

Educators Must Accept the Challenge to Be Professional

by Anthony Muhammad, Former Principal, Southfield High School

The Professional Learning Community (PLC) model for educators has become increasingly popular in the American education system. Developed and championed by the staff of Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois and its former principal and superintendent Dr. Richard DuFour, the model emphasizes focusing on the areas of learning more than teaching, working collaboratively, and holding educators accountable for results (DuFour, 2004). Who could argue with such noble principles?

In order to become part of a Professional Learning Community, educators first must commit to its most fundamental premise: to be a *professional*. What is a professional? *A professional is someone with expertise in a specialized field. It is an individual who not only has pursued advanced knowledge to enter the field but who expects to remain current in their evolving knowledge base* (DuFour and Eaker, 1998).

This definition is divided into two parts. The first part of the definition implies credentialing, which is required by Michigan law. This includes such avenues as completing an approved course of study at a college or university, serving an apprenticeship, and passing some form of professional examination. This process allows a person to *enter* the field. For more information, visit www.michigan.gov/ops.

The second part of the definition identifies the key concept of *growth*. As professionals, educators are expected to stay current in the constantly evolving knowledge base within education. It is each educator's responsibility to stay connected with research that stimulates thought and provides findings that enhance educational practice.

Educators have the awesome responsibility of shaping the minds of society's most vulnerable members—its children. In order to effectively shape those minds to become capable, contributing citizens, each educator must be armed with in-depth understanding of his or her learners, the subject matter being taught, educational policies, and the communities that are served.

Here are a few simple steps educators can use to increase their professional learning:

1. Join a professional organization for educators (preferably within the subject area taught).
2. Read one article per week from an educational journal that relates to either the learners or the subject being taught (sharing articles with colleagues offers the additional benefit of encouraging impromptu conversations).
3. Subscribe to an educational periodical to stay abreast of the latest developments in the field.

4. Buy a book from the education section of a bookstore, or borrow one from the library. Read from the book for 15-30 minutes each night. Repeat this process monthly.

These steps do not require a huge time commitment. They simply require a commitment to be the very best. In a climate that demands more of students, more is demanded of the educators who teach them. When teachers embrace professionalism and keep up with advances in their field, they naturally become invigorated and productive. Embracing professional duties not only promises that students will learn more, it makes the teaching profession more rewarding as well.

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