

The Professional Learning Community Continuum

Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<p>Mission: Is it evident that learning for all is our core purpose?</p>	<p>No effort has been made to engage faculty in identifying what they want students to learn or how they will respond if students do not learn. School personnel view the mission of the school as teaching rather than learning.</p>	<p>An attempt has been made, typically by the central office, to identify learning outcomes for all grade levels or courses, but this attempt has not impacted the practice of most teachers. Responding to students who are not learning is left to the discretion of individual teachers.</p>	<p>Teachers are clear regarding the learning outcomes their students are to achieve. They have developed strategies to assess student mastery of these outcomes, they monitor the results, and they attempt to respond to students who are not learning.</p>	<p>Learning outcomes are clearly articulated to all stakeholders in the school, and each student's attainment of the outcomes is carefully monitored. The school has developed systems to provide more time and support for students experiencing initial difficulty in achieving the outcomes. The practices, programs, and policies of the school are continually assessed on the basis of their impact on learning. Staff members work together to enhance their effectiveness in helping students achieve learning outcomes.</p>
<p>Shared Vision: Do we know what we are trying to create?</p>	<p>No effort has been made to engage faculty in describing preferred conditions for their school.</p>	<p>A vision statement has been developed for the school, but most staff are unaware of or are unaffected by it.</p>	<p>Staff members have worked together to describe the school they are trying to create. They have endorsed this general description and feel a sense of ownership in it. School improvement planning and staff development initiatives are tied to the shared vision.</p>	<p>Staff members routinely articulate the major principles of the shared vision and use those principles to guide their day-to-day efforts and decisions. They honestly assess the current reality in their school and continually seek effective strategies for reducing the discrepancies between the conditions described in the vision statement and their current reality.</p>



Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<p>Shared Values: How must we behave to advance our vision?</p>	<p>Staff members have not yet articulated the attitudes, behaviors, or commitments they are prepared to demonstrate in order to advance the mission of learning for all and the vision of what the school might become. If they discuss school improvement, they focus on what other groups must do.</p>	<p>Staff members have articulated statements of beliefs or philosophy for their school; however, these value statements have not yet impacted their day-to-day work or the operation of the school.</p>	<p>Staff members have made a conscious effort to articulate and promote the attitudes, behaviors, and commitments that will advance their vision of the school. Examples of the core values at work are shared in stories and celebrations. People are confronted when they behave in ways that are inconsistent with the core values.</p>	<p>The values of the school are embedded in the school culture. These shared values are evident to new staff and to those outside of the school. They influence policies, procedures, and daily practices of the school as well as day-to-day decisions of individual staff members.</p>
<p>Goals: What are our priorities?</p>	<p>No effort has been made to engage the staff in setting and defining school improvement goals related to student learning. If goals exist, they have been developed by the administration.</p>	<p>Staff members have participated in a process to establish goals, but the goals are typically stated as projects to be accomplished or are written so broadly that they are impossible to measure. The goals do not yet influence instructional decisions in a meaningful way.</p>	<p>Staff members have worked together to establish long- and short-term improvement goals for their school. The goals are clearly communicated. Assessment tools and strategies have been developed and implemented to measure progress toward the goals.</p>	<p>All staff pursue measurable performance goals as part of their routine responsibilities. Goals are clearly linked to the school's shared vision. Goal attainment is celebrated and staff members demonstrate willingness to identify and pursue challenging stretch goals.</p>
<p>Communication: How do we communicate what is important?</p>	<p>There is no clear, consistent message regarding the priorities of the school or district. Initiatives are changing constantly and different people in the organization seem to have different pet projects.</p>	<p>A small group of leaders in the school or district is declaring the importance of a program or initiative. Their efforts have yet to impact practice to any significant degree.</p>	<p>The school or district is beginning to align practices with stated priorities. New structures have been created to support the initiative, resources have been re-allocated, and systems for monitoring the priorities have been put into place. Evidence of progress is noted and publicly celebrated.</p>	<p>The priorities of the school or district are demonstrated in the everyday practices and procedures of the school and the assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the staff. The priorities are evident to students, parents, new staff members, and even visitors to the school or district. Stories of extraordinary commitment to the priorities are part of the lore that binds people together.</p>



The Professional Learning Community Continuum

Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<p>Clarity Regarding What Students Must Know and Be Able to Do</p>	<p>There has been little effort to establish a common curriculum for students. Teachers are free to determine what they will teach and how long they will teach it.</p>	<p>District leaders have established curriculum guides that attempt to align the district curriculum with state standards. Representative teachers may have assisted in developing the curriculum guides. The materials have been distributed to each school, but there is no process to determine whether the designated curriculum is actually being taught.</p>	<p>Teachers have worked with colleagues to review state standards and district curriculum guides. They have attempted to clarify the meaning of the standards, establish pacing guides, and identify strategies for teaching the content effectively.</p>	<p>Teachers have worked in collaborative teams to build shared knowledge regarding state standards, district curriculum guides, trends in student achievement, and expectations of the next course or grade level. As a result of this collective inquiry, teachers have established the essential learning for each unit of instruction and are committed to instruct their students in the essential learning according to the team's agreed-upon pacing guide. They know the criteria they will use in judging the quality of student work, and they practice applying those criteria until they can do so consistently. They demonstrate a high level of commitment to the essential curriculum, to their students, and to their teammates.</p>



Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<p>Assessing Whether Students Have Learned the Essential Curriculum</p>	<p>Each teacher creates the assessments he or she will use to monitor student learning. Assessments may vary widely in format and rigor from one teacher to another. The assessments are used primarily to assign grades rather than to inform teacher and student practice. State or provincial tests are administered in the school, but teachers pay little attention to the results.</p>	<p>District officials analyze the results of state and provincial tests and report the results to each school. Principals are expected to work with staff to improve upon the results. The district may also administer district-level assessments in core curricular areas. These assessments have been created by key central office personnel, by representative teachers serving on district committees, or by testing companies who have sold their services to the district. Classroom teachers typically feel little commitment to the assessments and pay little attention to the results.</p>	<p>Teachers have worked together to analyze results from state and district tests and to develop improvement strategies to apply in their classrooms. They have discussed how to assess student learning on a consistent and equitable basis. Parameters are established for assessments, and individual teachers are asked to honor those parameters as they create tests for their students. Teachers of the same course or grade level may create a common final exam to help identify strengths and weaknesses in their program.</p>	<p>Every teacher has worked with colleagues to develop a series of common, formative assessments that are aligned with state or provincial standards and district curriculum guides. The teams have established the specific proficiency standards each student must achieve on each skill. The team administers common assessments multiple times throughout the school year and analyzes the results together. Team members then use the results to inform and improve their individual and collective practice, to identify students who need additional time and support for learning, and to help students monitor their own progress toward agreed-upon standards.</p>



The Professional Learning Community Continuum

Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<p>Systematic Interventions Ensure Students Receive Additional Time and Support for Learning</p>	<p>There is no systematic plan either to monitor student achievement on a timely basis or to respond to students who are not learning with additional time and support. What happens when students experience difficulty in learning will depend entirely upon the teacher to whom they are assigned.</p>	<p>The school has created opportunities for students to receive additional time and support for learning before and after school. Students are invited rather than required to get this support. Many of the students who are most in need of help choose not to pursue it.</p>	<p>The school has begun a program of providing time and support for learning within the school day, but unwillingness to deviate from the traditional schedule is limiting the effectiveness of the program. The staff has retained its traditional 9-week grading periods, and it is difficult to determine which students need additional time and support until the end of the first quarter. Additional support is only offered at a specific time of the day or week (for example, over the lunch period or only on Wednesdays) and the school is experiencing difficulty in serving all the students who need help during the limited time allotted.</p>	<p>The school has a highly coordinated, sequential system in place. The system is proactive: It identifies and makes plans for students to receive extra support even before they enroll. The achievement of each student is monitored on a timely basis. Students who experience difficulty are required, rather than invited, to put in extra time and utilize extra support. The plan is multi-layered. If the current level of support is not sufficient, there are additional levels of increased time and support. Most importantly, all students are guaranteed access to this systematic intervention regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned.</p>



The Professional Learning Community Continuum

Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<p>Collaborative Teams of Teachers Focus on Issues That Directly Impact Student Learning</p>	<p>There is no systematic plan in place to assign staff members to teams or provide them with time to collaborate. Teachers work in isolation with little awareness of the strategies, methods, or materials used by their colleagues.</p>	<p>Some structures have been put into place for teachers who may be interested in collaborating. Teachers are encouraged but not required to participate. Topics tend to focus on matters other than classroom instruction and student learning.</p>	<p>Time has been provided during the contractual day for teachers to work together in teams on a regular basis (at least once a week). Guidelines have been established in an effort to ensure staff members use collaborative time to address topics that will impact instruction. Teams are attempting to develop positive relationships and implement specific procedures, but they may not be convinced the collaborative team process is beneficial. Leaders of the school are seeking ways to monitor the effectiveness of the teams.</p>	<p>Self-directed teams represent the primary engine of continuous improvement in the school. Team members are skillful in advocacy and inquiry, hold each other accountable for honoring the commitments they have made to one another, consistently focus on the issues that are most significant in improving student achievement, and set specific measurable goals to monitor improvement. The collaborative team process serves as a powerful form of job-embedded staff development, helping both individual members and the team in general become more effective in helping students learn at high levels. Staff members consider their collaborative culture vital to the effectiveness of their school.</p>



The Professional Learning Community Continuum

Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<p>Creating a Focus on Results That Impacts Schools, Teams, and Teachers</p>	<p>There is no effort to establish specific district goals intended to impact the direction of each school. The district reacts to problems as they arise and does little to either focus on the future or promote continuous improvement.</p>	<p>The district establishes multiple long-range goals as part of a comprehensive strategic planning process. Schools may create annual school improvement plans in response to district requirements, but those plans have little impact upon classroom practices.</p>	<p>The district has identified a few key goals. Every school then adopts goals designed to help the district achieve its targets. Every collaborative team in every school adopts SMART goals specifically aligned with its school goals. A process is in place to monitor each team's progress throughout the year.</p>	<p>Educators throughout the district have a results orientation. Collaborative teams of teachers establish both annual goals and a series of short-term goals to monitor their progress. They create specific action plans to achieve goals and clarify the evidence they will gather to assess the impact of their plans. This tangible evidence of results guides the work of teams as part of a continuous improvement process. Each member understands the goals of the team, how those goals relate to school and district goals, and how he or she can contribute to achieving the goals.</p>



The Professional Learning Community Continuum

Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<p>A Focus on Results</p>	<p>There are no processes to use results as a tool for improvement. Teachers fall into a predictable pattern: They teach, they test, they hope for the best, and then they move on to the next unit.</p>	<p>District leaders analyze results from high-stakes summative tests such as state and provincial examinations. Data are shared with each school, and principals and teachers are encouraged to review the results and address weaknesses as part of their school improvement plan.</p>	<p>The school has created a specific process to bring together collaborative teams of teachers several times throughout the year to analyze results from common formative assessments. Teams identify areas of concern and discuss strategies for improving the collective results. Assessments are also used to identify students who are experiencing difficulty, and the school creates systems to provide those students with additional time and support for learning.</p>	<p>Collaborative teams of teachers regard ongoing analysis of results as a critical element in the teaching and learning process. They are hungry for information on student learning and gather and analyze evidence from a variety of sources. Results from their common formative assessments are compared to results from state and provincial assessments to validate the effectiveness of their local assessments. Teachers use results to identify strengths and weaknesses in their individual practice, to help each other address areas of concern, and to improve their effectiveness in helping all students learn. Strategically linked SMART goals drive the work of each collaborative team. Analysis of the performance of individual students enables the team and school to create efficient and timely interventions. Improved results and achievement of goals are the basis for a culture of celebration within classrooms, the school, and the district.</p>



The Professional Learning Community Continuum

Element of a PLC	Pre-Initiation Stage	Initiation Stage	Developing Stage	Sustaining Stage
<p>Responding to Conflict in a PLC</p>	<p>People react to conflict with classic flight or fight responses. Most staff members withdraw from interactions in order to avoid those they find disagreeable. Others are perpetually at war in acrimonious, unproductive arguments that never seem to get resolved. People seem more interested in winning arguments than in resolving differences. Groups tend to regard each other as adversaries.</p>	<p>School and district leaders take steps to resolve conflict as quickly as possible. Addressing conflict is viewed as an administrative responsibility. The primary objective of administrators in addressing disputes is to restore the peace.</p>	<p>Staff members have created norms or protocols to help them identify and address the underlying issues causing conflict. Members are encouraged to explore their positions and the fundamental assumptions that have led them to their positions. They attempt to use a few key, guiding principles to assist them in coming to closure.</p>	<p>Staff members view conflict as a source of creative energy and an opportunity for building shared knowledge. They create specific strategies for exploring one another's thinking, and they make a conscious effort to understand as well as to be understood. They seek ways to test competing assumptions through action research and are willing to re-think their position when research, data, and information contradict their suppositions. Because they have found common ground on their purpose and priorities, they are able to approach disagreements with high levels of trust and an assumption of good intentions on the part of all members.</p>

