

# Centennial Teachers Engage in Collaborative Team Teaching/Professional Learning Communities Based on Research and Best Practices.

## Read on to see “What the Research” says.

**The research is clear: effective PLCs/collaborative team teaching can have a dramatic, positive impact on student achievement and staff development.**

“If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building professional communities characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff.” (Newman & Wehlage, 1995, p.37)

Louis and Marks (1998) found that when a school is organized into a professional learning community, the following occurs:

1. Teachers set higher expectations for student achievement.
2. Students can count on the help of their teachers and peers in achieving ambitious learning goals.
3. The quality of classroom pedagogy is considerably higher.
4. Achievement levels are significantly higher.

“Strong professional learning communities produce schools that are engines of hope and achievement for students... There is nothing more important for education in the decades ahead than educating and supporting PLC Leaders...” (Saphier, 2005, p.111)

“(In the most successful schools) leadership ensures there are integrated communities of professional practice in the service of student academic and social learning and a healthy school environment in which student learning is the central focus...” (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Craverns, 2007)

Outcomes for both staff and students have been improved by organizing professional learning communities. For staff, results include:

- Reduction of isolation of teachers
- Increased commitment to the mission and goals of the school and increased vigor in working to strengthen the mission
- Shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for students’ success
- Powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice, that creates new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learners
- Increased meaning and understanding of the content that teachers teach and the roles that they play in helping all students achieve expectations
- Higher likelihood that teachers will be well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire students
- More satisfaction and higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism
- Significant advances in teaching adaptations for students and changes for learners are made more quickly than in traditional schools
- Higher likelihood of undertaking fundamental, systemic change (Hord, 1997)

“A school-based professional community can offer support and motivation to teachers as they work to overcome the tight resources, isolation, time constraints, and other obstacles they commonly encounter...In schools where professional community is strong, teachers work together more effectively, and put more effort into creating and sustaining opportunities for student learning.” (Kruse, Louis, & Bryk, 1994, p. 4)

“Such a tipping point - from reform to true collaboration - could represent the most dramatic shift in the history of educational practice...” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 431)

“Quality teaching requires strong, professional learning communities. Collegial interchange, not isolation, must become the norm for teachers. Communities of learning are the building blocks that will establish a new foundation for America’s schools.” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003, p.17)

“Professional learning communities offer an infrastructure to create the supportive cultures and conditions necessary for achieving significant gains in teaching and learning. Professional learning communities provide opportunities for professional staff to look deeply into the teaching and learning process and to learn how to become more effective in their work with students.” (Morrissey, 2000)

“Working at complementary levels - school improvement and PLCs reinforce and strengthen one another. They are mutually supportive. If we want to ensure that no child is left behind, we must understand the important relationship between school improvement and PLCs... The use of PLCs at the classroom level has dramatically increased teachers’ ability to implement a guaranteed and viable curriculum, monitor student progress, and improve the teaching and learning process. A strong link between school improvement goals and PLCs allow all children to be successful.” (Colliton, 2005, p. 1-2)

Another analysis of the data collected by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools agreed that development of professional learning communities was critical to improving schools and elaborated on the conditions leading to successful PLCs:

1. Reflective dialogue based on a shared set of norms and beliefs that allow them to critique their individual and collective performance
2. De-privatization of practice that requires teachers to share, observe, and discuss each other’s methods and philosophies
3. Collective focus on student learning fueled by the belief that all students can learn and that staff members have a mutual obligation to see to it that students learn
4. Collaboration that moves beyond dialogue about students to producing materials that improve instruction and assessment for students
5. Shared values that affirm common ground on critical educational issues and a collective focus on student learning (WestEd, 2000, p. 11)

Another approach to presenting the research in support of PLCs is to break the concept down into the three big ideas explained in *Learning by Doing* (2006) - a focus on learning, a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results... For example, the following research highlights the importance of a collaborative culture:

“The single most important factor for successful school restructuring and the first order of business for those interested in increasing the capacity of their schools is building a collaborative internal environment that fosters cooperative problem-solving.” (Eastwood & Seashore Louis, 1992, p. 215)

“The key to ensuring that every child has a quality teacher is finding a way for school systems to organize the work of qualified teachers so they can collaborate with their colleagues in developing strong learning communities that will sustain them as they become accomplished teachers.” (National Commission of Teaching and America’s Future, 2003, p.7)

“High performing schools promote collaborative cultures, support professional communities and exchanges among all staff, and cultivate strong ties among the school, parents, and community... Staff collaborates to remove barriers to student learning... Teachers communicate regularly with each other about effective teaching and learning strategies.” (National Education Association, 2006)

“Isolation is the enemy of learning. Principals who support the learning of adults in their school organize teachers’ schedules to provide opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and think together. For instance, teams of teachers who share responsibility for the learning of all students meet regularly to plan lessons, critique student work, adjust instruction, and solve common problems.” (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001, p. 45)