

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) Advice To Members

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are becoming more prevalent in Ontario. The term has many different interpretations and the implementation of PLCs has deviated from the original research definitions. The Professional Learning Community (PLC) is an organizational model that links the success of the school to the presence of the following factors: the importance of workplace factors (resources, climate, shared vision, good leadership), institutional support for educator learning, opportunities for educators to work collaboratively, and shared decision-making.

A PLC focuses on three things: student learning, the development of a school culture that fosters professional collaboration and results.

Although ETFO recognizes the potential of this new structure, it is becoming increasingly aware of situations where the PLC is not collaborative, where shared decision-making is not the norm, where the PLC is under-resourced and the focus is only on improving student results on EQAO tests.

ETFO has developed policy on PLCs.

It has defined a PLC as:

“A group of education professionals who share common visions, values, and goals and work collaboratively using inquiry, experimentation, and innovation to improve teaching and student learning.”

ETFO supports PLCs under the following conditions:

- participation in a PLC is voluntary;
- PLCs are based on collegiality, respect for member professionalism and autonomy;
- PLCs are a means for educators to generate knowledge regarding teaching and learning;
- PLCs are based upon an evidence-based, shared decision-making model;
- PLCs foster educator empowerment and leadership development;
- professional development opportunities during the school day on the role and function of a PLC are provided by district school boards prior to, and throughout the development of a PLC;
- funding is provided by school boards for a PLC to access professional learning opportunities and resources, and enable educators to meet and collaborate during the school day, exclusive of educator preparation time and nutrition/lunch breaks;
- educator self-directed learning is included in any professional development associated with a PLC;
- a PLC should focus on all areas of the curriculum, with emphasis on the development of the whole child; and
- no aspect of educator participation in a PLC is used for performance appraisal.

If your school is starting a PLC or you already have one in place, remember that participation is voluntary and that an effective PLC:

- respects your autonomy;
- works on a shared-decision making model;
- uses data to improve teaching and learning;
- provides professional development within the school day;
- provides for individual and collective professional development;
- provides available resources;
- defines clear responsibilities; and
- does not use participation as criteria in the performance appraisal process.

For more information, contact Professional Relations Staff at 416-962-3836 or 1-888-838-3836 at the provincial office.

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