

APPENDIX IV-19

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PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES GUIDE



TUCSON UNIFIED
SCHOOL DISTRICT

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INTRODUCTION

When we prioritize and strengthen our own professional learning, it is reflected in the achievement of our students. In Tucson Unified School District we are committed to implementing and supporting vibrant Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) that are dedicated to improving the learning of each student. We value making every decision with student success in mind, partnering to reach common goals, and taking responsibility to do things right and do the right thing. (See Appendix A: [TUSD Governing Board Policy; District Mission, Vision, and Values](#), page 52)

PLCs challenge the practice of isolation among teachers and foster the sharing of best practices. DuFour et al (2010) define a PLC as *“an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.”* By joining together, teachers have the potential to affect great changes in their students and their school.

Instruction and student learning improve when teachers continuously revisit their instruction together, share ideas across classrooms, and work to tailor assessment and practices to match the individual needs of the student population we serve.

“The most effective learning communities are defined by a spirit of reflection, an action orientation, and a focus on “collective inquiry”. (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008)

Teachers working interdependently in collaborative teams to achieve common goals for which all team members are mutually accountable are at the heart of high-functioning PLCs. Together with site administrators, everyone shares responsibility for the success of PLCs at their sites. In fact, high-performing schools embrace collaboration and make it part of their culture. In Tucson Unified, we value the dedication and hard work of every PLC team member.

We look forward to supporting you on your PLC journey. Please share with us your questions, your concerns, and of course - what’s working!

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is organized into three sections.

The first section, *Overview*, contains necessary information for establishing and maintaining strong PLCs at every school site in Tucson Unified. Most topic pages in the *Overview* section include a coordinating resource box (see box below). Within these resource boxes teams will find links to a variety of materials such as tools, videos, articles, worksheets, and/or templates.

The second section, *Resources*, contains essential templates, tools, and instruments that teams will need throughout the PLC process from developing team norms and SMART goals to creating agendas and recording meeting minutes.

The third section, *Appendix*, contains two critical documents which drive PLC work in Tucson Unified.

- Appendix A is our Governing Board Policy articulating the District Mission, Vision and Values. This provides the professional context within which we undertake all of our work with students and with one another.
- Appendix B concisely outlines the shifts in school culture necessary for cultivating productive and healthy Professional Learning Communities. This comes from DuFour et al, *Learning by Doing*, which is a comprehensive guide for PLC work in schools and is the major theoretical framework underpinning our PLC development in Tucson Unified.

This guide contains materials and tools to assist Tucson Unified PLCs. Further resources can be found at the following:

- DuFour et al. (2010) *Learning by Doing*. 2nd edition
- [All Things PLC](#)
- [Solution Tree: Professional Learning Communities at Work™](#)
- [Solution Tree Video: The Power of PLCs at Work](#)

Links to free Solution Tree documents are provided throughout this document. Users will need to create a free account in order to access and download materials. Please mark your login and password here for future reference.

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OVERVIEW



SIX ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A PLC

1. *Shared mission, vision, values, goals*

Educators in a PLC benefit from clarity regarding their shared purpose, a common understanding of the school they are trying to create, collective communities to help move the school in the desired direction, and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound (SMART) goals to mark their progress.

2. *Collaborative teams focused on learning*

In a PLC, educators work together interdependently in collaborative teams to achieve common goals for which they are mutually accountable. The structure of the school is aligned to ensure teams are provided the time and support essential to adult learning. “Collaboration is a systematic process in which we work together, interdependently, to analyze and impact professional practice in order to improve our individual and collective results.”

3. *Collective inquiry*

Teams in a PLC relentlessly question the status quo, seek new methods of teaching and learning, test the methods, and then reflect on the results. Building shared knowledge of both current reality and best practice is an essential part of each team’s decision-making process.

4. *Action orientation and experimentation*

Members of a PLC constantly turn their learning and insights into action. They recognize the importance of engagement and experience in learning and in testing new ideas. They learn by doing.

5. *Commitment to continuous improvement*

Not content with the status quo, members of a PLC constantly seek better ways to achieve mutual goals and accomplish their fundamental purpose of learning for all. All teams engage in an ongoing cycle of inquiry-driven action.

6. *Results orientation*

Educators in a PLC assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. They are hungry for evidence of student learning and use that evidence to inform and improve their practice. “The success of the PLC 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.” —Richard DuFour

Adapted from DuFour et al, *Learning by Doing* and Kim Daley @ Solution Tree

THREE BIG IDEAS

According to the DuFours, three key ideas lay the foundation of PLC.

1. Embrace Learning for All

We embrace as our fundamental purpose the learning at high levels of every student in Tucson Unified. We further champion the idea that we ourselves are also learners. Therefore, we are willing to examine our teaching practices, policies, programs, and everything we do in our school and district through this lens: *Does this impact learning for each and every student in a positive way?*

2. Build a Culture of Collaboration

We take collective responsibility for the success of all of the students in Tucson Unified. We can achieve our fundamental purpose of high levels of learning for all students only if we work together. Therefore, we cultivate a collaborative culture through the development and support of high performing teams.

3. Focus on Results

We assess our effectiveness in achieving high levels of learning for all students in Tucson Unified on the basis of results rather than intentions. We use results to drive our efforts, to let us know whether our actions make a positive difference in the learning of each and every student. We are results-driven and evidence-based practitioners using outcomes to inform and improve our professional practice and to respond to the needs of all of our students for assistance or enrichment.

This guide contains materials and tools to assist Tucson Unified PLCs. Further resources can be found at the following:

- [Solution Tree Video: Rebecca DuFour "Three Big Ideas of a PLC"](#)