

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| About the Authors | vii |
| Foreword | |
| A Commitment to School Improvement | ix |
| Introduction | |
| Getting Started: A Conceptual Framework for Creating a Professional Learning Community | 1 |
| <i>Robert Eaker, Richard DuFour, and Rebecca DuFour</i> | |
| Chapter 1 | |
| Cultural Shifts: Transforming Schools Into Professional Learning Communities | 9 |
| <i>Robert Eaker</i> | |
| Chapter 2 | |
| Time, Perspective, and Priorities | 31 |
| <i>Richard DuFour</i> | |
| Chapter 3 | |
| Lessons Learned: Boones Mill Elementary School | 57 |
| <i>Rebecca DuFour</i> | |
| Chapter 4 | |
| A Conversation With the Authors | 77 |

GETTING STARTED: RECULTURING SCHOOLS TO BECOME PLCs

Chapter 5

A Call for Action 109

Robert Eaker, Richard DuFour, and Rebecca DuFour

Chapter 6

Artifacts 113

Chapter 7

Case Studies 159

Bibliography 183

Introduction

Getting Started: A Conceptual Framework for Creating a Professional Learning Community

With the 1998 publication of *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*, we presented the premise that the most promising strategy for substantive school improvement is developing the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community (PLC). We were able to strengthen that argument by citing the consensus of leading researchers from within and outside of education who agreed that the characteristics of a professional learning community are essential to the sustained improvement of any organization. Our book illustrated the principles of a PLC at work in the real world of schools and offered strategies and tools to assist educators in making the transition to a PLC.

We have now worked with school districts, state departments of education, and professional organizations throughout the United States and Canada to assist in the implementation of the PLC concepts. The response has been overwhelmingly

positive. The ideas that drive the PLC model strike a chord with educators. It typically requires very little to persuade them that students and teachers alike would benefit if schools operated as learning communities.

The enthusiastic response to the PLC model often has been tempered, however, by the uncertainty of educators regarding their ability to create a learning community within their own settings. They question whether or not their schools or school districts have the resources, competencies, leadership, or will to work through the challenges inherent in the cultural transformation of a school. While embracing the abstract idea of the PLC model, they lack confidence in their ability to move from abstraction to implementation, from promise to reality in their own settings. Thus, it is common for participants in our workshops to seek the step-by-step recipe they can follow to create a PLC in their own school.

The bad news, of course, is that no such recipe exists. Neither quick fixes nor fool-proof formulas are available to those interested in the PLC model. The structural and cultural changes required to advance a traditional school on the continuum of becoming a PLC are inherently nonlinear and complex. Progress is typically incremental, characterized more by starts and stops, messiness, and redundancy than sequential efficiency.

But while those interested in the PLC model do not have access to a fool-proof recipe, a solid conceptual framework is available to guide their efforts. The elements of this framework illustrate how schools operate when they are functioning as PLCs. Schools that keep the framework at the forefront as they engage in the improvement process have a model by which they can assess the effectiveness of their efforts.

Developing High-Performing, Collaborative Teams

Schools that function as professional learning communities are **always** characterized by a collaborative culture. Teacher isolation is replaced with collaborative processes that are deeply embedded into the daily life of the school. Members of a PLC are not “invited” to work with colleagues: they are called upon to be contributing members of a collective effort to improve the school’s capacity to help all students learn at high levels.

The driving engine of the collaborative culture of a PLC is the team. All members of the staff are assigned to one or more teams that are called upon to work interdependently to achieve one or more common goals. Individual teachers give up a degree of personal autonomy in exchange for collective authority to answer the most critical questions of teaching and learning. Teams work together to clarify the intended outcomes of each grade level, course, or unit of instruction. They develop common assessments that they consider valid measures of student mastery. They jointly analyze student achievement data, draw conclusions, and establish team improvement goals. They support one another and share strategies and materials as they work together to accomplish goals that they could not achieve by working alone. The teams have the benefit of time, focus, parameters, access to information, and ongoing support as they engage in collective inquiry and action research. They work together in an ongoing effort to discover best practices and to expand their professional expertise.