

## Improving Student Learning through Collaboration

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As we near the opening of school, the Pullman School District will introduce district collaboration. Teachers will spend a series of half-days collaborating together with colleagues in their own schools and across the district. Why? The answer is simple, to improve student learning for every student across our district.

To an unprecedented degree, educators are expected to educate every student. It is a monumental task. What will it take to succeed? It will require collaboration in the development of a shared model of education and core values. It will also require a sustained commitment from teachers and administrators.

Even though the expectations and accountability for schools have increased over time, the practices inside schools have often stayed the same. Teachers can feel overwhelmed as they strive to reach each student. They often work long hours alone in their classrooms attempting to solve difficult problems and develop strategies to be more effective with their students. As teachers and schools continue to labor to leave no child behind, a reality begins to present itself; we will never be at our best as a result of working in isolation. Yet, this too often is a practice that defines the culture of many schools.

Many schools have adopted the Professional Learning Communities (or PLCs) model to promote and nurture collaboration. A professional learning community is not a program or a product, it is a philosophy. PLCs are founded on a shared set of beliefs and a way of thinking that revolves around three 'big ideas':

- Professionalism– Professional practice should be based on the latest and most current information. Successful organizations do not do things just because they feel right. They examine research and seek out best practices that yield results.
- Learning – The fundamental purpose of a school (and a school district) is to ensure high levels of learning for all students. As an organization, our collective focus is and should be targeted specifically at learning. There is a difference between teaching and learning. In turn, there is a difference between schools that target how much was taught vs. how much was actually learned. These differences go far beyond semantics.
- Community – Successful organizations have a clear focus and purpose. They work as a community to share their strengths and 'co-labor' to solve complex problems. Effective teams set goals for themselves and work collectively to achieve the best cumulative results.

Next year, as we begin district collaboration, we will emphasize why we have taken this step; to improve student learning. Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) is a strategy to help us be more effective as an organization. It will help us work smarter and more efficiently. We can better focus our work and build alignment between classrooms and schools. But most important, it will help us better ensure high levels of learning for each of our students.