 82.
- Teitel, L. (2009, Reprint). Improving teaching and learning through instructional rounds. *Harvard Education Letter*, 25(3), 1-3.