

TRANSFORM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

July 2014

3 keys to keep learning communities focused on the learning

Professional learning communities have proliferated dramatically over the past several years, becoming almost commonplace as a strategy for addressing student learning problems. Much to the disappointment of many educators, though, the presence of learning communities does not always bring significant changes in student learning. In order to keep the focus on effective professional learning, learning communities must have three critical elements: Continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and alignment and accountability.

Continuous improvement

Embedding a system of continuous improvement into a learning community ensures that learning remains the primary purpose and focus of the activities. The cycle of continuous improvement is a map to guide learning communities through an effective learning process.

Collective responsibility

School and system leaders can build a culture of collective responsibility by sharing leadership and supporting the staff's growth. When leaders build the capacity for effective collaboration and leadership within the staff, educators are empowered to take responsibility for their own learning and the learning of others.

Alignment and accountability

The work of effective learning communities aligns with school and system learning goals. Professional development that doesn't align to school and system goals results in learning that is unconnected to a school's highest priorities, syphoning off limited resources and lowering the possibility that professional learning will have a meaningful impact. Effective learning, on the other hand, moves the entire school closer to shared goals.

Practitioner perspectives



TEACHER LEADER

Heather Vasquez, program coach for Richard E. Miller Elementary School in Phoenix, Arizona, knows that positive

cultures come not from wishful thinking but from a fundamental belief that everyone can learn and contribute.



PRINCIPAL

Dexter Fullo, principal for Benavente Middle School in Deddo, Guam, established a shared vision that the adults must learn if

the students are to learn, and then he empowered his teachers to do their own learning and facilitation.



SYSTEM LEADER

Dave Swierpel, director of professional learning for Carman-Ainsworth Schools in Flint, Michigan, shares how he keeps the focus on

learning through careful planning and ongoing support.

FOR FURTHER READING AND RELATED TOOLS...

This document is a summary of Learning Forward's bimonthly action brief, *Transform Professional Learning*.

Learning Forward members get the full text of each issue, with suggested actions to take, concerns, related articles, and tools for implementation at www.learningforward.org/transform.

Learning Forward is the only association devoted exclusively to advancing professional learning for student success.

Join today for full access to all member resources.



Learning Forward's digital publications are supported in part by MetLife Foundation.

A cycle of continuous improvement	
PURPOSE To help school and district learning leaders develop the shared focus of your learning communities, use this tool to help define and plan a cycle of continuous improvement.	
TIME 1 hour	
MATERIALS • Copy of the Cycle of Continuous Improvement (Chart for each session) • Copy of the Continuous Improvement Chart for each session	
STEPS	TIME
1. Review the background text to the individual pieces of the system to read and prepare for this strategy.	5 minutes
2. Share the Cycle of Continuous Improvement and the implementation. Discuss each step and how it will be implemented in your district or school. Discuss how the components relate to the standards.	30 minutes
3. Ask team members to suggest shifts in the cycle that will encourage high levels of learning. Ask them to give feedback on the cycle to use in a subsequent session.	30 minutes

FEATURED TOOL:

A cycle of continuous improvement

Use this tool, adapted from Learning Forward's newest publication, *Becoming a Learning System*, to help define and plan a cycle of continuous improvement so that effective learning remains the primary focus of your learning communities. Available for members at www.learningforward.org/transform.