

A decorative graphic on the right side of the page. It features three blue circles of varying sizes, each composed of concentric circles in different shades of blue. Two thin, light blue lines intersect at the top left and extend diagonally across the page, framing the circles.

# Professional Development

Overview  
12/16/09

*"Teachers who know a lot about teaching and learning and who work in environments that allow them to know students well are the critical elements of successful learning."*

*Linda Darling-Hammond*

## **I. Background Information**

A committee consisting of administrators and teachers was organized under the direction of the Superintendent in June 2009 for the purpose of recommending to the Superintendent and the School Committee the most effective ways to create job embedded, capacity building, professional development, utilizing stimulus funds, to support the long-term educational goals of the school system.

The committee was charged with, "Identifying the short- and long-term ways in which, together, we can create a self-sustaining, job-embedded professional development program that supports the ongoing needs of teachers and students." (P. Ash)

### **Members of the Professional Development Committee**

Joanne Hennessy	District-wide	Chairperson
Michelle Bartley	Clarke Middle School	Teacher
Charles Caliri	Lexington High School	Assistant Principal
Robert Collins	Lexington High School	Department Head, Social Studies
Jackie Crowe	Lexington High School	Teacher
Edward Dube	Diamond Middle School	Teacher
Rebecca Gruber	Diamond Middle School	Teacher, LEA Representative
Julia Hendrix	Fiske	Mathematics Specialist K-5
Kristina Lieberman	Estabrook	Teacher
Peg Mongiello	Diamond Middle School	Principal
Carol A. Pilarski	Central Office	Assistant Superintendent
Tom Plati	Central Office	Director of Technology
David Pittman	Bridge	Teacher
Ellen Quirk	Bowman	Teacher
Ann Tenhor	Hastings	Teacher
Sandra Trach	Estabrook	Principal
Roberta Wehmeyer	Harrington	Teacher
Howard Wolke	Diamond Middle School	Teacher

*These individuals have given thoughtfully and generously of their time and energy to this important task. This group has spent a number of days and hours working together exploring the research, discussing issues, and reaching consensus as to the vision, principles, standards and design for professional development in the Lexington Public Schools. There has been a clear, shared purpose, thoughtful collaboration and reflective professional inquiry.*

*The Professional Development Committee would like to thank Dr. Paul Ash, Superintendent of Schools, for his support of the work of the committee.*

## II. Vision

*Lexington Public Schools is committed to providing a high quality, continuous and sustained, professional development program to all its teachers and other educational professionals. The professional development plan for Lexington Public Schools describes a vision for adult learning that is collaborative, continuous, embedded in daily practice and focused on student achievement. This model builds on the wealth of knowledge and experience that teachers and practitioners have and expands upon that knowledge and skills. It builds on and strengthens the successes already evident in the district by providing a framework that affords every educator an opportunity to enrich his/her practice. The vision of Lexington Professional Development ensures that standards-based professional development results in continuous professional growth and enhances on-going student learning.*

Sustained, high quality professional development provides a context in which it can have lasting impact. This perspective assumes that learning is an ongoing process of reflection, experimentation and discussion that requires more than a single event. It assumes that mastering complex ideas and skills requires continuous learning and long-term support. If educators are to introduce new practices into their work and to deepen their understanding of content, their students, and teaching, then the environment in which they work must support their learning – through adequate resources, strong supportive leadership, and a community that encourages collaboration and application of new learning.

Effective professional development that improves student learning supports teams of educators whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district and who work collaboratively in a trusting and respectful manner. Professional development that truly enhances adult learning provides opportunities for educators to be involved in learning communities. These professional learning communities might take various forms, but they are all characterized by ongoing learning. They encourage individual and collaborative exploration, practice, and reflection. They foster collegiality and problem solving, and they emphasize continuous improvement in classrooms and schools.

Figure 1: Central Role of Professional Learning Communities within the Professional Development Model



Professional learning communities are not limited to a single content, grade or even school level. Growth opportunities go beyond the school doors to ensure that the most efficient learning opportunities are present. By connecting professional learning communities across schools and levels, the opportunities become more effective and more likely to receive the support needed to be successful.

Figure 2: A Look at Professional Learning Communities

**What is a PLC?**

“A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.”  
—adapted from *Learning by Doing*

### 3 Big Ideas of a PLC

#### *Focus on Learning*

The fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure high levels of learning for all students. This focus on learning translates into four critical questions that drive the daily work of the school. In PLCs, educators demonstrate their commitment to helping all students learn by working collaboratively to address the following critical questions:

- 1) What do we want students to learn? What should each student know and be able to do as a result of each unit, grade level, and/or course?
- 2) How will we know if they have learned? Are we monitoring each student’s learning on a timely basis?
- 3) What will we do if they don’t learn? What systematic process is in place to provide additional time and support for students who are experiencing difficulty?
- 4) What will we do if they already know it?

#### *Build a COLLABORATIVE 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, develop common assessments for learning, analyze evidence of student learning, and use that evidence to learn from one another.

#### *Focus on Results*

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

### Essential Characteristics of a PLC

#### *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.

#### *Collaborative teams focused on learning*

In a PLC, educators work together interdependently to achieve common goals for which they are mutually accountable. Teams in a PLC 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. Members of a PLC turn their learning and insights into action. They recognize the importance of engagement and experience in learning and in testing new ideas. Educators in a PLC assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. They examine evidence of student learning and use that evidence to inform and improve their practice.

—adapted from *Learning by Doing*

## III. Professional Development: Focus on Learning

*Effective professional development that improves student learning provides a framework for integrating best practices and relating those best practices to the mission of the organization.*

*No Child Left Behind*, the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks, the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System, the new Student Assessment Program, and College Board assessments, including the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) and Advanced Placement (AP) tests have raised the academic bar for all students. The standards and the ways in which educators and schools are held accountable for student performance place greater demands on educators to combine understanding of subject matter and teaching practices with knowledge of learners. Indeed, the movement towards standards-based reform, data based assessments and accountability for learning has served to emphasize the important role professional development plays and its link to improved student achievement. “As students are expected to learn more complex and analytical skills in preparation for further education and work in the 21st century, teachers must learn to teach in ways that develop higher order thinking and performance. These new standards require a new kind of teaching, conducted by teachers who understand learning as well as teaching, who can address students’ needs as well as the demands of their disciplines, and who can create bridges between students’ experiences and curriculum goals” (Darling-Hammond, 2005).

Within professional learning communities, this focus on learning translates into four critical questions that drive the daily work of educators. The diagram below represents a framework linking the four questions, current research-based, best practices, and the relationship in the teaching and learning process.



#### IV. Professional Development: Workshops and Courses

Professional learning is an ongoing process of reflection, experimentation, and discussion. In this view of professional learning, workshops and courses become part of a coherent series of events that sustain, reinforce, and deepen learning. Directly aligned with the system-wide goals, these workshops and courses build on the current strengths of the district and afford educators an opportunity to enrich their practice while building systemic capacity. The artful weaving of insight and knowledge garnered from interactive workshops and courses that promote experiential learning builds the capacity of established professional learning communities. Both opportunities are needed for transfer of teacher learning into practice to produce the changes needed for student learning.

The workshops represented in the professional development program provide opportunities for a awareness and exploration on the part of participants. For example, within a 3-6 hour workshop, participants may learn about the purpose, features and tools used in an innovative approach. Within this same model, a group of teachers may come together to share experiences with the approach and discuss next steps for implementation in a discussion format led by a facilitator / coach. Workshops provide the opportunity to develop strong foundational knowledge in effective practices and offer educators an opportunity to share their work and learn from others.

Course offerings allow for more active engagement for the purpose of deepening understanding and making application in real-life contexts. These courses involve multiple approaches, appropriate strategies, instructional on-site coaching and last over a period of time so that participants function as members of a professional learning community and participate in job-embedded learning as they are taking the course. Participants are expected to *apply* what they have learned during the course meetings in their own instructional programs and then discuss that application during follow-up sessions. In this way, participants bring to the next professional development session firsthand experience of the practice and can participate in meaningful discussions concerning its effectiveness. Participants are able to ask specific questions of colleagues and the presenter, receive new information, and plan for the next phase of implementation.

In each course, the presenter/ facilitator meets the needs of those who are implementing the new practice by setting up the conditions for interactive dialogue and supportive coaching. In this way, faculty members are encouraged to share with each other successes or challenges regarding how they give specific feedback to students or how they are flexibly regrouping students for instruction based on the assessment results, or differentiating instruction, etc. They may also share specific techniques for creating an assessment test item, or employing the effective teaching strategies that were selected by a Data Team. They may bring with them work products from the classroom and request feedback on the quality of those items.

The professional development presenter/facilitator creates follow-up agendas that include: (1) revisiting the big picture to remind everyone of the place the particular new practice holds in the larger comprehensive instruction and assessment initiative; (2) encouraging participants to share their progress with the new practice since the prior or initial professional development session; (3) serving as instructional, on-site coach, offering feedback; (4) responding effectively to any questions or needs for clarification; (5) providing feedback on work products the participants created and used independently; (6) allowing participants the opportunity during the session to apply the new information in a simulated way; and (7) planning time for next steps. Questions from participants are encouraged throughout each session to promote active engagement, interaction, and dialogue. (Ainsworth)

Such courses link teacher learning to teacher practice and student learning. The length of the course allows participants to receive the necessary support to transfer learning to practice and measure results. These courses generally range in time from 15, 18, 30 to 37.5 hours. PDPs are offered and graduate level credit may be arranged with the external provider through an accredited college.

The workshops and courses offered during the Spring 2010 pilot are directly aligned to the district's continued commitment to close the achievement gap and provide equity and excellence for all students. They are linked to the system wide goals and represent "the short- and long-term ways in which, together, we can create a self-sustaining, job-embedded professional development program that supports the ongoing needs of teachers and students." (P. Ash)

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