

Closing the Achievement Gap Through Professional Learning Communities

February 26, 2013

Defining Collaboration

Merriam Webster

- To work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor

Education.com

- An interactive process that enables teachers with diverse expertise to work together as equals and engage in shared decision making toward mutually defined goals

U.S Department of State, Diplomacy in Action

- When members of an inclusive learning community work together as equals to assist students to succeed in the classroom

What does collaboration look like?

- An inclusive group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other to inquire on their practice and together learn new and better approaches to enhance student learning (Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Thomas, Wallace, Greenwood et al., 2005).
- A group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive learning-oriented and growth-promoting way (McREL, 2003).

What does collaboration look like? (continued)

- Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many, 2006).
- An ongoing process through which teachers and administrators work collaboratively to seek and share learning and to act on their learning, their goal being to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for students' benefit (Hord, 1997).

Why collaborate?

Students are coming to school with a greater diversity of needs and assets, requiring teachers to personalize learning at the same time that economic factors are driving class sizes higher and constraining the resources available to help teachers reach each student (American Federation of Teachers and American Institute for Research, 2011).

Why collaborate? (continued)

- A strategy to increase student achievement by creating a collaborative school culture focused on learning (Feger and Arruda, 2008)
- Recognizes and capitalizes on the collective strengths and talents of the staff (Protheroe, 2008)
- Research has shown that in schools where there are high levels of teacher collaboration and strong professional communities, student achievement is higher (Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran, 2007)

Why Collaborate? (continued)

Benefits for both students and teachers

- Collegiality is important for teachers.
- Collegiality can be expressed through experiencing challenging and stimulating work, creating school improvement plans, and leading curriculum development groups.
- The literature suggests that collegiality is directly linked to effective schools (Johnson 1986; Glatthorn and Fox 1996), where “teachers valued and participated in norms of collegiality and continuous improvement (experimentation)”(Little 1982, 1).

Collaboration and Student Outcomes

From the American Federation of Teachers: *Workplaces That Support High-Performing Teaching and Learning*

- Ronald Gallimore and his colleagues found that when grade-level teams of teachers, led by a trained peer facilitator, work together to assess student needs and solve real instructional problems, teachers learn more profoundly how their practice affects student learning (Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009).
- As a result of such supported collaboration, the researchers found that student achievement improves (Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009).

Collaboration and Student Outcomes

A study of 52 Midwestern urban elementary schools

After controlling for the effects of student characteristics (race, gender, SES, and prior achievement) and school context, we found that teacher collaboration for school improvement was positively related to differences among schools in both mathematics and reading achievement. These results are important given that most prior research on teacher collaboration has considered results for the teachers involved, rather than student-level outcomes. This study thus offers original evidence of a positive and statistically significant relationship between teacher collaboration and student achievement (Goddard, Goddard and Moran. 2007).

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

3 Big Ideas of a PLC (DuFour and Eaker)

1. Clarity of Purpose

- What is it we want students to learn? What should each student know and be able to do?
- How will we respond when a student has achieved this learning?
- How will we respond when a student is not learning? What systematic process is in place to provide support for students who are struggling?

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

3 Big Ideas of a PLC (DuFour and Eaker)

2. Collaborative School Culture

- No school can help all students achieve at high levels if teachers work in isolation.
- Schools improve when teachers are given the time and support to work together to clarify essential student learning and assessment.
- Schools must identify and implement new practices for raising student achievement.

Professional Learning Communities (PLC)

3 Big Ideas of a PLC (DuFour and Eaker)

3. Focus on Results

- PLCs measure their effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions.
- All programs, policies, and practices are assessed on the basis of their impact on student learning.
- All staff receives relevant information on their effectiveness in achieving intended results.