

Purpose of... PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The professional learning community (PLC) is based on a single, simple premise: To be effective, educators must change their focus from teaching to learning. In a PLC, educators have three goals:

Ensuring that all students learn.

Every classroom includes students of varying abilities. In a PLC, teachers are prepared to serve both the students who learn material quickly and those who need additional time and support. This means developing a coordinated strategy to provide timely intervention when students are struggling.

Creating a culture of collaboration.

In many schools, teachers work in isolation. While staff may come together to formulate basic operational policies (like how to respond to tardiness or supervise recess), they do not engage in professional dialogue about what works in their classrooms. In a PLC school, educators share best practices, join forces to solve problems, and work together to improve both their individual performances and the school's performance as a whole.

Focusing on results.

To ensure that a PLC meets its educational goals, educators must identify students' current levels of achievement, establish clear educational objectives, work together to meet those goals, and provide evidence that they have succeeded.



Find out more about...

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Alberta Education, Alberta's
Commission on Learning:

<http://education.alberta.ca/departement/ipr/archive/commission/report/reality/school/devlcomm.aspx>

Alberta Education (PDF) Google:
"Professional Learning for Teachers
in Alberta's K-12 Education System"

Council on Alberta Teaching Standards
<http://www.teachingquality.ab.ca/WhatsNew/>

Alberta Teachers' Association
<http://tiny.cc/l6sby>

College of Alberta School
Superintendents (PDF)
Google: "Compilation of CASS research
papers"

All Things PLC, Rick DuFour
<http://www.allthingsplc.info/>

Google Search Phrases:
"Professional Learning Communities"
"Rick DuFour"
"Teacher Collaboration"
"Assessment for Learning"
"Mike Schmoker"



LAKELAND CATHOLIC SCHOOLS
BETTER EDUCATION... *It's as simple as that!*

Notre Dame Elementary

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES



PARENT'S GUIDE



4711 - 48 Street
Bonnyville, Alberta T9N 2E6
780-826-3485

OKAY - What's this all about?

A "Professional Learning Community" is a concept that was developed by Richard DuFour, a former high school principal. In his high school, staff members focused on a shared mission, teamwork, continuous improvement and results orientation. This was an environment where staff worked together to analyze student progress towards knowing and understanding program of study outcomes. By taking the time to analyze student performance, teachers were better able to meet the needs of students in their effort to learn their grade level outcomes.

In 2003, Alberta's Commission on Learning released a report with recommendations for improving student learning in Alberta. Recommendation #13 states:

"Require every school to operate as a professional learning community dedicated to continuous improvement in students' achievement."

Lakeland Catholic School District did extensive research in this area and then proceeded to implement this government recommendation. A team of leaders went to Rick DuFour's High School and received professional development on the why's, who's, how's, when's and where's of creating PLC's. It was clear PLC's were not a passing fad so Professional Learning Communities were formed in all Lakeland Catholic schools, Rick DuFour was invited to the District to speak to all teachers and our journey to school improvement began. Alberta Education sets the direction for education and Lakeland Catholic ensures, through intentional practice, that these recommendations are fully implemented to serve students and our community.

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Won't the loss of instructional time be an issue?

R. Grade 1 - 4 students in Alberta are required to receive 950 hours of instruction a year. Students at NDE receive 967 hours of instruction.

Q. Don't teachers already have planning time?

R. Yes, they have planning time for things like phone calls to parents, preparing lesson materials, scheduling field trips, meeting with students, writing newsletters . . . PLC's allow teachers critical time to truly focus on addressing individual student learning needs, to share best practices, and develop strategies to improve the learning of all students.

Q. What about child care on early dismissal days?

R. We have a partnership with the Child Care Centre to provide for students on early dismissal days. We know how important quality education and continued improvement is to the parents at Notre Dame Elementary. This is an effort to improve the overall quality of your child's education.

Q. Do PLC's replace Professional Development?

R. Staff at NDE engages in both PLC's and Professional Development. PD is typically content focused where the teacher engages in the session as a LEARNER whereas a Professional Learning Community provides an opportunity for teachers to engage in critical conversations about student Learning. Teachers "use" the information learned through PD to inform their instructional practices and ensure all students learn the essential outcomes they need to know to be successful in their learning. The teacher also brings ideas and strategies learned through PD, to their PLC where they discuss and plan implementation of these "best practices" in their classrooms. It is this "critical collaborative time" that helps teachers continuously improve their instruction and ultimately student learning. Both are important learning opportunities but the PLC is where the critical work of refining instructional practice to improve student learning is accomplished.

Think of PLC's like a trip to the doctor!



In the medical field when you have a pain or illness you visit the doctor. The doctor would conduct a series of tests, analyze the results, and prescribe a treatment.

This same series of events is applicable in a learning environment. All students have different learning styles, stages of readiness for learning, and learning experiences outside of school. To identify and "treat" any deficiencies, PLC's operate similar to a doctor:

- **What do we want each student to learn?**
What are the most important outcomes in the Alberta Program of Studies that students need to know?
- **How will we know when each student has learned it?**
Through ongoing assessment of their learning.
- **How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?**
We look at the reasons why a student is struggling in their learning and "prescribe treatment". We provide students with new and different learning opportunities until the outcome is achieved.
- **How will we respond when a student has already learned essential knowledge and skills?**
We build on that knowledge and those skills, moving them closer to becoming 21st century learners, critical thinkers, and problems solvers.