

## UNDERSTANDING PLCs

Professional learning communities (PLCs) have been in existence since the 1970s. However, Fisher, Frey, Almarode, Nagel, and Flories (2020) note that the aims have changed:

- To improve the pedagogical and content knowledge of educators through collaboration among colleagues
- To improve the learning outcomes of students



With a focus on both educator and student learning, five essential questions serve to engage PLCs in critical dialogue.

### 1. **Where are we going?**

Learning communities that can answer this question have high levels of clarity. They are keenly aware of the academic standards, learning targets, and rigor level of the standards. And they use this knowledge to drive the engineering of assessment evidence and the learning plan.

### 2. **Where are we now?**

In order to answer this question, learning communities need to have evidence to determine current student proficiency on the standards. This allows them to determine appropriate entry points for instruction, beginning with where students are and moving them to where they need to be.

### **3. How do we move learning forward?**

This question focuses on teaching practices and learning from one another. Learning walks and microteaching are examples of how we analyze our teaching by using the wisdom of our peers. We can also evaluate learning tasks by analyzing assignments for rigor and alignment to the standards.

### **4. What did we learn today?**

Focusing on this question helps learning communities synthesize the information discussed and the data reviewed to examine student progress and achievement. Which, in turn, helps to ground actions and focus goals moving forward.

### **5. Who benefited and who did not benefit?**

This question encourages us to closely examine student progress and achievement, guiding the learning community in terms of where to go next for each learner. Both the supports and enrichment opportunities designed for students should be examined to determine what is working and take action to improve what is not.

#### References

Fisher, F., Frey, N., Almarode, J., Flories, K., & Nagel, D. (2020). *PLC+: Better decisions and greater impact by design*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

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