PLC Ideas

Professional Learning Communities in Action

What Do People In PLC’s Do?

(From Lois Easton; Collaborative Professional Learning in School and Beyond: A Tool Kit for NJ Educators. From SERVE, Atlanta.)

- Educators talk to each other about how they teach and the results they get.
- Learn from each other by watching each other work.
- Design lessons, assessments, or units together.
- Critique lessons, assessments, or units with each other.
- Share articles and other professional resources and read and discuss books.
- Visit each other’s classrooms to examine instructional approaches.
- Work together to examine student work samples and assessments in order to better understand student strengths and weaknesses and improve instruction and other aspects of learning.
- Provide moral support and encouragement to each other in trying new ideas.

Math

- Techniques to assess children’s progress on skills, concepts, and thinking processes.
- Research and evaluate a variety of assessment tools and techniques; interviews, written work, conferences.
- Valuable techniques to gain insight into children’s thinking and strategies, as well as the development of their skills.
- Develop rubrics, or frameworks, to assist in categorizing progress in different areas of children’s learning.
- Develop various strategies for ongoing assessment (kid watching) such as flip card collections, computer labels, observational class checklists, etc. then evaluate the ease and efficiency of methods.
- Evaluate assessment techniques to discover if current methodologies balance written work with observational, individual and group work, and short answers with longer explanations.
- Evaluate the positive effects of using portfolios as evidence of progress. How could portfolios be used as evidence of progress for children, their families, and next year’s teachers?
- Methods to develop fact power
- Research practical and proven ways to help implement the NCTM standards
- How to make student writing integral to math instruction
- Teaching with manipulative materials
- Benefits of cooperative learning
- Questioning techniques to empower learning and promote higher order thinking

Three Qualities of Powerful Professional Learning

1. Powerful professional learning honors the professionalism, expertise, experiences, and skills of staff.
2. Powerful professional learning establishes a culture of quality—it encourages discussion about what quality looks like, both in terms of the work educators do and their students do.
3. Powerful professional learning slows the pace of schooling, providing time for the inquiry and reflection that promote learning and application.
Examination of Running Records:
Looking at student reading levels and, as a group, zooming in on the Meaning, Structure and Visual miscues that students appear to be making. A closer analysis of these specific miscues might lead to a conversation about instructional strategies that might address the students' needs.

Examining Student Writing Using the New 6+1 Rubric: This was handed out during K-4 articulation on September 1st. This could be done right away at the beginning of the year by asking the students to respond to an open-ended prompt such as: Write a story about something you did or something that happened to you this summer.

6+1 Traits: Groups could choose one trait to focus on during a Writing Workshop unit of study. Rather than using the full-blown 6+1 traits rubric, teachers might decide to use the portion of the rubric that applies to that specific trait. Conversations could center on what mini lessons might be taught to improve students' writing related to that specific trait.

Examining a Guided Reading Group: For example, a 1st grade group might decide to take a look at the needs of higher level readers in the classroom. They might decide to try a “flexible grouping” experiment to determine whether that would better meet the students' needs.

The Daily Five: A concern among many teachers related to Literacy is: how do I keep all of my students engaged in meaningful literacy activities while I meet with small groups? Some teachers have been using the Daily Five structure. It might be interesting for a group to study the positive impact as well as the concerns related to the Daily Five structure.

The Being a Writer Program: A group might ask students to complete a writing task related to a unit of study at the beginning of a unit. The group could look at these writing pieces together to determine instructional needs. Following instruction of the mini lessons within the unit, the group could ask students to complete the same (or a similar) writing task. As a PLC group, you could determine whether the mini lessons within the program seem to be having a positive effect on the students’ writing.

Checking for Comprehension: A question that may come up is: How do you check for comprehension and understanding with higher level readers? Groups can research various methods and/or try techniques used in the past with success. Teachers can see what the pros are and cons as well as what produces the best results.

Differentiation of Instruction Book Study: Meeting the needs of students is often challenging. Your group may decide to join in a book discussion about differentiation of instruction, try new strategies, track and report on their progress. This may be applied to various subject areas.

Three Qualities of Powerful Professional Learning
1. Powerful professional learning arises from the returns benefits to the real world of teaching and learning.
2. Powerful professional learning requires the collection, analysis and presentation of real data.
3. Powerful professional learning results in application in the classroom.