



## **PLCs and the 4 Essential Questions of Learning**

### **What do Professional Learning Communities do?**

Professional Learning Communities give time & structure for teachers to grow professionally by asking the essential questions of learning. These questions may seem simple, and they are, but they have proven to have a significant impact on student learning when asked and answered regularly by a team of teachers who teach a common course.

### **Essential Questions of Learning**

Question 1: What is it we expect students to learn?

Question 2: How will we know when they have learned it?

Question 3: How will we respond when they don't learn?

Question 4: How will we respond when they already know it?

**Question 1:** What do we want our students to learn, understand and be able to do? This question is about establishing clarity and focus. What is it that we really want kids to know? Or, better yet, what is it that they really NEED to know and be able to do? This question requires teachers to clearly identify each essential learning target for the students they serve.

**Question 2:** How will we know when our students have learned it? What artifacts will we accept as evidence that our students have learned what they were supposed to learn or can do what they are supposed to be able to do? Question 2 speaks to the development and use of common formative assessments. It also addresses the power of these assessments to inform students and teachers about their progress towards an intended learning target.

**Question 3:** How will we respond when there is evidence that our students are not learning? By asking Question 3, PLCs are forced to focus on each student who is not meeting the intended learning target. It is not enough to simply look at the grade average in the class, or to be satisfied with “most” students getting it. One of the tenets of PLCs is a belief that ALL students can learn at high levels. This means that teachers in a PLC will do everything in their power to ensure that all students meet or exceed the essential learnings.

**Question 4:** How will we respond when they already know it? What systems and strategies do we have in place to allow students to accelerate or deepen their learning beyond the articulated curriculum? Much like students who struggle in school are often marginalized, students who have already mastered the desired skills are told to wait for the rest of the class to catch up. Question 4 forces PLC members to look at the evidence of student learning, for each and every student, and come up with creative ways to challenge students to take the next step in their learning.

For more on each question, check out the videos on our website [HERE](#)