The Professional Learning Community Journey: Creating a School of High Expectations

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Climate of High Expectations

Students make learning a priority.

Goals and high expectations are clearly communicated by every adult.
Connect the big ideas of the professional learning community process with the beliefs and practices within a school.
Things we’ve thought about and are doing

Things I haven’t thought about

Things we need to address
Setting Norms for Today’s Work

Choose your attitude: Make the choice to approach our learning with a positive attitude.

Be present: Engage with your colleagues throughout the discussion.

Play: Have fun and enjoy the opportunity to reflect, share, and celebrate.

Make someone’s day: Consider positive possibilities.
The Entire Staff Is a Professional Learning Community
Another Plate?
Common Sense
The entire staff is a professional learning community.
The entire staff engages in an ongoing, collaborative process of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for their students.”
What's your Why?

When you know why you do what you do even the toughest days become easier!

doncrowther.com/featured/why
Three Big Ideas of the **Professional Learning Community Model**

1. Focus on learning rather than teaching.
2. Work collaboratively on matters related to learning.
3. Hold themselves accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement.
Six Characteristics of the Professional Learning Community Model

- A shared mission centered on a focus on learning
- A collaborative culture with a focus on learning for all
- Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality
- Action orientation: Learning by doing
- A commitment to continuous improvement
- Results orientation
First Big Idea

A Focus on Learning
Purpose, beliefs, assumptions, policies, practices, and procedures must relate to learning.

Decisions about curriculum, assessment, instruction, interventions, grading, and so on must filter through a framework to determine probable impacts on learning.
Foundational Blocks
Developing a Shared Purpose

- **Mission** asks: "Why?" "Why do we exist?"

- **Vision** asks: "What?" "What do we want to become?"

- **Values and Collective Commitments** ask: "How?" "How must we behave to create the school that will achieve our purpose?"

- **Goals** ask: "How?" "How will we know all of this is making a difference?"
Where Should We Begin?

What kind of school are we striving to become?
What Kind of School Are We Trying to Create?

- Sort and select? Or create winners?
- Identify the students who get it right the first time? Or provide extra time and support?
- Spot the talented? Or develop talents?
- Success for all students? Or success for some students?
Our Mission: Success for Every Student
A Learning Community Culture Asks

... various adult personalities to come together to think about how to best act on behalf of all the students.

It also says, “Don’t be content until every area where students aren’t doing well is erased and we are helping all students really be successful.”

(Kanold, *The Power of Professional Learning Communities at Work*, 2007)
“[It is] a huge and daunting goal—like a big mountain to climb. It is clear, compelling, and people get it right away. It serves as a unifying focal point of effort, galvanizing people and creating team spirit as people strive toward a finish line.

“Like the 1960s NASA moon mission, a BHAG captures the imagination and grabs people in the gut.”

—Collins, Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap ... and Others Don’t (2001), p. 202
Engage in Collective Inquiry

- Relentless questioning of the status quo
- Seeking new methods and testing them
- Reflecting on results
- Maintaining a sense of curiosity and an openness to new possibilities
- Recognizing that the process of searching for answers is more important than having the answers
Collective Inquiry

- What is our primary purpose?
- What do we want our classrooms to look like for students and for us?
- What assessment practices will we use to enhance student learning?
- What does great instruction look like?
- What is our plan for intervening when students struggle?
- How can we extend and enrich our students’ learning experience?
- What’s keeping us from becoming the school we want to become?
- Why do students fail?
Reasons Students Are Failing?

- Lack of motivation
- Inability to value education (student)
- Poor study habits
- Sleep deprivation
- Absences
- No strong role models
- Student culture and emphasis on achieving at high levels
- Unpreparedness
- Too many distractions
- Weak vocabulary
- Failure to engage student
- Anger
- Low self-esteem
- Inability to value education (parent)
- No connection to content
- Self-fulfilling prophecy
- Poor listening skills
- Incomplete homework
- Undiagnosed disabilities
- Low expectations (parents and staff)
- No background knowledge
- Student mobility
Reasons Students Are Failing?

- Lack of effort
- Poor attitude toward learning
- Peer pressure
- Attitude that it is “uncool” to get good grades
- Misplacement in program
- Being labeled as failure
- Lack of differentiated instruction
- Lack of relationships with staff
- Lack of organizational skills

- Truancy
- Lack of goals or dreams
- Can’t see work or needs glasses
- Substance issues
- Poor policies
- Lack of accountability
- Failure to ask for assistance
- Laziness or refusal to try
- Lack of consequences
- Lack of inference across curriculum
What are some questions you need to think about and begin to address?
What is learning really all about?

What’s happening as the brain receives, organizes, stores, retrieves information and develops ideas?
Schools have traditionally been teacher centered schools. To change to a learning centered school, we must first grasp the principles of human learning. We must develop a common understanding of how these principles impact our classroom practices.
Some Principles of Learning

- Learning is continuous.
- We are more likely to hit the target when we know what the target is.
- Without the opportunity to correct, learning is likely to stop.
- We improve with multiple attempts.
- Effort and proper preparation are the main determinants of success.
Some Principles of Learning

- The brain is chunking, swirling, and searching for connections as we learn.
- We are natural problem solvers and explorers.
- People are wired differently with different experiences.
- We work harder and longer when we are internally motivated.
- We learn best in a positive environment.
Second Big Idea

Collaborate on Matters Related to Learning
Matters Related To Learning

- Curriculum
- Assessment
- Instruction
- Interventions
- A Growth Mindset Classroom
Taking a Look at Collaboration

A **systematic** process in which we work together **interdependently** to analyze and **impact** professional practice to improve our individual and collective results.
Creating A Vision And Identifying Actions To Support The Vision

- What do we want our classrooms to look like for students and for us?
- How do we want our students to interact with each other and with us?
- How do we want our students to approach learning?
- What will happen when students struggle?

To Achieve This We Will...
## Learning Teams That Get Results

**William Ferriter**

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Four Critical Questions for Teaming

What do we want our students to learn?

- Essential
- Guaranteed
- Viable Curriculum
"Professional learning teams embrace accountability and see content mastery as their personal responsibility.

- They redesign the way they define their curriculum.
- They engage students in their own learning.
- They systematically track progress in their classrooms."

—Muhammad, *Transforming School Culture: How to Overcome Staff Division* (2009), p.18
Narrowing the Instructional Focus

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“In the process we discovered that countless lessons from existing units could be eliminated because they did not address essential learnings. ... Our work finally had the kind of clarity and focus necessary to create new systems for responsible.”

—William Ferriter, Sixth Grade Teacher
What Do We Collaborate About?

How will we know they are learning it?

Frequent, team-developed, common formative assessments
Common Formative Assessments are the “lynchpin” of the PLC at Work Process

*noun*: a person or thing vital to an enterprise or organization.
“When implemented well, formative assessment can effectively double the speed of student learning.”

Common Assessments ~ What

“An assessment typically created collaboratively by a team of teachers responsible for the same grade level or course.”

(Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 214)
Common Assessments ~ Why?

- Identify students in need of additional time and support
- Identify effective teaching practices, materials, and strategies
- Identify program concerns
- Provide data for setting team goals
- Provide feedback to help students reflect on their progress toward mastery.

Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, p. 214
What Do We Collaborate About?

How will we respond when they don’t learn?

Timely, directive, systematic intervention
Answering the Third Critical Question

- Are students ensured extra time and support for learning?
- Is our focus prompt intervention rather than sluggish remediation?
- Is our response timely and directive rather than invitational?
- Is our response systematic?
“We must change from a model that picks winners to one that will create winners.”

What Do We Collaborate About?

How will we respond when they already know it?

Timely enrichment and extension
Third Big Idea

Hold Ourselves Accountable
As a result of analyzing the achievement scores of more than 100,000 students across hundreds of schools, the conclusion was that the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. (Wright, Horn, & Sanders 1997)
Questions About the Culture of Your School

- Do we believe that all of our students can learn at high levels?
- Do we believe that educators are the key contributors to student learning?
- Do we believe education is critical to the future of our students?
- Do we believe we can make a difference in the lives of our students?

—DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes (2009, p. 99)
For their sakes

We must be great!
Thank You!

Solution Tree