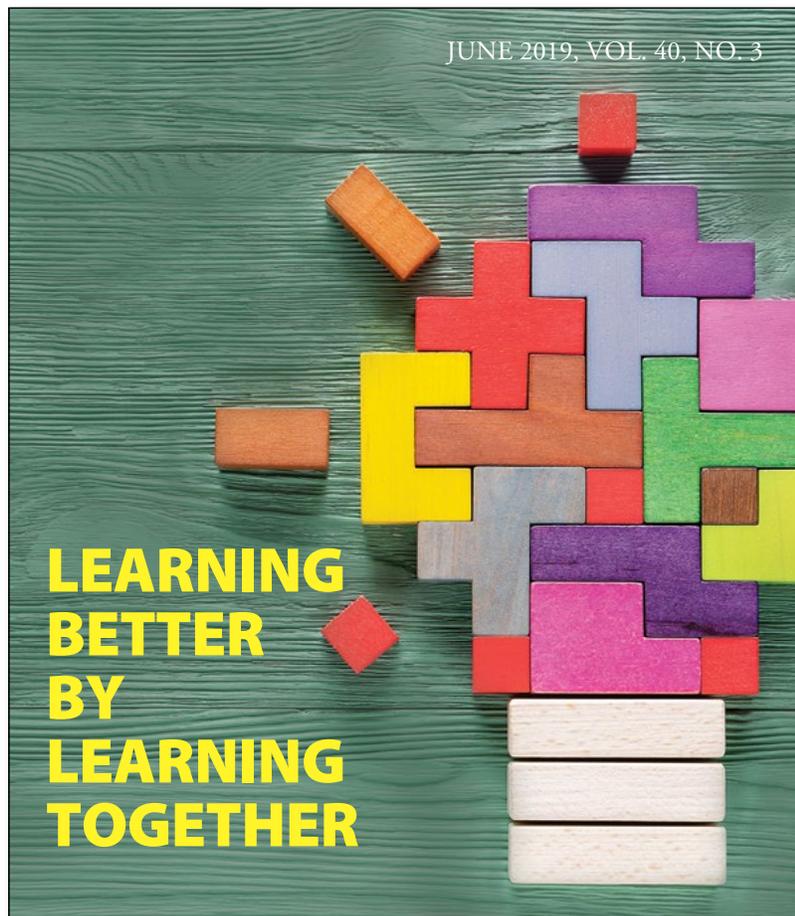


THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

SUPPLEMENTAL GUIDE FOR DISTRICT TEAMS



Thank you for being a district member with Learning Forward. To help you spread the learning and engagement with your colleagues, we have designed this supplemental guide exclusively for district members.

This guide will help you take your teams through a deep dive into the latest issue of *The Learning Professional*. By reading the issue and using this guide, both focused on collaboration, teams will:

- Affirm the value of collaboration for professional learning.

- Reflect on who their collaboration partners are and how they can expand the circle.
- Identify and overcome collaboration challenges.
- Strategize about how to keep the focus of team meetings on instruction.

We invite you to share this guide with building leaders and members of your learning teams. Be sure to give us feedback about whether you found this useful, and if you post on social media, tag us [#LearnFwdTLP](https://twitter.com/LearnFwdTLP) [@LearningForward](https://twitter.com/LearningForward) so we can share your good work!

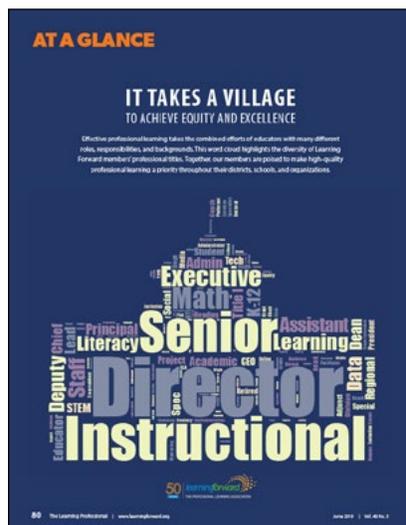
GET STARTED

Get everyone on board

The infographic in “[At a Glance](#)” illustrates that “it takes a village” to create and sustain professional learning that improves student learning. Educators and leaders at many levels and in many roles must be involved to make professional learning successful, although their contributions will vary.

ACTIONS

1. As a team, examine the infographic and spend five minutes sharing what you notice about the types of roles represented.
2. Ask each member of your team or group to make a list of the people (titles/roles, not specific names) who are involved in the professional learning work they do.
3. Ask each member to draw two concentric circles. In the inner circle, write the titles/roles of people they interact with directly in their professional learning work. In the outer circle, write the titles/roles of people who are involved indirectly (e.g. in setting policy). Outside the circles, write the titles/ roles of people who are not currently engaged but could influence professional learning work.
4. As a group, discuss what you noticed about who is outside the circles and why. Discuss what you can do to engage those outside the circles to improve your professional learning efforts. These might be specific outreach strategies, goals to align with a district strategic plan, or other steps.



NEXT STEPS

TOOLS *Workshop materials for your conference*

OVERCOME 5 PLC CHALLENGES

BY THOMAS H. LEVINE

PLCs can get stuck. Research suggests that professional learning communities (PLCs) are not always as effective as they are intended to be (Cochran-Smith, 2007). Teachers leading the charge, however, can overcome these challenges and achieve the goals of PLCs as a result of five common challenges: coherence, insularity, unequal participation, congeniality, and privatization.

CHALLENGE 1: PROMOTE COHERENCE AND FOLLOW-THROUGH

Professional learning communities are often to be expected to improve practice. However, teachers have expressed one of the most common challenges to PLCs: they are not always as effective as they are intended to be (Cochran-Smith, 2007). Teachers leading the charge, however, can overcome these challenges and achieve the goals of PLCs as a result of five common challenges: coherence, insularity, unequal participation, congeniality, and privatization.

CHALLENGE 2: OVERCOME INSULARITY TO ENSURE NEW INPUT

Continually meeting with the same group of colleagues can create a group of colleagues who are not open to new ideas or ways of thinking. This is often the case in PLCs. For example, in one PLC, the members of the group had developed a set of protocols for PLCs that were not open to new ideas or ways of thinking. This is often the case in PLCs. For example, in one PLC, the members of the group had developed a set of protocols for PLCs that were not open to new ideas or ways of thinking.

CHALLENGE 3: ENSURE EQUAL PARTICIPATION AND MAXIMAL LEARNING

In our classrooms, many teachers want to equate and maximize student participation. However, teachers often find that some students are more active than others. This is often the case in PLCs. For example, in one PLC, the members of the group had developed a set of protocols for PLCs that were not open to new ideas or ways of thinking.

CHALLENGE 4: MOVE PAST CONGENIALITY

PLCs are often characterized by a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose. However, this can sometimes lead to a lack of critical discussion and a focus on maintaining the status quo. This is often the case in PLCs. For example, in one PLC, the members of the group had developed a set of protocols for PLCs that were not open to new ideas or ways of thinking.

CHALLENGE 5: PRIVATE PRACTICE

Many teachers have gotten used to working in private. However, PLCs are often characterized by a sense of camaraderie and shared purpose. This is often the case in PLCs. For example, in one PLC, the members of the group had developed a set of protocols for PLCs that were not open to new ideas or ways of thinking.

REFERENCES

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Overcome collaboration challenges

Thomas H. Levine created this issue's tool to help teams overcome five common challenges to effective collaboration in PLCs: promote coherence and follow-through; overcome insularity to ensure new input; ensure equal participation and maximal learning; move past congeniality; and deprivatize practice.

ACTIONS

1. Ask participants to read the article [“Overcome 5 PLC Challenges.”](#)
2. As a group, choose one of the challenges as a focus for this discussion. (You may repeat this process later with another challenge.)
3. Divide participants into pairs or small groups and ask them to read through the section of the tool related to the identified challenge. Have each pair/group discuss the first three questions in the tool and record notes, using specific examples or evidence to back up their assessments of the current status of PLCs.
4. Ask pairs/groups to discuss the final question about next steps or strategies to try and record their ideas.
5. As a full group, share ideas for next steps or strategies. By consensus or vote, choose two to three ideas to try and make a plan to try them before the next time the group convenes.

Keep team meetings focused on instruction

Student achievement data are a driving factor in many schools' decisions about instruction. But how well are these data being used? In this issue's **Research Review**, Elizabeth Foster shares findings from a study about how teacher teams interpret and use student achievement data. The teachers attributed student results to instruction only 15% of the time. They were far more likely to attribute results to students' behavioral characteristics, emotional issues, or home lives and to a perceived mismatch between the students and the test (often related to English fluency).

ACTIONS

1. Ask participants to read the article and discuss:
 - a. What surprised you about the study's findings?
 - b. What rang true or resonated with you about the findings?
 - c. What percentage of student results do you estimate actually are attributable to instruction among your students (or those of the teachers you supervise/support)?
2. Point out that there are, indeed, factors outside of teachers' control that influence achievement. Also acknowledge that even well-intentioned teachers and administrators can miss opportunities to recognize connections between instruction and achievement. Then lead the group in brainstorming ways that you can keep the focus of data meetings on instruction and factors inside of teachers' control.
 - a. Begin by posting large flip-chart paper on the wall, and as a group, make a list of the things that can derail the conversation. It might include things like teacher fears about evaluation or sanctions, concerns about student trauma or social and emotional challenges, or implicit bias.
 - b. Hand out sticky notes and ask teachers to write strategies for overcoming the challenges they identified in the previous step. For example, linking discussions about social and emotional strategies to supporting achievement, or putting a team member in charge of steering data meeting discussions away from becoming complaint sessions.
 - c. Ask participants to place their sticky notes on the challenges.
 - d. Beginning with the challenge that has the most sticky notes, discuss the ideas and evaluate as a group which strategies to try at your next PLC meeting.



WAS THIS GUIDE HELPFUL?



YES

CLICK a thumb to share your feedback.



NO

TELL US MORE

- Share your feedback with suzanne.bouffard@learningforward.org so we can best meet your needs.
- **Tweet** or **post pictures** of your team, and we'll share your good work.

