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**Increased Student Achievement and School Improvement are Our Goals
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***Professional Learning Communities:
Effective Staff Development***

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Professional Learning Communities Effective Staff Development

There is a huge body of evidence showing that Professional Learning Communities have a previously unprecedented impact on teacher effectiveness. By engaging teachers in



ongoing dialogue and discussion around student work and by providing job-embedded professional development, PLCs

have had a positive impact on schools by:

- “Developing teachers’ skills
- Improving the quality of ongoing interaction among staff
- Achieving a coherent focus
- Mobilizing resources
- Developing school leadership” (Newmann, King, & Youngs 2000 in Fullan 2005)

In looking at the above list, it is easy to see why PLCs not only help the students, but they also help the educators. In fact, “recent research shows that the kinds of

professional development that improve instructional capacity display four critical characteristics; effective professional development initiatives are:

- Ongoing and embedded within a context so that they meet the specific needs of a particular setting.
- Aligned with reform initiatives.
- Grounded in a collaborative (culture).
- Inquiry-based approaches to learning” (Senge 1990; Knapp 2003 in Annenberg 2004).



All of the above factors are part of Professional Learning Communities.

In addition, research says, “effective professional development to improve classroom teaching concentrates on high learning standards and on evidence of students’ learning. It mirrors the kinds of teaching and learning expected in classrooms. It is driven fundamentally by the needs and interests of participants themselves, enabling adult learners to expand on content knowledge and practice that is directly connected with the work of their students in the classroom” (Corcoran

1995; Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin 1995; Little 1988; Elmore 2002 in Annenberg 2004). Again, we are describing PLCs.

Therefore, according to the research, along with increased student achievement, Professional Learning Communities are one of the best ways to engage in effective school improvement and productive staff development. As Schmoker says, “We can no longer afford to be innocent of the fact that “collaboration” improves performance” (Schmoker 2004). Stiggins and Chappuis agree with him saying, “When teams commit to shaping the ideas into new classroom practice, reflecting on the results, and sharing the benefits with each other, professional growth skyrockets” (Stiggins & Chappuis Winter 2006).

The National Staff Development Council goes on to explain that “staff development that has as its goal high levels of learning for all students, teachers, and administrators requires a form of professional learning that is quite different from the workshop-driven approach. The most powerful forms of staff development occur in ongoing

teams that meet on a regular basis...for the purposes of learning, joint lesson planning, and problem solving. These teams, often called learning communities or communities of practice, operate with a commitment to the norms of continuous improvement and



experimentation and engage their members in improving their daily work to advance the achievement of school district and school goals for student learning” (NSDC). Thus professional learning communities become not only a means to improve student achievement and increase student learning, but they are also the most effective way to engage the staff in effective, ongoing professional development that results in increased student achievement for all learners.

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