



## **Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work™:**

### **New Insights for Improving Schools**

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#### **Action Guide**

This action guide is intended to assist you in the reading of and reflection upon *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools* by Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, and Robert Eaker. The guide can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire faculty to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, and identify steps that might be taken to promote the professional learning community (PLC) concept in a school or school district. The guide is arranged by chapters, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topic that is addressed in a particular chapter. We believe this guide will prove to be a valuable asset for a school or school district that has undertaken the journey to becoming a PLC.

## **Introduction**

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In 1998, Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker authored *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* with the premise that the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities (PLCs). On the 10th anniversary of that publication, the authors note in their sequel, *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work: New Insights for Improving Schools*, that their conviction to that premise has not wavered—it is still valid after a decade of working with schools and districts across North America to implement the PLC concept. So what have they learned from their work in real schools?

In the introduction to *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work*, the authors describe how their work with school districts has left them with much clearer insights regarding the most effective strategies for helping educators make the transition from more traditional school cultures to practices more reflective of a PLC. In addition to working directly with a wide variety of schools and districts, the authors note that they have also had the benefit of contributions from researchers and writers, as well as their colleagues who have successfully done the hard work of reculturing their schools and districts. Importantly, the authors note that their ideas have been significantly impacted by the research and writing of others outside of the education arena.

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Based on these new insights, one of the primary objectives of *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* is to offer educators specific, practical recommendations for creating true PLCs, so that their students may learn at higher levels and their professional lives become more rewarding, satisfying, and fulfilling.

After reading the introduction, consider the following questions:

1. In the last decade, the idea of schools and school districts functioning as PLCs has become enormously popular. Very few educators disagree with the fundamental premises that form the framework for the PLC concept. Yet many educators find the task of actually transforming their school or district into a PLC to be daunting. What are some of the major obstacles a school or school district would need to overcome to move from a more traditional school culture to a culture reflective of a PLC?
2. At dinner with a group of fellow educators, a colleague makes an impassioned point that the world of business is motivated by profit, and there is simply nothing to be learned from the business world that is applicable to schools. How would you respond to such a statement?
3. Public schools face a myriad of complex and difficult challenges. This is true of other organizations as well. What are some challenges that virtually all large organizations now face in the 21st century?

## **Chapter 1**

### **New Insights Into Professional Learning Communities at Work**

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In chapter 1, the authors observe that the term *professional learning community*, which prior to 1998 was used primarily among educational researchers, has now become part of the routine jargon of educators throughout North America. The term is now used so ubiquitously to describe any loose grouping of educators that it is in danger of losing all meaning. Chapter 1 defines the term *professional learning community* and describes the practices that form the PLC framework. Noting that effective leaders are able to translate the purpose and priorities of their organizations into a few big ideas that unite people and give them a sense of direction in their day-to-day work, the authors organize the characteristics and practices of PLCs into three big ideas: a focus on learning, a collaborative culture, and a focus on results.

As an increasing number of schools have embarked on the journey to becoming a PLC, new knowledge has been learned not only about the core concepts and practices of a PLC, but about the complex challenges associated with significantly changing organizational culture. Chapter 1 outlines 12 new and/or deeper learnings the authors have acquired since the publication of their first book—insights that are explored in detail throughout *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work*.

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The following questions are designed to help readers reflect on the main points in chapter 1, as well as clarify what the term *professional learning community* means in their own school or district.

1. Since the term *professional learning community* has become so popular, many people are unclear about exactly what the term means. If someone who has no knowledge of the PLC concept asked you what the term means, how would you respond?
2. If parents who were new to your school visited to get a sense of what the school was going to be like for their child, what behaviors would they likely observe that would indicate that learning is the central and overriding purpose of your school?
3. It has been said that in many schools there is incongruence between the school's or district's pronouncements (the mission and vision, for example) and day-to-day practices. Can you think of any examples in which this was or is the case in your own setting?
4. Collaboration will not improve student learning unless collaborative efforts are focused on the right things. Reflect on your experiences as part of a collaborative team. How was time used? What was the focus of conversations? How beneficial were the collaborative efforts?

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5. Reflect on this statement: “Everyone is in favor of school improvement—it’s just *doing differently* that everyone objects to.” Do you think there is any truth in this statement? If so, why? What are some of the most difficult obstacles to getting educators to “do differently”? How has your school or school district attempted to overcome them?
  
6. What evidence is there that educators in your school or district have a deep, rich understanding of the big ideas that drive a PLC? What efforts have been made to ensure a deep understanding of the concept? How are new faculty and staff oriented to the PLC concept?
  
7. In the final section of chapter 1, the authors describe 12 new and important learnings they have gained in their work with schools and districts. Reflect on each new learning and ask yourself, or discuss with others, whether you agree or disagree with each particular point the authors emphasize.

**Activities**

1. Organize into small groups. Half of the groups should list the *behaviors* one would likely observe in a school with a primary focus on *teaching*. The other half should list the behaviors that one would observe in a school with a primary focus on *learning*. Each group should post their findings, and participants should then move around the room, reading each sheet. After everyone has had a chance to

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read the work of each group, the entire group should discuss the impact a shift from a focus on *teaching* to a focus on *learning* will have for your school.

2. Organize into three groups. Each group is responsible for explaining to the other groups the underlying concept and meaning of one big idea of a PLC. At the end of each presentation, the entire group should discuss how the big idea is evident on a day-to-day basis in the school.

## **Chapter 2**

### **The Rise and Fall of School Reform**

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Chapter 2 chronicles the history of school reform in the United States and highlights how schools have been asked to perform in very different ways at various times in our history. The authors describe the expectations and practices of schools from the era of sorting and selecting, through the progressive era, to the dissatisfaction with schools that was evidenced by the 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*. School reform efforts have continued into the 21st century with the passage of the landmark No Child Left Behind legislation. The overriding theme of chapter 2 is that America's public schools have, from the very beginning of our nation, been the focus of nonstop school reform efforts. The chapter critiques the current disappointment and offers a perspective on education that is rarely reported: the successes of public education in America.

After describing wave after wave of efforts to reform public education, the chapter concludes with a discussion of why education reform has failed to deliver. There are those who have concluded that it is simply impossible to improve schools. *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* is based on the exact opposite assumption. The authors note that there is a greater understanding and consensus regarding what must be done to help more students learn at higher levels than ever before in our history. Simply put, educators must break from the more traditional school structures and cultures

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and embrace the assumptions and practices that will enable schools and school districts to function as PLCs.

After reading chapter 2, consider the following questions:

1. Early in America's history, schools were expected to sort and select students. Can you think of any comments you have heard or decisions that have been made in your school or district that would lead you to believe that this philosophy is alive and well in America's public schools?
2. It has been argued that one of the greatest obstacles to any new attempt to improve schools is the opinion held by many educators that "this too shall pass." Why do you think so many educators hold this view? What are some approaches that might be taken to change this mindset?
3. Reflect on the effect the No Child Left Behind legislation has had on your school. What are the positive effects? The negative effects? What, if any, aspects of No Child Left Behind would you change?
4. It has been said that No Child Left Behind focuses on many of the issues that the education profession has simply refused to address. Can you think of any examples of this?

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5. As you reflect on your own career as an educator, do you think it is indeed possible to significantly improve schools and school districts? How successful has your school or school district been at sustained, meaningful improvement in student learning?

**Activities**

1. Imagine that your district is undertaking an initiative to educate the public about the need for increased funding for your school district. You have been asked to head a committee that will develop a script for a video focusing primarily on two points of emphasis: 1) the successes of public education, and 2) the fact that, with support, schools can significantly improve. What should the script highlight in light of the fact that so many efforts to improve public education have failed?
2. In reviewing various eras of public education, one might come to the conclusion that public education simply moves from one new view to another throughout history. On the other hand, the case could be made that rather than moving from one era to another, public education is expected to address all eras simultaneously. To make this point, organize into groups, giving each group one of the following expectations: “sorting and selecting,” “preparing students for the real world,” “teaching more content at greater depths,” and “demonstrating student proficiency on standardized tests.” Each group should then report the ways in which your school is asked to provide evidence that they meet their assigned expectation.

### **Chapter 3**

#### **Making the Case for Professional Learning Communities**

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What would it take to persuade educators that successfully implementing PLC practices is the most promising path for sustained and substantive improvement of our schools and districts? Chapter 3 presents findings from researchers from both inside and outside of education in support of the efficacy of PLCs. However, some educators may not be persuaded by research. The authors note that researchers are not alone in their advocacy of the PLC concept. The chapter also highlights organizations that endorse the goal of schools and school districts functioning as PLCs.

There is plenty of compelling evidence to make the case for PLCs. The authors point out that what is much more difficult is to persuade educators to actually *implement* the practices essential to the concept—to close the gap between what we *know* and what we *do*. They emphasize that closing the knowing-doing gap requires purposeful action to alter not only the existing structures of schools and districts, but more importantly, the cultures that have been created and sustained within those traditional structures.

One way to examine school culture is by analyzing the unwritten and unexamined stories and mythology that drive the culture. The chapter closes with two stories that reflect completely different school cultures, with each story representing the message of “this is how we do things around here,” which, in its most simple form, is a representation of

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school or district culture. These stories reflect the unwritten rules that members of the school community learn. The chapter concludes by emphasizing that *changing the stories* can help *change the system*. This is particularly important in light of the aging of the current teaching force. The authors point out that with half of all new teachers leaving the profession within their first five years, the answer is not to pour more good people into a bad system, but to make school a more satisfying and rewarding place for teachers to engage in professional practice. In short, the authors point out the need to make every school a PLC.

After reading chapter 3, consider the following questions:

1. A new teacher comes to your school from a district in another state that has successfully implemented PLC practices and concepts. The new teacher asks you if most teachers in your school have been persuaded of the merits of the PLC concept. How would you respond? How has your school or district gone about the work of persuading educators of the merits of the PLC concept? Which strategies were the most effective? What strategies might have been more effective?
  
2. The authors make the point that the big problem facing those who want to create a PLC is not the lack of knowledge, but rather the lack of will. Do you think this is the case and, if so, why are some educators so reluctant to act? What are some ways educators might be persuaded to act?

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3. Chapter 3 emphasizes the importance stories play in reflecting school culture. What stories could be told of your school or district culture? What underlying beliefs do these stories represent? How are these unwritten stories reflected in your written school policies, practices, and procedures?
4. In a discussion of the merits of the PLC concept, a teacher asks this question: “How does the PLC concept make schools and school districts a more rewarding and satisfying place for those of us who teach?” How would you respond to this question?

**Activities**

1. To make the point that most educators overwhelmingly support the practices that form the framework of the PLC concept, divide into two groups. One group is assigned the task of discussing and then listing on chart paper the merits of the concept, and the other group is assigned the task of listing the negative aspects associated with the concept. Each group then presents its conclusions. Follow this with a discussion of the merits of the PLC concept with the entire group.
2. After a meeting in which the merits of the PLC concept have been discussed, the group should brainstorm the actions that would have to take place if a school or district were to actually implement PLC practices, and identify the barriers to such practices taking place. Next, brainstorm some things that might be done to overcome these barriers.

## **Chapter 4**

### **The Challenge of Cultural Change**

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Chapter 4 focuses on a major theme found throughout *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work*, one that the authors emphasize time and time again: It is impossible for a school or district to develop the capacity to function as a PLC without undergoing profound cultural shifts—changes in the assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations, and habits that constitute the norm. External efforts to improve schools invariably focus on structural changes—the changes that impact policies, procedures, rules, and relationships. Unfortunately, structural changes typically neither impact the practices of teachers in their classrooms nor the assumptions that drive those practices, and thus they are insufficient to improve schools. The authors point out that even a cursory review of the literature on the change process validates the critical importance of cultural change. The authors also note one of the great ironies of organizational life: While it is true that educators shape school cultures, it is probably more accurate to say that in the day-to-day life of a school, culture shapes educators. Because educators are so immersed in their cultures, they find it difficult to step outside of their traditions and assumptions to examine their conventional practices from a critical perspective.

Chapter 4 identifies specific cultural shifts that must occur if a school or district is to move from a more traditional culture to one that is reflective of a PLC, and the authors note that making such shifts is a difficult challenge and will not proceed smoothly.

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Chapter 4 also gives focus to a critical distinction: the difference between successfully leading a *change* process and leading an *improvement* process, with the emphasis being on the necessity of leaders becoming skillful in the improvement process. The chapter also addresses the issue of leadership strategies for changing culture, emphasizing the need for simultaneous “tight” and “loose” leadership—another theme that is woven throughout the entire book.

The authors contend that growing and tending to a garden is an apt metaphor for school or district culture and that school cultures can, in fact, be grown; however, just like a garden, school culture requires attention, nourishment, and maintenance. Just like tending a garden, developing school and district culture is hard work, but the authors are optimistic it can be done, and they are certain the effort is worthwhile.

After reading chapter 4, consider the following questions:

1. The authors point out that most efforts to improve schools focus on a school’s or district’s structure rather than on its underlying culture. Why do you think this is the case?
2. At a retirement dinner for a colleague who has taught for his entire career, one speaker makes the comment that the retiring teacher truly reflects what it means to be a member of the Washington Elementary family. After considering this statement, ask yourself this question: Do most faculty members, over time, simply

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- succumb* to the culture of their school, or do they make conscious attempts to collectively *shape* the culture of the school or district?
3. At a faculty meeting you are asked this question: What are some of the cultural changes that will take place if this school becomes a PLC? How would you respond?
  4. The authors write of the importance of both tight and loose leadership, yet many educational leaders believe that to be effective, improvement efforts must be loose or “bottom-up.” What do you think? Can a school rely totally on improvement efforts that float from the bottom up?
  5. Chapter 4 refers to the “genius of *and*.” Think of an example of this concept in a school or district setting.
  6. Of course, change is never smooth. There will be bumps in the road on the journey to becoming a PLC. After reading chapter 4, what are some obstacles to the change process?

**Activities**

1. Pages 93, 94, and 95 contain a list of the cultural shifts that must occur if a school is to move from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning—a central tenet of a PLC. Divide into groups, assigning each group one of the major headings on the

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- list. Each group should then identify the potential barriers to each shift and what might be done to overcome them. Small groups then report to the entire group. Save your ideas for overcoming the barriers and compare them to your school's collective commitments, or revisit this list prior to writing collective commitments for your school.
2. Divide into smaller groups and discuss past change initiatives that have been undertaken. What was the purpose of the change? What were the obstacles that had to be overcome? In what ways did the change affect improvement of the school or district?
  3. As a group, describe the concept of simultaneous loose and tight leadership by answering these questions: What is meant by loose? What is meant by tight? Discuss why each of these leadership concepts by itself is insufficient for changing school culture.
  4. Explain to the faculty why the metaphor of a garden applies to a school or school district that functions as a PLC. Divide into groups. Each group should come up with a different metaphor members think is analogous to a PLC. Each group then presents their metaphor and why it is reflective of a school or district that functions as a PLC.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Clear Mission and Shared Vision**

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In *Professional Learning Communities at Work*, the authors stressed the importance of faculties developing a shared understanding of and commitment to the fundamental purpose of their school. Now, 10 years later, clarity of purpose and a willingness to accept responsibility for achieving that purpose remain critical elements of school improvement, generally, and PLCs specifically. What the authors have learned is that many educators do not grasp the tremendous difference between *writing* a mission and *living* a mission. Chapter 5 gives focus to the fact that a new mission requires new *actions*.

The authors note that educators must do more than write catchy mission statements; they must align the structures and cultures of their institutions to support the mission of high levels of learning for all students. They reference the work of their colleague Janel Keating who pressed her staff to answer the following questions: “What would it look like if we really meant it when we said the fundamental purpose of our school is to ensure that all students learn? What would people see us doing?” Chapter 5 contains 11 actions that a school would take to ensure students learn—if they really meant it!

Recognizing that it would be difficult to overstate the importance of collaboratively developing a shared vision in a PLC, the authors discuss the distinct difference between a

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school or district mission and a shared vision. They also point out that the process for *developing* a vision of the future is as important as the vision itself. Throughout chapter 5, there is an emphasis on the word *shared*—collaboratively developing a *shared* mission and vision.

Chapter 5 places great emphasis on the actual process of writing a vision statement, including a discussion of mistakes that are frequently made, how to build consensus, and questions that will help guide the process. The chapter concludes with the authors presenting several benefits that occur when a school or school district develops a clear, meaningful shared vision.

After reading chapter 5, consider the following questions:

1. In many schools, there is a distinct difference between the stated purpose in the mission statement and the purposes that are unstated, those that are communicated by patterns of behavior. After reflecting on the dominant patterns of behavior in your school or district, what do you think, in reality, is the fundamental purpose of your school?
2. In many card games, one suit trumps other suits. In many schools in which learning is proclaimed as the fundamental purpose, a number of things often trump learning. What are some of the things that on a regular basis take precedence over learning in your school or district?

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3. Imagine this scenario happening in your school: As faculty work collaboratively to develop a shared mission and vision, there is confusion among some members about the difference between mission and vision. How would you explain the difference between mission and vision? What examples might you use?
4. One aspect of being an effective leader is to think ahead, to anticipate problems. The authors discuss a number of common mistakes that are made when developing a shared vision. Reread each of these, reflecting on this question: What can be done to avoid each of the potential mistakes?
5. The authors point out the need to develop a working definition of *consensus*. Do you agree with the definition that the authors suggest? Why is it so important to resolve differences in this definition prior to developing a shared mission and vision?
6. Some educators may think that developing a shared vision is a waste of time. Why would some people have this view? What are some benefits of developing a clear, meaningful vision statement?

**Activities**

1. Divide into two groups to consider the following situation: You were asked to be a guest on a local television talk show to explain how your school is focusing on ensuring all students learn at high levels. What are some of the things you should

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- be sure to talk about? Each group should list their responses on chart paper and report to the entire group. Discuss the groups' responses. Are there other things the groups should have mentioned that were overlooked?
2. Divide into smaller groups. Each group should review the characteristics of effective schools and then rate, on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest), the degree to which effective school practices are prevalent throughout your school. Next, the groups should identify the essential practices they would like to see in your school. Use these processes to begin the dialogue about describing the school you seek to become (developing a shared vision).
  3. As part of an effort to enhance the leadership capacity of others, join with your team leaders in reading an article or book each month on highly effective organizations, sharing what you have learned in monthly discussions. Compare what you are learning about effective organizations with your school's vision of the future.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Shared Values (Collective Commitments) and Common Goals**

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In chapter 6, the authors write of the importance of schools and school districts collaboratively developing shared values (collective commitments) and common goals. They observe that values, or collective commitments, address the issue of *how* the people within schools and districts will fulfill their purpose and make their desired future a reality. The power of collective commitments lies in the fact that they should be more than just words; they should drive the day-to-day work of the school. The chapter contains a discussion of the benefits to be gained by collaboratively developing collective commitments, as well as suggestions for educators to consider when engaging in a process designed to identify shared values or collective commitments.

However, developing collective commitments leaves one essential question yet to be addressed: What goals should be developed that will, if accomplished, move a school or school district towards their vision of the future? In addition to a discussion of the importance of developing SMART goals, the authors also present additional keys to effective goal-setting.

Chapter 6 ends with the significant point that clear, shared mission, vision, collective commitments, and goals provide a solid foundation for a PLC, but that clarity regarding these important elements is just a start. They allow a school or district to move forward

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with a stronger sense of purpose, direction, and priorities, but until people within the organization begin to act in new ways that reflect the foundation, little will be accomplished.

As you think of the key points of chapter 6, consider the following questions:

1. There is often a huge difference between the school we desire and our willingness to behave in ways essential to creating such a school. This issue is addressed in a PLC by collaboratively developing collective commitments each staff member must honor in order to become the school that has been envisioned. What are some key commitments that would have to be made and honored if your school were to function as a PLC?
2. One way a PLC differs from a more traditional school is that values or commitments are stated as behaviors rather than beliefs. Why do you think the authors emphasize this point?
3. What are some difficulties that might be experienced if a faculty engaged in a process to collaboratively identify and honor collective commitments?
4. A faculty member might ask, “Why are we doing this? What are the advantages of collaboratively developing collective commitments?” How would you respond?

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5. Simply developing collective commitments will not ensure that they will become embedded into the school culture. How could collective commitments be monitored?
  
6. Reflect on this statement: When something is truly a priority in an organization, people do not simply *hope* it happens; they develop and implement specific plans to *ensure* that it happens. What gets *planned for* and monitored in your school?
  
7. Do the goals that have been developed for your school or school district meet the standards for being SMART goals?
  
8. Has your school involved the faculty and staff in setting short-term goals that, if achieved, would move the school toward the agreed-upon vision? If your school accomplished every improvement goal, what would be the impact on student learning?
  
9. How are goals monitored in your school or school district?

**Activities**

1. Divide into discussion groups. First, each group should read the school vision statement (for example, “Our vision calls for an intense focus on learning”) and outline the key elements embedded in the shared vision document. Next, each group should develop “then” statements that would be the logical extension of

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each key element of the school’s vision of the future. For example, “*If* we seek to have a school that is characterized by an intense focus on learning, *then* we must agree to a guaranteed curriculum and commit to implementing that curriculum in our classrooms.”

2. Faculty frequently see goal-setting as something that has to be done, but has little to do with the real world of the day-to-day life of a school. In order to determine what is *really* valued, engage in a discussion that answers the following questions:

- What do we plan for in this school?
- What behaviors do we model for our students?
- What do we monitor and check on?
- What do we celebrate in our school?
- What questions are we struggling to answer?
- What takes priority in resource allocation?
- What faculty and staff behaviors would we be willing to confront?

Remember, the answers to these questions reflect what is *ultimately* valued in a school or school district.

## **Chapter 7**

### **Teaching in a Professional Learning Community**

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If a school seeks to ensure high levels of learning for all its students, traditional views of teaching must be challenged. Chapter 7 describes how teaching in a PLC differs significantly from more traditional school cultures: Teaching in a PLC involves a shift from a culture of isolation to a culture of collaboration, from working independently and pursuing individual goals and interests to mutual accountability for fulfilling collective purpose and achieving common goals.

Chapter 7 contains a detailed review of the research on the power of collaborative cultures versus the limitations of working in isolation. The authors call for a new image of the teaching profession, one in which teachers are contributing members of a collaborative team that shares responsibility for the learning of their students. The authors do offer a word of caution, however: Collaboration in and of itself does not impact student learning. It is the focus of the collaboration that matters—what teams actually *do*. The authors provide several examples of effective team collaboration. Perhaps this chapter is best summed up by a comment from a teacher who observed that “working in a PLC means you never again have to face the challenges of teaching alone” (p. 169).

After reading chapter 7, reflect on the following questions:

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1. In spite of years of research validating the positive effects of teachers working in collaboration with their colleagues, teachers in most schools still spend their entire careers teaching in isolation. Why do you think this is the case?
2. Principals are often challenged by a teacher who prefers not to be a contributing member of a collaborative team to provide evidence or benefits of collaborative teaming. After reading this chapter, what are some of the benefits of teachers working in collaborative teams that you could cite?
3. The authors note that shifting from a culture of teacher isolation to one of collaborative teaming can generate opposition from some teachers. Why do you think this is the case? How would you address such opposition?
4. As a principal, how would you respond if a teacher came to your office and made the following statement: “If there are teachers in this school who are willing to work in collaborative teams, it is fine with me, but I didn’t go into teaching to be part of a *team*. I went into teaching to teach students, so just give me my kids and let me teach them.”
5. As educators work to transform their school’s or district’s culture from one of teacher isolation to a collaborative culture that is characterized by people working in high-performing collaborative teams, there may be initial confusion regarding

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- exactly what is meant by the term *collaborative team*. After reading this chapter, how would you define *collaborative team*?
6. Reflect on the culture of your school. Can you cite specific examples in which teachers are expected to work *interdependently* to achieve common *learning* goals for their students and for which they accept *mutual* accountability?
  7. In this chapter, the authors discuss the problem of some educators taking a “hard fact” and converting it into a “half truth.” Can you think of examples in your career in which this has been the case?
  8. Teachers who are asked to work in collaborative teams are frequently frustrated because they do not know what to do in their teams. The authors argue that simply collaborating will, in and of itself, have no positive effects on student learning. Teachers must collaborate about the right things. What are the right things that should drive the work of collaborative teams of teachers? What is the focus on collaborative teaming in your school? How is the *quality* of the work of collaborative teams monitored in your school?
  9. One important characteristic of a profession is that behavior is based on knowledge of the latest and best practice. Yet in many schools, educators simply pool opinions when considering ways to improve their practice. How do educators in your school build shared knowledge?

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**Activities**

1. Show the video *A Culture of Collaboration*. (The video is part of the video series *The Power of Professional Learning Communities at Work: Bringing the Big Ideas to Life*, 2007, by DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour, which is available from Solution Tree.) Discuss how the collaborative culture depicted in the video is different from the role of teachers in traditional schools.
2. Visit a school that effectively utilizes the collaborative team concept. Ask to meet with a team to talk about the work they do and how working in collaborative teams has changed their roles as teachers. Perhaps this team could visit your school and present at a faculty meeting.
3. Divide into smaller groups. Ask each group to identify potential barriers to creating a collaborative culture that organizes teachers into collaborative teams. Each group can then report, followed by a general faculty discussion.
4. Go to the website [www.allthingsplc.info](http://www.allthingsplc.info), and find a school listed on the web site that has demographics similar to your school. Contact the school and ask about the trials and successes they have experienced with collaborative teaming. Ask what their teachers *do* in their teams when the teams meet. Ask what recommendations they have for implementing the team concept.

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5. Observe a team of teachers role-play an exemplary team meeting for the rest of the faculty. Call upon the faculty to critique the role-play. Each team should then discuss how the role-play was similar to and different from their team meetings.

## **Chapter 8**

### **Assessment in a Professional Learning Community**

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Chapter 8 examines the critical role of assessment in a PLC. To provide a broad context for the nation’s current fixation with testing in public education, the chapter gives a brief history of assessment in American public schools. Traditionally, assessment practices have reflected the belief that the fundamental purpose of schools was to sort and select students. The premise of chapter 8 is that if a school or school district hopes to operate as a PLC, it must embrace a very different purpose—high levels of learning for all students—and it *must* use assessments in a very different way to align with that purpose.

Since an intense focus on learning in a PLC requires monitoring the learning of individual students on a timely basis, the authors discuss the differences between summative and formative assessment—that is, the differences between assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning. Also included are timely tips for embedding formative assessment practices into the culture of schools and classrooms.

Recognizing that occasionally some educators may question the use or even the efficacy of collaboratively developed common formative assessments, the authors cite numerous studies that support the practice, along with their own arguments as to why assessments that are created by a team of teachers should be included in every school’s process for monitoring student learning.

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Chapter 8 concludes with a call for teachers to become more assessment literate, and the authors suggest resources from some of the nation's leading experts in the field. A PLC is not only committed to higher levels of learning for its students, but for adults as well: Teachers in a PLC should work collaboratively to gain shared knowledge about effective assessment strategies.

After reading chapter 8, consider the following questions:

1. The authors point out that historically America has embraced sorting and selecting as the fundamental purpose of schools. Do you think this purpose continues to be reflected in many practices found in schools today? What are some examples of schooling practices that reflect a philosophy of sorting and selecting? To what extent is this purpose reflected in your school's philosophy and practices?
2. Reflect on the fundamental differences between assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning. What are some specific ways teachers in your school use assessment practices to support student learning?
3. The authors make the case that one of the most powerful, high-leverage strategies for improving student learning available to schools is the creation of frequent, high-quality common formative assessments by teachers who are working collaboratively to help a group of students acquire agreed-upon knowledge and

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- skills. What is an appropriate response to those who might ask why collaboratively developed common assessments are important?
4. Imagine this happening to you: After a number of attempts at persuading a faculty to collaboratively develop common formative assessments, you realize that the reason a few members are resistant to the practice is that they simply do not want to collaborate. If you came to this realization, what would you do?
  5. What are some of the potential barriers to creating common assessments? How could these barriers be overcome?
  6. The authors note that good teachers are assessing *all* the time by using a variety of strategies to check for student understanding during every class period. If you wanted to provide teachers in your school with some helpful ideas about how to use continuous classroom assessment practices more effectively, what are some practices you might suggest?
  7. What are some steps that could be taken in your school or school district to assist teachers in building shared knowledge of effective assessment practices?
  8. If you agree with the premise that if a school operates as a PLC, it embraces the purpose of high levels of learning for all and aligns its assessment practices with this purpose, what are the implications of this alignment for the variety of roles

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and responsibilities within the school or district? Specifically, consider the following: What is the role of the teacher (or teacher teams) in developing and utilizing high-quality formative common assessments? What is the role of the principal? What is the role of the central office?

**Activities**

1. As a group, watch *A Focus on Results* from the video series *The Power of Professional Learning Communities at Work* (2007) by DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour (available from Solution Tree). Afterwards, discuss how teams in the video were using collaboratively developed common formative assessments.
2. Divide into two groups. One group should brainstorm and list the benefits of collaboratively developed common formative assessments. The other should list the reasons why such assessments should not be used. Each group should then present its arguments to the whole group. Follow up with a review of the research on the power of common formative assessments and a general discussion.
3. Divide into smaller groups. First, each group should identify and list potential barriers that may arise as the school attempts to utilize collaboratively developed common formative assessments. Each group should then report their findings. The second activity asks each group to identify possible ways to overcome the most frequently identified barriers. Each group should report again to the total group. Follow with a general discussion.

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4. Chapter 8 contains a number of suggested resources for learning more about effective assessment strategies. Ask different teams in your school to read a different author and then share what they have learned with the entire faculty. Look for common ground—trends in the research and advice—from the various authors. Discuss the implications of what each author proposes for your school.

## **Chapter 9**

### **A Tale of Excellence in Assessment**

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Chapter 9 extends the focus on assessment in a PLC by utilizing the oldest teaching vehicle known to man: a story. This story of a high school teacher was written by Rick DuFour and first appeared in *Ahead of the Curve* (DuFour, 2007). It is the story of a teacher who has taken a teaching position at a school that functions as a PLC. The story illustrates the power of teachers working in teams, developing common assessments, aligning those assessments with state and national tests, using the results from previous assessments to guide instruction, identifying prerequisite knowledge for success in the unit, regrouping and sharing students, providing students with specific feedback rather than grades, providing systematic interventions when students are unsuccessful, and allowing students additional opportunities to demonstrate proficiency.

Although the story illustrates virtually every aspect of a PLC culture, heavy emphasis is placed on how assessments are used to improve student learning. Chapter 9 reinforces the basic premise that assessments should be used to determine if students need assistance in acquiring prerequisite skills prior to teaching each unit, to inform individual teachers of the strengths and weaknesses in their instruction, to help teams identify areas of concern in the curriculum, to identify students who need additional time and support for their learning, and to give students additional opportunities to demonstrate that they have learned.

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Although chapter 9 is written in the form of a story, the authors note that the school described in this chapter is not a utopian ideal; real teachers in real schools engage in such practices every day. They point out that while such a dramatic cultural shift does not require a windfall of new resources, something more rare is required—*a willingness to change the fundamental assumptions and practices that have characterized public education for decades.*

After reading chapter 9, consider the following questions:

1. What are the primary differences between a typical teacher in your school and the teacher depicted in chapter 9? To what extent is the culture represented in chapter 9 reflective of the culture of your school?
2. In the story, the teacher becomes anxious about the possibility of losing some of his autonomy. Do you think this is likely to be the feelings of some teachers as they engage in the practices described in this chapter? How would you address such fears?
3. Do you know teachers who would question the practice of allowing students to redo their work before receiving a final grade? How would you respond to such concerns?

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4. The authors note that creating a school culture like the one described in chapter 9 requires a willingness to change the fundamental assumptions and practices that have characterized public education for years. Do you think such changes are possible? What are some potential barriers? What can be done to overcome these barriers? Why are some schools able to overcome these barriers while others, often within the same district, cannot?

**Activities**

1. As you address the topic of improving assessment practices in your school, ask the group to read chapter 9. Using the previous questions, lead the faculty in a discussion about the implications the chapter has for your teachers, your students, and your school.
2. Identify a task force (a guiding coalition) of key faculty members and ask them to study the best examples of effective assessment practices they can find. (Share both chapters 8 and 9 with them.) Ask them to develop a specific plan for implementing more effective assessment practices in your school.
3. Divide the faculty into groups. Each group should describe the key elements that would need to be addressed in the following scenario: Imagine your school has been asked to develop a training video on the topic of assessment, and you are seeking suggestions from teachers about the key points that should be highlighted in the script. Discuss the recommendations from each group.

## **Chapter 10**

### **Intervention and Enrichment in a Professional Learning Community**

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In chapter 10, the authors address the fact that, in most schools, what happens when a student experiences difficulty in their learning depends to a large extent on the teacher to whom the student is assigned. The authors also contend that individual teachers in the same school represent a wide range of beliefs and practices regarding students who are not learning. There are schools, however, that do not leave learning to chance. They have created coordinated plans to ensure any student who struggles receives additional time and support for learning in a directive, timely, and systematic way.

The good news is that such practices are being implemented each day in schools across North America. Chapter 10 highlights elementary, middle, and high schools that have successfully developed systematic plans of intervention; however, creating a school culture in which students who are not learning receive systematic time and support is not an easy task. It requires the willingness of staff members to examine and change their long-standing practices to help more students learn at higher levels.

The authors remind readers that developing systematic plans for intervention is difficult and complex work. The authors provide words of caution about systematic interventions, as well as offer replies to the common objections one is likely to hear when developing a plan. However, if schools address this topic through the framework of “What would we

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want for our own child?” the answer becomes clear: We would want—in fact, expect—schools to have a systematic plan to provide students with additional time and support when they experience difficulty in their learning, regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned.

After reading chapter 10, consider the following questions:

1. Chapter 10 begins with a fictional conversation between parents and a principal. How would you respond if parents asked you similar questions?
2. The authors state that the question of how, or even if, students receive additional time and support typically depends on the teacher to whom the student is assigned. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? Explain your rationale. The following question asks them to describe the intervention practices in their own school or district
3. As you read the examples from schools that have developed effective intervention strategies, consider how they are different from and similar to the intervention strategies in your school or district.
4. Developing systematic intervention plans does require serious thought, hard work, and a willingness to do differently. What are some cautions of which educators should be aware? What are some likely objections regarding implementing a plan

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to provide students with additional time and support that is directive, timely, and systematic? How could you respond to each objection?

5. Imagine you are giving a keynote address to a meeting of your state professional association titled, “Helping More Students Learn More.” What are some key points you would emphasize?

**Activities**

1. Show the video *Through New Eyes: Examining the Culture of Your School* (2002) by Rick DuFour (available from Solution Tree). Conduct the workshop by following the outline in the accompanying booklet. Discuss the implications for your school.
2. Conduct a book study of *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don’t Learn* (2004) by DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Karhanek (also available from Solution Tree.)
3. Organize a representative task force of teachers charged with finding other schools in your region that have developed systematic plans to provide students with additional time and support. Arrange for task force members to visit the schools and report back to the entire faculty in an effort to build shared knowledge on real-world examples.

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4. Visit the website [www.allthingsplc.info](http://www.allthingsplc.info), and identify schools listed under the “Evidence of Effectiveness” link with demographics similar to yours. Contact those schools and ask them to share more information about their plans for systematic interventions.
  
5. Divide the faculty into groups. Each group should then discuss members’ own experiences as students. How did their teachers and schools respond when students did not learn? After each group has reported to the entire group, groups should discuss the question, “What practices have changed in schools since you were students in terms of what happens when students do not learn?”
  
6. Create a comprehensive outline that includes each step of the school’s response in the story describing Hannah’s experience at Helen Harvey Elementary School. Compare that list with responses of teachers to question 5, “What happened to students who experienced difficulty when you were going to school?” Which kind of school would we hope our own children would attend?

## **Chapter 11**

### **The Classroom as a Learning Community**

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Although the emphasis of *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* is on the importance of educators working together to create schools and school districts that function as PLCs, chapter 11 is based on the assumption that teachers can apply the same principles and concepts to create learning communities in their classrooms. The authors point out that if the traditional image of schools is a series of individual classrooms staffed by relatively autonomous teachers, the traditional image of the classroom is of individual students competing with one another for limited recognition and honors offered by their schools.

This chapter includes a discussion of the importance of collaboratively developed classroom norms—a few specific promises that each student understands, owns, and therefore agrees to honor. Also included are suggestions for teachers as they collaboratively develop norms for their classrooms.

Chapter 11 moves beyond the development of classroom norms to provide additional strategies for creating a classroom that functions as a learning community. Issues such as how to clearly define learning outcomes for students, how to engage students in assessment of their learning, and the power of cooperative learning are discussed, along with a few words of caution.

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After reading chapter 11, consider the following questions:

1. It has been said that we must make sure PLC practices impact individual classrooms. How have classrooms in your school been impacted by the PLC concept and the practices inherent in this school improvement framework?
2. The authors write that norms represent the collective commitments individuals make to one another so their work will be more effective and rewarding. What are some norms students might collaboratively develop? Have students in your school collaboratively developed classroom norms?
3. If, at a faculty meeting, you were asked to offer some tips for developing effective classroom norms, how would you respond?
4. Imagine you have been asked to speak at a monthly meeting of your teacher's association. The topic is "How Can Classrooms Become Professional Learning Communities?" What are the most important strategies you would recommend?
5. As a student, did you ever have a teacher who organized his or her classroom as a learning community? Tell your story.

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**Activities**

1. Divide into small groups. Each group should discuss and list the benefits of embedding learning community concepts and practices in their classrooms. Each group then shares its list with the entire group.
2. The authors point out that all groups develop norms, they are just rarely discussed. Organize into small groups, allowing individuals in each group to share examples of unwritten norms that they were aware of when they were students.
3. Ask a group of teachers to plan and demonstrate a model cooperative learning lesson that includes the five basic components advocated by Johnson and Johnson.

## **Chapter 12**

### **The Role of the Principal in a Professional Learning Community**

Thirty years of research on effective schooling practices have highlighted the critical role the principal plays in schools. Chapter 12 speaks to the role of the principal in a school that functions as a PLC. In addition to a review of the role of the principal in effective schools, the chapter also highlights the research on effective principal behaviors. Noting that principals can benefit from embracing a few key ideas to help them create a meaningful and manageable conceptual framework for addressing the complexities of the principalship, the authors provide suggestions to assist principals so that they will:

1. Be clear about their primary responsibility.
2. Disperse leadership throughout the school.
3. Bring coherence to the complexities of schooling by aligning the structure *and* culture of the school with its core purpose.

The authors also propose a new image of leadership. Rather than the charismatic individual who personally transforms a school, the authors argue for leadership that is focused on building the capacity of their school or district to improve continuously, developing the next generation of leaders, and ensuring the organization will continue to thrive year after year. They call for leaders who view their job as establishing the conditions and preconditions for others to succeed.

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Much can be gained from the insights of successful leaders. The chapter closes with insights from principals who have successfully developed some of the most effective PLCs in the nation.

After reading chapter 12, consider the following questions:

1. Why is the role of the principal so critical to effective schools?
2. The authors assert that principals must be clear about their primary responsibility. What is the primary responsibility of the principal in a PLC?
3. What do the authors mean when they state that principals of PLCs disperse leadership? How is leadership dispersed in your school?
4. What is your understanding of the term *reciprocal accountability*? Can you cite an example of how the concept of reciprocal accountability has been used in your school and district? How does the concept apply to classrooms?
5. In what ways can principals bring coherence to the complexities of schooling? How is this accomplished in your school?
6. The authors call for leaders who view their jobs as establishing the conditions and preconditions for others to succeed. Do you agree with this statement? In what ways is this being accomplished in your school?

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7. Reflect on the contributions of the principals who offer their insights in this chapter. What points made the biggest impact with you? Why?

**Activities**

1. Make a list of the effective practices of principals that are suggested in chapter 12. Beside each practice, rate yourself (or the principal of your school) on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being the lowest and 5 the highest). Which practices received a high rating, and which ones received only a 1 or 2? What could be done to improve on the behaviors that received the lower ratings?
2. The authors call for *dispersed leadership*. Divide into smaller groups. Each group should brainstorm ways in which leadership can be developed and dispersed throughout the school. Groups then report and discuss their findings with the larger group.

## **Chapter 13**

### **The Role of the Central Office in a Professional Learning Community**

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Although effective schools researchers of the 1980s argued that the individual school should serve as the primary unit of change in school improvement initiatives, more recent research has brought to light the important role of the central office. Chapter 13 presents a review of this research, as well as explicit recommendations regarding how central office leaders can best fulfill their responsibility to ensure districtwide school improvement.

In this chapter, the authors tackle the ongoing debate of whether strategies to improve schools and districts should be top-down or bottom-up. They conclude that effective leaders of PLCs are simultaneously loose and tight, and thus are able to foster autonomy and creativity within a systematic framework that stipulates clear, nondiscretionary priorities and parameters. Of course, this leads to the obvious question, “What should district leaders be tight about?” In addition to providing detailed descriptions of four keys that assist leaders in being tight, the authors note that there is compelling evidence that some practices for improving student learning in education are more effective than others. The authors make it clear that when education leaders are aware of compelling evidence of practices that support student learning, they must act on what they know, but at the same time, they must remain open to promising new ideas.

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Of course, the learning of adults is an integral aspect of a PLC, and the central office plays a significant role in ensuring ongoing, job-embedded staff development. The authors observe that if district offices are to play a role in building the capacity of school personnel to function as PLCs, they must redefine professional development and embrace a new approach to promoting adult learning. Chapter 13 contains specific suggestions for staff development in PLCs.

After reading chapter 13, consider the following questions:

1. Do you agree with the authors that the term *top-down* is often uttered with disdain? Is it even possible to have significant districtwide improvement without top-down leadership?
2. What are your thoughts about this statement: One of the great ironies in organizational change is that successful bottom-up change is dependent on effective top-down leadership.
3. How would you respond to this statement: My professional autonomy allows me the freedom to accept or reject proposals for improving the school regardless of the evidence that can be presented to support the proposals.
4. After reading the lists of conditions that promote student learning at higher levels and conditions that have an adverse impact on student learning on pages 343 and 344, which list is most representative of practices in your school or district? What

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- should be the role of the central office in ensuring that the conditions that promote student learning are implemented districtwide?
5. In a meeting of principals in your district, you are asked to offer advice or keys as to how leaders can effectively be tight on certain things. What keys would you present?
  6. Imagine this scenario: A few educators in your district are not clear about what the phrase *simultaneously loose and tight* means. What examples could you use to help them understand this term? Discuss the areas in which your district should be tight and the areas in which they can be loose.
  7. In discussing strategies for efforts to implement improvement initiatives, the authors suggest that in some cases people should simply be required to act. Do you agree with this? When would this be appropriate?
  8. Reflect on this statement regarding staff development: In most districts, individuals are rewarded for pursuing *random* training through scores of *disconnected* providers in curricula of *varying quality* over which the district exercises *no* control. Do you agree with the statement? To what degree is this statement reflective of staff development practices in your district?

## **Activities**

1. Refer to the research findings on pages 337 through 340 on effective district practices. After everyone has had a chance to read the findings, engage in a discussion about how practices in your district compare to the findings. Identify areas of strength and areas that need attention.
2. Organize into groups in which members have various levels of tenure in the district. Ask each group to reflect on members' experiences and generate a list of what has traditionally been tight and loose in the district. Report lists to the whole group.
3. Refer participants to pages 343 and 344 for the lists of conditions that promote student learning at higher levels and conditions that have an adverse impact on student learning. Divide into groups, with each group discussing each finding and ranking on a scale of 1 to 5 the degree to which the practice is perceived to be prevalent in your school or school district (with 5 representing "very prevalent" and 1 indicating the practice is absent). Each group should then report and discuss their ratings. Next, each group recommends strategies for addressing each area of need and shares its recommendations with the whole group.
4. Pages 359 and 360 contain a list of seven questions that can be asked to gather feedback as to how clearly central office leaders (or even building leaders) are

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- communicating priorities throughout the organization. Divide into groups. Each group should discuss how members would answer each question. Report the answers to the larger group, and then discuss.
5. Imagine your school board is contemplating budget cuts in the area of staff development. One board member has publicly stated that there is absolutely no evidence that staff development in previous years has proved to be beneficial. You have been asked to make a presentation to the board in response, emphasizing two points: 1) Why staff development is important in a PLC, and 2) how staff development in your district is different from traditional approaches. What key points would you include in your presentation to the board?

## **Chapter 14**

### **The Role of Parents and the Community in a Professional Learning Community**

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There is an overwhelming body of research supporting the importance of strong partnerships between schools and parents and the community they serve, and creating these strong partnerships is also aligned with the assumptions and practices inherent in the PLC concept. Chapter 14 contains a detailed review of characteristics of effective school-family partnerships, with particular attention given to the six research-based standards that have been developed by the National Parent Teacher Association (National PTA). In addition to presenting the National PTA standards, the authors provide specific, practical suggestions regarding how to implement the standards in the day-to-day practices of schools.

The authors emphasize that the way in which educators view their schools will determine their interest in and commitment to including parents as significant partners in the teaching and learning process. They compare an *industrial* view with a *service-industry* view, pointing out that the service-industry model calls for individualization, soliciting the perspective of the customer, and then exceeding customer expectations.

After reading chapter 14, consider the following questions:

1. Imagine your local television station contacted you asking if they could do a news story on how your school fosters school/parent partnerships. What current

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- practices and programs would they see? Are these things you would want to see featured about your school in the story?
2. Parents frequently complain that while schools say they want parent involvement, what they really want is parents' money and time. To what degree is this complaint applicable in your school or district?
  3. In what ways could you use the National Parent Teacher Association standards to improve your school's parent relations program? Is there a specific standard or two that need attention in your setting?
  4. How are community resources utilized in your school? How could your current use of community resources be improved upon?
  5. The authors urge that school leaders "look through the lens" of the service-industry model. Do you agree? To what degree is your school aligned with the service-industry model as described in this chapter?
  6. Chapter 14 concludes by highlighting Mountain Meadow Elementary School, an example of an exemplary school/parent-community partnership based on the service-industry model. Did you learn of any practices at Mountain Meadow that could be utilized in your school? Are there current practices in your school that you would highlight as exemplary school/parent-community partnerships?

## **Activity**

After each member of the faculty has read chapter 14, work to address these questions:

- What does the research say about exemplary school-parent/community relations?
- What is the current reality of your school's parent/community relations program?
- What do you think the fundamental purpose of school/parent-community programs should be?
- If you were to describe the school/parent-community relations program you desire, what would it look like?
- What commitments would the faculty and staff have to make in order for the program to become a reality?
- What goals would need to be attained in order to achieve an improved school/parent-community program?

## **Chapter 15**

### **Sustaining the Professional Learning Community Journey**

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How can school leaders sustain the process of reculturing a school or district into a PLC? In this chapter, the authors point out that there are no easy answers to this question. They also observe that there is no one way to make the journey. The journey to becoming a PLC is hard, complex work that requires passion and persistence. While there is no prescribed step-by-step recipe or route to becoming a PLC, there are some critical issues that must be addressed sooner rather than later if the school-improvement journey is to proceed in a purposeful direction.

Like all journeys, the authors note that there will be bumps in the road and detours along the way. Chapter 15 includes a description of five “dangerous detours” and suggestions regarding how to deal with them. The authors conclude with a discussion of how sustained effort requires creating and celebrating short-term wins. They also make a point of honoring educators by observing that the problems confronting public education have never been the result of lack of effort or lack of caring among educators, and if contemporary schools are to reflect fundamentally different assumptions than schools of the past, if they are to reflect a genuine commitment to high levels of learning for all students, if they are to be places of collective inquiry and collaborative efforts, it will be *because of* rather than *in spite of* the educators within them.

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After reading chapter 15, reflect on the following questions:

1. The authors write that some issues must be addressed sooner rather than later if the school-improvement journey is to proceed in a purposeful direction. What are some of the issues that *must* be addressed? To what degree have they been addressed in your school or school district?
  
2. In chapter 15, the authors emphasize the power of *learning by doing* rather than *learning by training*. Do you agree with this premise? Can you think of a skill in which you have become proficient without actually doing the work?
  
3. Many school cultures suffer from the “if only” complex—if only parents provided more support, if only we had a better State Department of Education, if only our government would better fund education, and so on. To what degree does your faculty look to external forces to improve their school?
  
4. It has been said that the road to becoming a PLC is dotted with many tempting parking spaces. Has your school demonstrated the persistence to stay focused on the right questions and stay headed in the right direction even when things do not go as initially planned? What can school leaders do to keep a school or district from retreating to the comfort of traditional practices when the going gets tough?
  
5. Why is the creation and celebration of short-term wins so important? How is this accomplished in your school and school district?

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6. The authors note that school leaders who have no regard for the ability of those with whom they work, or worse, hold them in contempt, will never successfully lead a PLC. Reflect on your career as an educator. Can you think of instances in which you felt you and your colleagues were held in contempt or disdain? What can leaders do to communicate that they believe in and have positive regard for those with whom they work and serve?

**Activities**

1. Organize into small groups, and refer to the list of “dangerous detours” discussed on pages 413 through 423. Each group should then list suggestions for successfully dealing with each of these detours and report to the larger group. Then have a general discussion regarding things that can be done to sustain the journey to becoming a PLC.
2. Divide into small groups and brainstorm ways in which your school or school district can create and celebrate short-term wins.
3. Divide into small groups to generate a list of ways systems of regular, meaningful communication can be strengthened within the school and between the school and school district.