**What PLC Teams Do in Simple Terms**

**Focus on the five critical questions and**

**celebrate pedagogy that gets results**

Since clarity is essential in communicating a new concept, this page gives the simplified version of what PLC teams do. PLC team conversations focus on the five critical PLC questions – Quest 1-4 come from DuFour, Eaker, DuFour.

1. **What is it we want all students to learn—by grade level, by course, by unit of instruction?**

(Teachers create a list of learning essentials for each course/grade level and share ideas on pedagogy.)

1. **How will we know when each student has acquired the intended knowledge and skills?**

(Teachers create a common assessment covering the agreed-upon essentials and set a goal for assessment achievement.)

1. **How will we systematically respond when students experience initial difficulty in learning?** (Teachers receive an item analysis of the common assessment results organized by the subtests on each essential item. They then apply strategies the team has created to get every student to each subtest’s assessment goal.)
2. **How will we deepen the learning for students who have already mastered essential knowledge and skills?** (Teachers create strategies to keep the successful students engaged in meaningful learning). (2005, p. 15.)
3. What instructional practices are working best for our students?

In order to get teachers to the point where they can discuss the pedagogy that makes a difference, there must be recognition that some teaching practices are better than others. This is determined by results with each particular group. To highlight these practices, the teachers who are achieving the outstanding results need to be celebrated.

**Two Basic Steps for PLC Teams**

Schmoker breaks PLC teamwork into these two simple steps that encompass the four critical questions and move teacher conversations beyond feel-good goobledy-gook and give it an empirical and precise edge:

* Clear, frequent talk about the concrete details of instruction—what to include and how to execute a lesson plan—based upon the results of common assessments. In other words, teachers examine what techniques netted the best results in the learning of the essentials on the common assessment.
* Recognition and celebration of superior practices and their subsequent results (in DuFour, Eaker, DuFour, 2005, p. 143).

**Judith Warren Little on PLC Team Focus**

***Unless the goals of collaboration were explicitly focused on achievement* [underline added]*, the dynamics of team meetings would prevent any meaningful critique of current practice that would lead to improvement; typical teamwork tended to “confirm present practice without evaluating its worth.” In such settings, teachers felt comfortable merely “sharing” their work”* (1990, p. 517).**

**PLC Guiding Questions: DuFour & Eaker’s 4 + 1 More**

**PLC teams focus their work on answering these five critical questions.**

1. **What is it we want all students to learn—by grade level, by course, and by unit of instruction?**

Teacher teams:

* Create a list of 8-10 semester learning essentials for each course or grade-level subject and share pedagogy.
* Consult the following when defining the essentials:
* State curriculum standards
* District curriculum guides
* Recommendations from appropriate professional organizations
* Data showing strengths and weaknesses of students as recorded on state and local assessments
* Critique all aspects of the current curriculum for what stays and what goes. Thoroughly uncovering the essentials is considered more important than covering all non-essentials.
* Teachers collaborate so every student within the team learns essentials (Eaker, 2002).
  1. **How will we know when each student has acquired the intended knowledge and skills?**

Teacher teams:

* Develop common formative & summative assessments measuring the learning of essentials.
* Formative assessments are assessments FOR learning – teachers react by prescribing changes in instruction just as doctors react when prescribing changes after a routine physical. These should be frequent because they allow teachers to adjust instruction.
* Summative assessments are assessments OF learning – teachers see final learning results just as doctors see final autopsy results (DuFour, DuFour Eaker, Karhanek, 2004, p. 24).
* Clarify the criteria (such as rubrics) used to judge students’ work.
* Set assessment goals such as: *\_\_% of the students will score \_\_% will score \_\_ % or better on the essential portion of our common assessment given on \_\_\_\_\_ (date).* Those who fall below this mark will be given extra time and support until for learning the essentials.
* Chart each student’s scores to determine if (s)he attained the goal set for each essential.

1. **How will we respond when students experience initial difficulty in learning?**

Teachers teams:

* Identify the students who did not reach the learning goal for each essential.
* Apply strategies the team has created to get every student to each essential’s assessment goal. By definition, these goals are *essential* as opposed to *nice to know* (Eaker, DuFour & Burnette, 2002, pp. 35-38).
* Provide additional time and support to students who struggle with the essentials. Interventions are immediate, systematic (not reserved for a few), timely (frequent), and directive (not a mere invitation for help) [Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, Karhanek, 2004, pp.7-8].

1. **How will we deepen the learning for students who have already mastered essential knowledge and skills?**

Teachers create strategies to keep the successful students engaged in meaningful learning. (DuFour, Eaker, DuFour, 2005, p. 15.)

**One More Question Added from Fraser**

* 1. **What methods of instruction will best lead to students achieving team learning goals?**

Teachers perform home-grown (action) research as well as apply conference and academic-based learnings.