Professional Learning
Communities
Focus on Learning

1. What do students need to know?
2. How do we know they know it?
3. What are we going to do if they don’t get it?
4. What are we going to do if they already know it?

Focus on Results

Collaborative Culture
6 Essential Characteristics of Being a Professional Learning Community

• **Shared Mission, Vision, Values, Goals**
  What distinguishes a learning community from an ordinary school is its collective commitment to guiding principles that articulate what the staff of the school believes and that govern their actions and behavior.

• **Collaborative Teams**
  Professionals in a learning community work in teams that share a common purpose. They learn from each other and create the momentum that drives improvement. They build within the organization the structure and vehicles that make collaborative work and learning effective and productive.

• **Collective Inquiry**
  People in a learning community relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results.
  - They reflect publicly on their beliefs and challenge each other’s beliefs.
  - They share insights and hammer out common meanings.
  - They work jointly to plan and test actions and initiatives.
  - They coordinate their actions, so that the work of each individual contributes to the common effort.
• **Action Orientation / Experimentation**
Members of professional learning communities constantly turn their learning and insights into action. They recognize the importance of engagement and experience in learning and in testing new ideas.

• **Commitment to Continuous Improvement**
Members of a learning organization are not content with the status quo and continually seek ways to bring present reality closer to future ideal. They constantly ask themselves and each other:
  • What is our purpose?
  • What do we hope to achieve?
  • What are our strategies for improving?
  • How will we assess our efforts?

• **Results Focus**
Professionals in a learning organization recognize that no matter how well intentioned the efforts, the only valid judgment of improvement is observable and measurable results. Assessment and re-evaluation are the keys to continued improvement.
“You cannot have students as continuous learners and effective collaborators, without teachers having the same characteristics.”

~ Michael Fullan, 1993
What are the Barriers to Building Effective Learning Communities?
What is Collaboration?

A **systematic** process in which we work together, **interdependently**, to **analyze** and **impact** professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results.
Collaborative cultures, which by definition have close relationships, are indeed powerful, but unless they are focusing on the right things they may end up being powerfully wrong.

Michael Fullan
Team Learning

The discipline of team learning starts with the capacity of team members to suspend assumptions and enter into a genuine “thinking together” to see deeper patterns and chart the future.
Five Critical Dimensions of Team Learning

- The need to think insightfully about complex issues
- The need to master the practices of dialogue and skillful discussion
- The need for innovative, coordinated action
- The need for collaborative inquiry
- The need for relational trust
Re-culturing Schools for Collaboration

- If schools are to improve, staff must develop the capacity to function as professional learning communities (PLC’s).
- If schools are to function as PLC’s, they must develop a collaborative culture.
- If schools are to develop a collaborative culture, the must overcome a tradition of teacher isolation.
- If schools are to overcome their tradition of teacher isolation, teachers must learn to work in effective, high performing teams.

Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, Getting Started, 2002
## Characteristics of Effective/Ineffective Teams

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effective</th>
<th>Ineffective</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Full sharing of information</td>
<td>• Little sharing of information</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Open/honest sharing of information</td>
<td>• Competitive</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Trusting</td>
<td>• Conflict frowned on</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Collaborative</td>
<td>• Conflict involves personal traits and motives</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Respectful</td>
<td>• Guarded atmosphere</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Supportive</td>
<td>• Decisions by majority vote</td>
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<td>• Conflict focuses on issues, not people</td>
<td>• Emphasis on power</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Conflict regarded as natural, even helpful</td>
<td>• Emphasis on activity and inputs, not goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Open</td>
<td>• Coercion and pressure</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Non-threatening</td>
<td>• Individual achievement valued without concern for group</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Noncompetitive</td>
<td>• Rewards based on arbitrary appraisals</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Decisions reached by consensus</td>
<td>• Rewards based on contribution to group</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Solution-oriented</td>
<td>• Peer recognition</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Commitment to goals (school’s mission/vision/action plan)</td>
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If schools want to enhance their capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a collaborative culture… When groups, rather than individuals, are seen as the main units for implementing curriculum, instruction and assessment, they facilitate development of shared purposes for student learning and collective responsibility to achieve it.

F. Newmann
Advantages of Teachers Working in Collaborative Teams:

- Gains in Student Achievement
- Higher Quality Solutions to Problems
- Increased Confidence Among All Staff
- Teachers Able to Support One Another’s Strengths and Accommodate Weaknesses
- Ability to Test New Ideas
- More Support for New Teachers
- Expanded Pool of Ideas, Materials, Methods

Judith Warren Little (summary of research)
List with your table group the component parts of the Reading First Program

Share out with the group these component parts

Together LABEL the PLC Component part that matches the Reading First Component
“I lift, you grab . . . . Was that concept just a little too complex, Carl?”
Preparing the Ground for Skillful Discussion

1. Create a safe haven for participants
2. Make openness and trust the rule rather than the exception
3. Encourage and reward the injection of new perspectives
4. Plan the agenda, time and context to allow for concentrated deliberation
Keys to Effective Teams

- Embed collaboration in routine practices of the school with FOCUS ON LEARNING.
- Time for collaboration built in school day and school calendar.
- Teams focus on key questions

- Products of collaboration are made explicit (timeline for norms, smart goals, outcomes, common assessments, analysis)
- Team norms guide collaboration
- Teams pursue specific and measurable performance goals
- Teams have access to relevant information
Team Growth & Development

- Forming
- Storming
- Norming
- Performing
- Reforming
Team Roles:

- **Facilitator**
  - Keep the group on task

- **Timekeeper**
  - Keep the group on time

- **Note taker**
  - Keep official record of the meeting decisions / actions
Weekly Expectations of Teams

- Use and turn in the Team Feedback Forms
- Set agenda for next meeting
- Assign roles
- Stay focused on the 4 key questions
- Meet at a regular time and place
Timeline for Team Products

By the end of the:

- 2nd week: Team Norms
- 4th week: Common SMART Goal
- 6th week: Common Assessments
- 8th week: Individual Student Interventions
Team Norms Guide Collaboration

- **Determine norms**
- **Print and Distribute Norms**
- **Begin and End each meeting reviewing the Norms together**
AGENDAS

• Purpose
• Meeting Outcomes
• Topics
• Time estimates
• Lead people
• Methods
Critical Question

What do we collaborate about?
SMART Goals

- Specific
- Measureable
- Attainable
- Results oriented
- Time Bound

What evidence do we have that our team is making progress toward our SMART goal?
Questions for Teams

- What are our check points?
- What specific data do we have?
- What interventions are happening with each student?
- What are our celebrations?
- What will our conclusive evidence be at the end of the year?
We KNOW.....

- Not all students learn at the same rate.
- Not all students understand and apply the material taught with only one lesson on that concept.
- That there are many successful strategies at our disposal that help students learn.

SO...How do we apply this knowledge?
Questions and Steps to use:

- What “cultural” issues must be addressed?
- Brainstorm all your current “best practices”
- List all your resources
- How will you identify students who need extra support? How often?
- List classroom interventions, grade level interventions, and school-wide interventions
- How will your team re-teach essential standards?
Questions and Steps:

- How will you address intentional non-learners?
- How will you communicate the program to staff, students and parents?
- How will you recognize/encourage student success?
- Will your grading policies align with program goals?
- What implementation obstacles will you face?
- How will you meet and overcome those obstacles?
- How will you celebrate the success of students?
It is ALL about ACTION:

- KNOWING
- DOING
- BEING
How do we know if we are effective?
– Team Consideration Worksheet

What should be our first step in making our team more effective?
Roland Barth: Ultimately there are two kinds of schools: learning enriched schools and learning impoverished schools. I have yet to see a school where the learning curves...of the adults were steep upward and those of the students were not. Teachers and students go hand and hand as learners...or they don’t go at all.