



Megan Conklin is a secondary literacy coach in the North Thurston (Wash.) Public Schools district. She is also a National Board Certified Teacher in adolescence and young adulthood English language arts. You can contact her at mconklin1@nthurston.k12.wa.us.

We created our community

Q How do you advance your own professional learning as a coach?

Our district focus this year is professional learning communities. It only made sense for those of us who are coaching teachers to say, “We need to be part of that, too. We need to be supporting each other and learning together while we learn to do this new work.”

We started like you would any professional learning community. We established norms and we talked about confidentiality. We shared triumphs — things that worked well — and issues with which we struggle. Additionally, we all are attending our own individual professional development opportunities. We bring all that information back to the table and see what pieces we want to integrate into our own models.

Because this is my first year, I think I’m a little heavy on personal professional development. I’ve gone to many coaching seminars and conferences. I know I’m erring on the side of my

own professional growth just because I have so much to learn right now about this role and about my content — secondary reading.

Our literacy cadre is where I first saw the power of professional learning communities come to life. The group began meeting four years ago before we knew the words “critical friends group” or “professional learning community.” It began with all the high school reading teachers coming together. We talked about what we were doing, aligned our curriculum, and did troubleshooting. This literacy cadre has been the single most powerful factor affecting student learning in our district — especially for struggling readers.

It’s that time to discuss as professionals what’s working and what’s not — to have people around to help us solve the problems and celebrate the successes — that makes a difference. These are opportunities to meet and ask pivotal questions. Because the district either pays us or provides released time, we feel that our time is being honored. This time together renews us. ♦

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