

Policy Code: 3432 Professional Learning Communities

A strong relationship exists between professional learning, coaching, and collaboration of employees, and the quality of instruction provided to students. As such, it is vital to designate instructional staff time for collaboration and planning around learning and teaching in Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

Participation in PLCs is aligned with North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards, North Carolina Standards for School Executives, and other professional standards for instructional staff. As such, the principal, with input from instructional staff, shall direct the implementation of PLCs at schools. It is the expectation and duty of instructional staff to participate in PLCs.

A. Definition of Professional Learning Communities

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are collaborative teams that engage in ongoing processes of collective inquiry geared towards exploring and examining practices to improve student learning outcomes for all students.

PLCs may be organized in vertical, same subject, or cross-disciplinary teams. They regularly convene to strengthen their practice and increase student achievement using PLC frameworks integrated with a multi-tiered system of instructional support (MTSS). PLC members work collectively to achieve the shared goals outlined in the school improvement plan and the district strategic plan. PLCs are driven by: structural conditions, supportive relational conditions, shared values and vision, intentional collective learning, supportive peers, and shared and supportive leadership (Hord, 2004).

Throughout the collective inquiry cycle, staff discussion may include:

- Identifying a common problem of practice based upon data-driven assessment of needs;
- Exploring and implementing evidence-based methods and materials to improve outcomes related to that common problem of practice;
- Monitoring and considering a variety of data to determine if what was implemented worked; and
- Reflecting upon multiple data points to determine what additional steps might be needed to fill emerging learning gaps.

B. Functions of Professional Learning Communities

PLCs play a critical role in impacting learning outcomes for all students by accomplishing the following:

- 1) **Engaging Instructional Staff in Continuous Improvement**
PLCs apply a cycle of continuous improvement—rooted in the MTSS process—to engage in inquiry, action, research, data analysis, planning, implementation, reflection, and evaluation to improve instructional practices.
- 2) **Developing Collective Responsibility**
PLCs share collective responsibility for the learning of all students. Within PLCs, peer accountability ensures a strong commitment to improving student outcomes as well as overall collective efficacy. PLCs build collective efficacy and strengthen interdependence through shared responsibility for student learning and professional growth. Each student benefits from the strengths and expertise of every educator when teams learn together.

3) **Creating Alignment**

Professional learning that occurs within PLCs provides continuous improvement that aligns with and ensures implementation of school and district initiatives. Furthermore, PLCs work to monitor these goals regularly.

C. Expectations of Professional Learning Communities

Instructional staff are expected to participate in Professional Learning Communities that:

- 1) Examine curriculum and content standards to:
 - a) Develop strong content and curriculum knowledge;
 - b) Unpack content standards and understands their progression; and
 - c) Select supplemental curriculum materials to promote student learning across developmental levels as aligned with Policy 3200 [Selection of Instructional Materials](#).
- 2) Design instruction to:
 - a) Consistently implement research based practices to provide strong academic and behavioral support for all students;
 - b) Demonstrate knowledge of students and their varying needs; and
 - c) Implement supports that would be most beneficial to meet the needs of each student (scaffolds, interventions, enrichment).
- 3) Utilize and review common evaluative tools that measure student understanding and/or application of content knowledge. An analysis of the data gathered through these tools should be used to:
 - a) Determine patterns and trends;
 - b) Identify which students need scaffolding, intervention, and/or enrichment; and
 - c) Modify instruction.
- 4) Discuss and consistently implement common grading procedures as outlined in Policy 3400 [Evaluation of Student Progress](#) and 3400 [R&P](#).

Principals, with assistance from school-based leadership teams, Area Superintendents and Office of Schools staff, in addition to central service instructional staff, will support PLCs through:

- 1) Communicating expectations for PLCs;
- 2) Organizing structures for PLC effectiveness;
- 3) Creating a schedule that accommodates weekly, designated, protected time for a minimum of one hour to support Professional Learning Communities; and
- 4) Providing ongoing feedback to PLCs and instructional staff.

Additional administrative guidance for both instructional staff and school-based leadership teams can be found in the [PLC Guidance document](#), which may be updated periodically.