

HGIOS 4 – 1.3 Leadership of Change

This indicator focuses on collaborative leadership at all levels to develop a shared vision for change and improvement.

Themes

- Developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community
- Strategic planning for continuous improvement
- Implementing improvement and change

Developing a shared vision, values and aims relevant to the school and its community

Senior leaders provide strong leadership which has enabled our school and wider community to develop, promote and sustain an aspirational vision which underpins our continuous improvement. Our vision evolves through ongoing reflection and debate across the school and community. As a result of this active collaboration, the school and community have ownership of the vision, values and aims. Through effective leadership at all levels, our school community works together to turn the shared vision into a sustainable reality.

Strategic planning for continuous improvement

Senior leaders create conditions where staff feel confident to initiate well-informed change and are committed to collective responsibility in the process of change. We ensure proposed changes demonstrate the interconnectedness of the school and community in improving learning and outcomes for children and young people. We protect time for professional dialogue, collegiate learning and self-evaluation, so that all members of our school community can contribute to our plans for continuous improvement.

Implementing improvement and change

Senior leaders in our school community promote and support innovation, creativity and practitioner enquiry which lead to positive change. We continually reflect on and develop our practice taking account of our self-evaluation and vision for continuous improvement. Staff, learners and partners engage regularly in critical and creative thinking. Practitioner enquiry and creative approaches are integral to the thinking and practice of staff, pupils and partners.

Features of highly-effective practice:

- Opportunities for learners and staff to regularly engage in critical and creative thinking are embedded.
- Practitioner enquiry forms a regular feature of approaches to continuous improvement.
- Practitioners have systematic opportunities to review and refresh their pedagogical practice.

1.2 LEADERSHIP OF LEARNING

Themes:

- Professional engagement and collegiate working
- Impact of career-long professional learning
- Children and young people leading learning

This indicator relates to leadership of improvements in learning and teaching. It highlights the importance of professional commitment to improving pedagogy through a range of approaches to career-long professional learning including collegiate working. It focuses on leadership which improves outcomes for learners through enabling them to lead their own learning.

Level 5 illustration:

Professional engagement and collegiate working

Across our school, an ethos of professional engagement and collegiate working is evident. This leads to continuous improvement in learning and teaching and improved outcomes for our learners. There is evidence of strong leadership of learning by staff at all levels and in a range of contexts. Our school has a collegiate learning culture demonstrated through, for example, collaborative practitioner enquiry, peer learning, constructive feedback, professional dialogue and debate.

Impact of career-long professional learning

All staff routinely engage in career-long professional learning (CLPL) The model of professional learning is understood and used by all staff. Individually and collectively, we plan and evaluate our professional learning directly on the quality of impact on learning and can evidence improvements for learners. We develop and use knowledge from literature, research and policy sources to support the process of leading and developing learning. We critically reflect on individual and collective professional learning. We work collaboratively to enhance teaching which leads to high-quality learning experiences for our learners.

Features of highly-effective practice:

- Senior leaders create the conditions for effective leadership at all levels and as a result all staff undertake leadership roles which focus on leading learning.
- All staff participate in individual and collective professional learning which improves outcomes for learners.
- Staff engage regularly in professional dialogue to develop collective understanding. For example, shared understanding of standards, pedagogy, assessment and strategies for raising attainment.
- The school has a range of effective systems and structures to facilitate regular collegiate working to maximise opportunities for staff learning within and beyond the school.
- Senior leaders facilitate a range of approaches to professional learning to enable staff to learn with and from each other. Where appropriate, this includes learning with colleagues across sectors and with partner agencies.
- There is a very strong focus on improving learning among staff across the school.

What Is a Professional Learning Community? Richard DuFour

What are the “big ideas” that represent the core principles of professional learning communities? How do these principles guide schools' efforts to sustain the professional learning community model until it becomes deeply embedded in the culture of the school?

Big Idea #1: Ensuring That Students Learn

The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift—from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning—has profound implications for schools. School mission statements that promise “learning for all” have become a cliché. But when a school staff takes that statement literally—when teachers view it as a pledge to ensure the success of each student rather than as politically correct hyperbole—profound changes begin to take place. The school staff finds itself asking, what school characteristics and practices have been most successful in helping all students achieve at high levels? How could we adopt those characteristics and practices in our own school? What commitments would we have to make to one another to create such a school? What indicators could we monitor to assess our progress? When the staff has built shared knowledge and found common ground on these questions, the school has a solid foundation for moving forward with its improvement initiative. As the school moves forward, every professional in the building must engage with colleagues in the ongoing exploration of three crucial questions that drive the work of those within a professional learning community:

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

Here is a scenario that plays out daily in traditional schools. A teacher teaches a unit to the best of his or her ability, but at the conclusion of the unit some students have not mastered the essential outcomes. On the one hand, the teacher would like to take the time to help those students. On the other hand, the teacher feels compelled to move forward to “cover” the course content. If the teacher uses instructional time to assist students who have not learned, the progress of students who have mastered the content will suffer; if the teacher pushes on with new concepts, the struggling students will fall farther behind.

What typically happens in this situation? Almost invariably, the school leaves the solution to the discretion of individual teachers, who vary widely in the ways they respond. Some teachers conclude that the struggling students should transfer to a less rigorous course or should be considered for special education. Some lower their expectations by adopting less challenging standards for subgroups of students within their classrooms. Some look for ways to assist the students before and after school. Some allow struggling students to fail.

When a school begins to function as a professional learning community, however, teachers become aware of the incongruity between their commitment to ensure learning for all students and their lack of a coordinated strategy to respond when some students do not learn. The staff addresses this discrepancy by designing strategies to ensure that struggling students receive additional time and support, no matter who their teacher is. In addition to being systematic and school wide, the professional learning community's response to students who experience difficulty is

- *Timely.* The school quickly identifies students who need additional time and support.
- *Based on intervention rather than remediation.* The plan provides students with help as soon as they experience difficulty rather than relying on summer school, retention, and remedial courses.
- *Directive.* Instead of *inviting* students to seek additional help, the systematic plan *requires* students to devote extra time and receive additional assistance until they have mastered the necessary concepts.

Schools that are truly committed to the concept of learning for each student will stop subjecting struggling students to a haphazard education lottery. These schools will guarantee that each student receives whatever additional support he or she needs.

Big Idea #2: A Culture of Collaboration

Educators who are building a professional learning community recognise that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture.

Despite compelling evidence indicating that working collaboratively represents best practice, teachers in many schools continue to work in isolation. Even in schools that endorse the idea of collaboration, the staff's willingness to collaborate often stops at the classroom door. Some school staffs equate the term "collaboration" with congeniality and focus on building group camaraderie. Other staffs join forces to develop consensus on operational procedures, such as how they will respond to tardiness or supervise recess. Still others organise themselves into committees to oversee different facets of the school's operation, such as discipline, technology, and social climate. Although each of these activities can serve a useful purpose, none represents the kind of professional dialogue that can transform a school into a professional learning community.

The powerful collaboration that characterises professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement.

Collaborating for School Improvement

Collaborative conversations should happen routinely throughout the year. Teachers should use frequent formative assessments to investigate the questions "Are students learning what they need to learn?" and "Who needs additional time and support to learn?" rather than relying solely on summative assessments that ask "Which students learned what was intended and which students did not?" Collaborative conversations call on team members to make public what has traditionally been private—goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns, and results. These discussions give every teacher someone to turn to and talk to, and they are explicitly structured to improve the classroom practice of teachers—individually and collectively.

For teachers to participate in such a powerful process, the school must ensure that everyone belongs to a team that focuses on student learning. Each team must have time to meet throughout the school year. Teams must focus their efforts on crucial questions related to learning and generate products that reflect that focus, such as lists of essential outcomes, different kinds of assessment, analyses of student achievement, and strategies for improving results. Teams must develop norms or protocols to clarify expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and relationships among team members. Teams must adopt student achievement goals linked with school and national and authority goals.

Removing Barriers to Success

For meaningful collaboration to occur, a number of things must also *stop* happening. Schools must stop pretending that merely presenting teachers with state standards or district curriculum guides will guarantee that all students have access to a common curriculum. Even school districts that devote tremendous time and energy to designing the *intended* curriculum often pay little attention to the *implemented* curriculum (what teachers actually teach) and even less to the *attained* curriculum (what students learn) (Marzano, 2003). Schools must also give teachers time to analyze and discuss state and district curriculum documents. More important, teacher conversations must quickly move beyond "What are we expected to teach?" to "How will we know when each student has learned?" In addition, faculties must stop making excuses for failing to collaborate. Few

educators publicly assert that working in isolation is the best strategy for improving schools. Instead, they give reasons why it is impossible for them to work together: “We just can’t find the time.” “Not everyone on the staff has endorsed the idea.” “We need more training in collaboration.” But the number of schools that have created truly collaborative cultures proves that such barriers are not insurmountable. As Roland Barth (1991) wrote,

Are teachers and administrators willing to accept the fact that they are part of the problem? . . . God didn’t create self-contained classrooms, 50-minute periods, and subjects taught in isolation. We did—because we find working alone safer than and preferable to working together. (pp. 126–127)

In the final analysis, building the collaborative culture of a professional learning community is a question of will. A group of staff members who are determined to work together will find a way.

Big Idea #3: A Focus on Results

Professional learning communities judge their effectiveness on the basis of results. Working together to improve student achievement becomes the routine work of everyone in the school. Every teacher team participates in an ongoing process of identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing a goal to improve the current level, working together to achieve that goal, and providing periodic evidence of progress. The focus of team goals shifts. Such goals as “We will adopt the Junior Great Books program” or “We will create three new labs for our science course” give way to “We will increase the percentage of students who meet the state standard in language arts from 83 percent to 90 percent” or “We will reduce the failure rate in our course by 50 percent.”

Schools and teachers typically suffer from the DRIP syndrome—Data Rich/Information Poor. The results-oriented professional learning community not only welcomes data but also turns data into useful and relevant information for staff. Teachers have never suffered from a lack of data. Even a teacher who works in isolation can easily establish the mean, mode, median, standard deviation, and percentage of students who demonstrated proficiency every time he or she administers a test. However, data will become a catalyst for improved teacher practice only if the teacher has a basis of comparison.

When teacher teams develop common formative assessments throughout the school year, each teacher can identify how his or her students performed on each skill compared with other students. Individual teachers can call on their team colleagues to help them reflect on areas of concern. Each teacher has access to the ideas, materials, strategies, and talents of the entire team.

Of course, this focus on continual improvement and results requires educators to change traditional practices and revise prevalent assumptions. Educators must begin to embrace data as a useful indicator of progress. They must stop disregarding or excusing unfavorable data and honestly confront the sometimes-brutal facts. They must stop using averages to analyze student performance and begin to focus on the success of each student.

Educators who focus on results must also stop limiting improvement goals to factors outside the classroom, such as student discipline and staff morale, and shift their attention to goals that focus on student learning. They must stop assessing their own effectiveness on the basis of how busy they are or how many new initiatives they have launched and begin instead to ask, “Have we made progress on the goals that are most important to us?” Educators must stop working in isolation and hoarding their ideas, materials, and strategies and begin to work together to meet the needs of all students.

Hard Work and Commitment

Even the grandest design eventually translates into hard work. The professional learning community model is a grand design—a powerful new way of working together that profoundly affects the practices of schooling. But initiating and sustaining the concept requires hard work. It requires the

school staff to focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement. When educators do the hard work necessary to implement these principles, their collective ability to help all students learn will rise. If they fail to demonstrate the discipline to initiate and sustain this work, then their school is unlikely to become more effective, even if those within it claim to be a professional learning community. The rise or fall of the professional learning community concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school—the commitment and persistence of the educators within it.

Sample Ground rules for PLC's (Professional Learning Communities)

Focus

- The aim is always to improve leadership practice and as a result student learning
- Stay on the agreed task or agenda

Using time in workshops

- Keep to time limits set for items within the workshop
- Share time fairly in discussion, making sure that everyone who wants to speak is heard and avoid monopolising discussions
- Do not take up time with non-PLC business

How we speak about Learning and Teaching

- Believe that all leaders and teachers, including you, have always done the best they could with the information and resources they had at the time (the same goes for students)
- Use descriptions to discuss student, leaders and teacher work, avoiding judgement
- Be honest about where you are 'shining' and where you having difficulties
- Value the views of all your colleagues, both new and experienced, even when you disagree with them

How we support each other

- Actively listen at all times and keep an open mind about new ideas
- Be honest and encouraging when you are making suggestions to colleagues
- Base your suggestions on actual practice
- Appreciate that different approaches work for different teachers and don't expect everyone to do the same as you

Productive attitudes

- Join in, dividing the workload, sharing tasks and offering help when required
- Develop a pragmatic, constructive attitude
- Be open to learning new things and be willing to give up old habits that might not be as effective as you would like