

The What of a PLC: Foundational Principles

The PLC process provides a guiding framework where student learning data are used by collaborative teacher teams to focus their work and implement best practices that ensure that every student learns. DuFour and DuFour (2011) define a PLC as “an on-going process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.”

Three Big Ideas of a PLC

The PLC process rests on three big ideas, and each of those ideas has significant implications for educators. Importantly, PLC practices are interconnected, and they only have power as a whole.

Big Idea #1: A Focus on Learning

The first big idea is that the fundamental purpose of schools is to ensure that all students learn at high levels. In order to bring this idea to life, educators work together to clarify the following **four critical questions** in order to ensure that all students learn at high levels:

- What do we want students to learn?
- How will we know if our students are learning?
- How will we respond when students do not learn?
- How will we enrich and extend the learning for students who are proficient?

Big Idea #2: A Focus on Collaborative Teamwork

Helping all students learn will require us to work in a collective effort to meet the needs of each student. In order to bring this idea to life:

- Educators are organized into meaningful collaborative teams in which members work interdependently to achieve common goals for which they are mutually accountable.
- Educators are clear on the purpose and priorities of their collaboration.

Big Idea #3: A Focus on Results

Educators must create a results orientation in order to know if students are learning. They must have and use evidence of student learning to drive continuous improvement of the PLC process. In order to bring this idea to life:

- Educators work collaboratively to achieve SMART goals.
- Educators collaboratively gather and analyze evidence of student learning on a regular basis to (1) inform and improve individual professional practice as well as the collective practice of the collaborative team, and (2) use assessment results to respond to students by name and by need.