

Curriculum Leadership Institute E-Hint

Professional Learning Communities and CLI

The “professional learning community” model is a popular and powerful school reform movement. When the core principles of professional learning communities are examined, it is clear that CLI has been recommending the same things for years! According to Richard DeFour in his article, “What Is a ‘Professional Learning Community?’” in the May 2004 issue of *Educational Leadership*, there are three essential characteristics. One, there is focus on learning, not simply on teaching. Two, there is a culture of collaboration; and three, there is a focus on results. The structure and responsibilities of CLI’s Curriculum Coordinating Council and Subject Area Committee qualify them as district-level professional learning communities. Their work is crucial to quality curriculum, instruction, and assessment throughout the entire district.

However, the professional learning community CLI recommends that is most directly responsible for student learning happens at the building level. It happens when grade level teams/departments, and the building faculty as a whole, work together to implement a new curriculum. When a new curriculum is implemented, everyone in the building should take the opportunity to rally around that subject and do everything possible to make the implementation a success. If this happens, there will be a focus on learning as each grade level team or department (and the entire faculty) makes plans for how to respond when any student experiences difficulty in learning. It continues when these plans are carried out and modified, as needed, for *every child* that needs corrective help. There will be a culture of collaboration when the grade level teams are given time to work together on a regular basis, and when each faculty meeting has the new curriculum as a standing agenda item throughout the year. These structures are necessary to promote a collaborative culture. During these meeting times, teachers will work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. There will be a focus on results as each grade level team or department develops and administers common assessments, identifies how each student performs, and calls on each other to reflect, share ideas, materials, strategies, and talents. Data must be constantly examined as a team to pinpoint what is working and what is not.

If you are successfully following the CLI Model, you *are* functioning as a professional learning community – both at the district and building level. Pay careful attention to what happens when a new curriculum is implemented at each building. Take the time to be sure all building principals know how absolutely critical they are to the success of that implementation, and what strategies they should be using to foster that success. If each building is focusing on the above characteristics of professional learning communities, student learning will increase and teachers will have satisfaction with the entire process.