

Defining a Learning Community

What is a professional learning community? What could we expect to see in an organization that is functioning as one?

First, the people in the organization have a clear sense of the mission they are to accomplish and a shared vision of the conditions they must create to achieve their mission. They work together in collaborative teams that engage in collective inquiry into both best practices for accomplishing their aims and the current reality of the conditions in their organization. Any discrepancy between best practice and the reality of their school spurs them to take action to reduce the discrepancy.

The entire organization is designed to engage teams in a cycle of continuous improvement – gathering and analyzing data and information, identifying weaknesses and areas of concern, working together to develop strategies to address specific weaknesses and concerns, supporting each other as they implement those strategies, gathering new data and information to assess the impact of the strategies and then starting the process all over again.

This cycle is not an annual event, but is rather the ongoing process that drives the daily work of people throughout the organization. Finally, the effectiveness of the organization is assessed on the basis of results, rather than intentions or activities.

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