

*“Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment”* as per Standards for Professional Learning published by Learning Forward. As coaches practice their craft, they are the conduits for learning across all content areas. They are in a perfect position to promote collaboration and collective problem solving by creating an environment of learners and a community of practice via a professional learning community. This collaboration can occur before, during or after school. The timing is not as critical as the regularity with which colleagues meet and discuss student learning.

When learning communities come together with the shared vision of discussing student work, teacher teams are better equipped to discuss common areas of interest and focus on what matters most... how to increase student engagement and improve student learning. This collaborative process helps all content teachers identify student needs, collect the data needed to assess those needs, and review the instructional practices that address how those needs are met. What better way to keep students at the center than to have ongoing, sustainable conversations about student learning through PLCs?

The PIIC BDA cycle of consultation, confidentiality, collaboration and collective problem solving is a process that lends itself to communicating with all members of a PLC. It is a way for communities of learners to share their expertise and learn from each other in a no-risk environment that emphasizes reflection “in, on, and around” action. All members of the community meet together to identify common goals for improved student learning and discuss ways to differentiate instructional practices so that all students benefit. As teachers, coaches and other school leaders work together to talk about their practices, they realize that they are strengthening and refining their own practices, not just sharing ideas. When this practice becomes a habit, it becomes much more significant, meaningful and sustainable.

When school staff meet repeatedly to focus on instructional strategies and practices, those conversations become the norm and help to create a culture of change, consistency, community, collaboration, and capacity building. The instructional coach becomes the link between student learning and adult practices. They tie together how and why standards-driven instruction and ongoing professional development are critical for school improvement. They keep the focus on student achievement and how teacher practices and school climate positively impact how students learn. They help teachers collaborate so that learning occurs across all content areas using an evidence-based literacy model that is reinforced in every classroom, not just in classrooms where high-stakes testing takes place.

When colleagues learn together in communities where the vision is shared, everyone works towards the same goals – to find ways to improve student engagement and student learning. The best way to do that is to organize into teams around student learning and improved instructional practices. This should not be a “pick-up” basketball game in the playground; it should be a deliberate and intentional process that brings professionals together to focus on what matters most... students at the center.