

*Support for Professional Learning Communities in Northfield
Northfield Public Schools
March, 2009*

What are Professional Learning Communities?

Professional Learning Communities are comprised of teams of teachers who share the same content and/or students and, on a weekly basis, work collaboratively to analyze student data, promptly identify student needs, identify and implement best practice strategies, evaluate the impact their teaching has on student learning, and make changes in their practice to better meet the needs of all students. They do this by answering the critical questions of learning:

1. What knowledge, skills, and dispositions do we expect our students to learn?
2. How will we know our students have acquired these essential learnings?
3. How will we respond, individually and collectively, when our students have difficulty learning?
4. How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are capable of moving further?
5. How can we use the evidence of student learning to inform and improve our practice?

Why do the benefits of PLC's outweigh the loss of instructional time?

“It is...imperative that teachers be provided with time to meet during their contractual day. We believe it is insincere and disingenuous for any school district or any school principal to stress the importance of collaboration, and then fail to provide time for collaboration.(DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, *Learning by Doing* 2006, pp. 95–97)

We believe that the benefits of PLC's will far outweigh the loss of instructional time. We simply cannot keep doing what we've always done and expect better results. We are living in an age of increased accountability and expectations. We would be remiss if we didn't take progressive and pro-active steps to implement research-based strategies to fully support our students. Others who agree:

“Every enterprise has to become a learning institution [and] a teaching institution. Organizations that build in continuous learning in jobs will dominate the twenty-first century.”(Druker, 1992, p.108)

“...other nations where students outperform those in the United States invest heavily in professional learning for their educators and provide time that is built into the teachers' work hours for ongoing, intensive professional development and collaboration.” (Minnesota Educator, March 2009, p. 7)

“...from reform to true collaboration - could represent the most dramatic shift in the history of educational practice...We will know we have succeeded when the absence of a 'strong professional learning community' in a school is an embarrassment.” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 431)

While we are very proud of the progress we have made in the areas of Assessment, Curriculum and Staff Development, we also know that there is always room for improvement. It is our goal to constantly be learning and improving what we do for the students and parents for whom we work.