



The Apple Core



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What is a PLC?

"A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators."

—adapted from *Learning by Doing*



Superintendent's Message District Commitment to Student Achievement

Superintendent Mark Dockins

Uintah School District is committed to creating a collaborative culture, with an intense focus on clarifying what each student must learn, monitoring each student's learning, providing systemic interventions, and incorporating enrichment for students who master learning standards. We are committed to developing a culture that values collaboration, continuous improvement and a focus on the results. It is our belief that our pursuit of high levels of learning for all students can be realized by embedding the practices of professional learning communities into the culture of the entire school district.

Over the past three years, Uintah School District has been working to change the way we look at teaching and learning. Our goal is to raise the bar of achievement in our district. We believe one of the best ways to accomplish this is by

focusing on student learning in small staff groups called Professional Learning Communities.

In most schools across the state and nation, teachers work in isolation, behind closed doors, without the opportunity to collaborate with their peers. This is the traditional model of "factory" schooling that most of us are familiar with because those were the kinds of schools we went to. The traditional system works well for a certain group of students. However, in today's educational world, our communities are highly diverse and our student demographics are far from homogenous. Traditional educational systems do not meet the needs of ALL students, and students in such systems have sometimes been left behind. Uintah School District is not going to settle for mediocrity. We are becoming a culture of collaboration with a laser-like focus on student achievement. The district leadership—including

school board members, the district office and our principals and coordinators—are all committed to developing a district culture of collaboration based around student achievement.

It is an exciting time to be at the forefront of change in education. Many times when people talk of educational change or reform, they are discussing a change in structure or systems—like changing the configuration of schools or creating charter or magnet schools. Those changes rarely elicit any significant student achievement improvements. The cultural change we are working toward as a district is focused, not on the structure of school or a new teaching program, but rather, it is focused entirely on student achievement and how to work collaboratively to increase our students' learning. With student achievement as our focus, I have no doubt that we will see significant increases in our student outcomes.

A Big Picture Look at Professional Learning Communities

3 BIG IDEAS OF A PLC Focus on Learning

The fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure high levels of learning for all students. This focus on learning translates into four critical questions that drive the daily work of the school. In PLCs, educators demonstrate their

commitment to helping all students learn by working collaboratively to address the following critical questions:

- 1) What do we want students to learn? What should each student know and be able to do as a result of each unit, grade level, and/or course?
- 2) How will we know if they

have learned? Are we monitoring each student's learning on a timely basis?

- 3) What will we do if they don't learn? What systematic process is in place to provide additional time and support for students who are experiencing difficulty?
- 4) What will we do if they al-

A Big Picture Look at Professional Learning Communities (continued)

ready know it?

Build a COLLABORATIVE CULTURE

- No school can help all students achieve at high levels if teachers work in isolation.
- Schools improve when teachers are given the time and support to work together to clarify essential student learning, develop common assessments for learning, analyze evidence of student learning, and use that evidence to learn from one another.

Focus on Results

- PLCs measure their effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions.
- All programs, policies, and practices are continually assessed on the basis of their impact on student learning.
- All staff members receive relevant and timely information on their effectiveness in achieving intended results.

6 ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A PLC

Shared mission, vision, values, goals

Educators in a PLC benefit from clarity regarding their shared purpose, a common understanding of the school they are trying to create, collective communities to help move the school in the desired direction, and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound (SMART) goals to mark their progress.

Collaborative teams focused on learning

In a PLC, educators work together interde-

pendently in collaborative teams to achieve common goals for which they are mutually accountable. The structure of the school is aligned to ensure teams are provided the time and support essential to adult learning.

The success of the PLC concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school—the commitment and persistence of the educators within it.
—Richard DuFour

“Collaboration is a systematic process in which we work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results.”

—adapted from *Learning by Doing*

Collective inquiry

Teams in a PLC relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results. Building shared knowledge of both current reality and best practice is an essential part of each team’s decision-making process.

Action orientation and experimentation

Members of a PLC constantly turn their learning and insights into action. They recognize the importance of engagement and experi-

ence in learning and in testing new ideas. They learn by doing.

Commitment to Continuous improvement

Not content with the status quo, members of a PLC constantly seek better ways to achieve mutual goals and accomplish their fundamental purpose of learning for all. All teams engage in an ongoing cycle of:

- Gathering evidence of current levels of student learning
- Developing strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning
- Implementing the strategies and ideas
- Analyzing the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not
- Applying the new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

Results orientation

Educators in a PLC assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. They are hungry for evidence of student learning and use that evidence to inform and improve their practice.

Adapted from the work of Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, and Robert Eaker.

<http://www.allthingsplc.info/tools/print.php#15>

**Next Mandatory Training:
Wednesday, November 18th
9:00 a.m. @ District Office**

For any employees who have not yet attended a 2009-2010 training, another will be held here at the district office at 9:00 AM on Wednesday, November 18.



DIRECTOR'S NOTES

Mandatory Trainings—Lee Gagon, HR Director

I would like to send out a “thank you” to district employees for having taken the time to attend a mandatory training session. Turnout has been terrific, and I have appreciated employees taking time

out of their busy schedules to meet with me to discuss and ponder some highlights from policy and from state and federal law, which impact us as we work with students, staff, and parents.

November/December Payroll Dates—Randy Upton, Business Administrator



We are coming upon the 2 months which provide the largest number of holidays. For November and December payrolls, time is of the essence because of all the days off. For these two months the November Payroll date and December payroll date will be November 25th and December 23rd, respectively. These dates meet the Board policy regarding pay day and holidays. Because of the

short month in November and December, the Business Office will not be able to give any consideration to late payroll requests. Please make sure all payroll documents are submitted on time. This will help ensure employees will receive correct paychecks before the Thanksgiving and Christmas holidays.

As many of you may remember, the Board of Education, as part of the 2009-2010 budget, approved a 1% stipend for all contract employees as part of the federal stimulus backfill. In order to qualify for this stipend, a contract employee is required to have re-

ceived an October 2009 and November 2009 paycheck. This stipend will be calculated using the contract employee’s base contract (amount on salary schedule times the full time equivalent). This stipend will be included as part of the November 2009 paycheck. It will not be paid on a separate paycheck.

If you should have questions on either of these items, please direct them to Randy Upton at extension 1020.

