

Chapter 5

SUPPORTIVE CONDITIONS FOR COLLABORATIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

TOOLS:

Tool 5.1 School culture survey. *1 page*

Tool 5.2 Audit of the culture starts with two handy tools. *12 pages*

Tool 5.3 Teacher and principal ICs on Learning Communities. *4 pages*

Tool 5.4 What does your community know and believe about teacher learning? A survey. *2 pages*

Tool 5.5 Frequently asked questions about professional development. *1 page*

Tool 5.6 Central office IC on Learning Communities. *2 pages*

Where are we?

Our school community believes that a highly qualified teacher in every classroom is important to student success.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NOT SURE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

Parents complain when students are out of class for teacher professional development.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NOT SURE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

The district mandates specific professional development for all teachers.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NOT SURE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

Teachers in our school are committed to continuous improvement.

STRONGLY AGREE AGREE NOT SURE DISAGREE STRONGLY DISAGREE

The school's culture increases teachers' willingness to engage in collaborative professional learning, and teachers' willingness to engage in collaborative professional learning improves the school's culture. The circular relationship between culture and willingness sometimes makes it difficult to determine where to start. Is it best to establish a culture that supports teacher interdependence, or is it best to begin with creating communities of learners? While it is possible to argue either side, it is perhaps best to accept the existing conditions and recognize that regardless of where a school begins, both culture and willingness will be positively impacted.

Conditions to support collaborative learning

Establishing the conditions that will positively contribute to a staff's success with collaborative professional learning requires vigilance and dedication. Yet, waiting until the conditions are ideal may mean that collaborative professional learning never happens. Sometimes pushing ahead, regardless of the conditions, speeds up the change in conditions and moves a school ahead far more rapidly.

Specifying conditions that support collaborative professional learning is difficult. Some of those conditions are identified here:

- Teachers' commitment and willingness;
- Principal's commitment and willingness;
- Community's commitment and support;
- Resources available to support collaborative learning;

- District support and commitment;
- Schedule that provides time;
- Structures for learning;
- Feedback systems;
- Reporting systems;
- Clear expectations;
- Coordination systems to share learning across teams; and
- Accountability systems to produce results.

School culture

The concept of school culture has appeared in educational literature for about two decades. Some of the early definitions offer clear understanding of the concept.

School culture can be defined as the historically transmitted patterns of meaning that include the norms, values, beliefs, ceremonies, rituals, traditions, and myths understood, in varying degrees, by members of the school community.

This system of meaning often shapes what people think and how they act. Researchers have found that healthy and sound school cultures correlate strongly with increased student achievement and motivation, and with teacher productivity and satisfaction. A vision for creating a healthy school culture should be a collaborative activity among teachers, students, parents, staff, and the principal. The principal's role in changing school culture is to act with care and concern for others, work to develop shared visions of what the school should be, and work on team-building (Stolp, 1994).

Stoll, a leading British researcher, defines school

Table 5.1 **Stoll's school culture indicators (Stoll, 1999)**

ASPECTS OF SCHOOL CULTURE	VISIBLE EVIDENCE
Celebrations	How staff and student successes and achievements are recognized and celebrated.
Stories	How the school talks about itself – its history and myths; whose stories are told and whose are overlooked; stories told by the community and the school about the school.
Shared sayings	The language the school uses to talk about itself, e.g. "We're a community school."
Taboos	What is not allowed within the school, explicitly and implicitly, from types of behavior to how certain groups or people are treated.
Ways of rewarding	Intrinsic or extrinsic rewards to staff and students; acknowledgements.
Rituals	How common events are run and what is emphasized at them – athletic achievement? discipline? academic achievement? community contributions?
Communications	How messages, positive and negative, are delivered to the school or wider community; the channels, levels of, and path for communication within the school.
Behaviors	How students and staff treat each other; the level of respect, trust, collaboration, and sharing evident; how guests are treated.
Rites of exit and entry	How new staff members are inducted; how farewells for staff and students are conducted; how new students and new parents are welcomed.
Events	The focus of significant annual events like awards, school plays, field day, homecoming, prom, etc.

culture as "how things are done around here." In a more implicit sense, school culture manifests itself in customs, rituals, symbols, stories, and language – culture's "artifacts" (Stoll, 1999).

In an extensive study of literacy teachers' success and the working conditions of the schools in which they taught, Langer discovered students who outperformed their peers attended schools that nurtured a professional climate for teachers. The factors that emerged across all the schools studied include:

- A shared vision for student achievement and a plan to get there;
- Teacher participation in a variety of professional communities in and outside of the school and valuing their commitment to the profession of teaching;
- Structured improvement activities that offered teachers a sense of agency;
- Caring attitude that extends to colleagues and students; and

- Deep respect for lifelong learning (Langer, 2001, 2002).

In a study of schools that received the U.S. Department of Education Model Professional Development Program Award in 1997 and 1998, the research team found striking similarities among the schools that used professional development as the means to improve student learning. The research team offered the following recommendations:

- Use clear, agreed upon student achievement goals to focus and shape student learning;
- Provide an expanded array of professional development opportunities;
- Embed, ongoing informal learning into the school culture;
- Build a highly collaborative school environment where working together to solve problems and learning from each other become the cultural norm;
- Find and use the time to allow teacher learning to

- Tools 5.1 and 5.2 are tools to

Tools 1, 2, and 3 are tools to assess a school's culture. Tool 5.1 is a simple and quick survey. The instruments in 5.2 are more thorough and extensive. The first tool, Self-Assessment: School Culture Triage, is a survey to gather perceptions of staff about school culture. The second instrument is a multi-part assessment of school culture involving interviews, observations, surveys, analysis of the data, and presentation of the findings. By administering either assessment as a baseline measure and then again at the end of the next several school years, a school will have evidence of the change in school culture that occurs over time. When baseline data are gathered after collecting a completed survey from each staff member, it will be helpful to compile the results into a series of tables and graphs and engage the staff in conversations about actions they want to take to address the areas of greatest need. By identifying areas of strength and creating a plan to address areas of need in a school's culture, staff members are making a commitment to improve the culture of their school.

Tool 5.3 can be used for a similar purpose. This tool, an innovation configuration on NSDC's Standards for Staff Development on Learning Communities, identifies principal and teacher behaviors associated with learning communities. Teachers and principals can use this tool to self-assess, conduct a schoolwide assessment in which they compile their results and use the innovation configuration to discuss evidence regarding their current state.

Determining whether to assess a school's culture is a decision that is best made collaboratively by the principal and teacher leadership team. Before selecting a tool to use, both the principal and teacher leaders will want to study several options, weigh the pros and cons of each, and select one that will be informative, not overwhelming. The samples included in this chapter are only

Paul S.3 School culture survey

CHART

Tools for Schools

SELECTING APPROPRIATE TOOLS

School culture survey

The professional staff in this school use their talents and knowledge to help each other with challenges and needs.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

This school has high expectations for teachers and administrators.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Staff and students in this school set and have confidence in each other.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Time and resources are available to support teachers in their best work.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Teachers and leaders in this school care not a knowledge base to inform their work with students and with the school.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Good teaching is recognized and appreciated in the school and community.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

This school honors values, ethics, collaboration, and honesty.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

School leaders consistently focus staff in discussing and making decisions about school issues.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

School administrators have strategies and progress to a minimum in order to protect teachers' time and planning time.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

The school has traditions in both curriculum and occurrence rates that are significant and leave a lot.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Based, upon communication used among staff members.

Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree

Comments and Facilitator

The tool will help a school understand its culture. I used it at 12 schools over a 10-year period. I have been able to help teachers and administrators to see the strengths and weaknesses of their schools. I have been able to help them to see the strengths and weaknesses of their schools. I have been able to help them to see the strengths and weaknesses of their schools.

The facilitator should prepare individual copies of the survey and distribute them to participants. The facilitator should also prepare a copy of the survey and distribute them to participants.

After individual districts have completed the survey, the facilitator should collect the surveys and distribute them to participants. The facilitator should also prepare a copy of the survey and distribute them to participants.

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April 2004, Vol. 31

Tool 5.1



Tool 5.2

The Teacher

CONTEXT

PROCESS

CONTENT

Tool 5.3

some examples of ways to assess school culture. If the school has not conducted a formal culture audit before, using a simpler tool such as the one in Tool 5.1 may be better. Tool 5.1 is based on the seminal research about school culture by Jon Saphier and Matthew King (1985). This research

has informed the field for more than 20 years. As the school begins to develop a culture of openness and inquiry, other tools may be more useful. Regardless of the tool or process selected, regular assessment of school culture is one way to ensure that actions to strengthen the culture are data-driven and focused on areas of need.

Community support

Another aspect of a supportive condition is community support for professional learning. Parents often do not understand the importance of teacher learning. They often only recognize the inconvenience when students are out of school so that teachers can learn. The notion that teachers only learn on days designated as learning days is antithetical to the kind of professional learning that this tool kit advocates. Educators learn continuously and transforming traditional professional development into collaborative professional learning may actually increase both teacher and student learning.

Schools often feel the tension between providing time for professional learning and time for student instruction. School staff can take some initiative in talking with their parent community about the value of professional development. Tool 5.4 is a survey to assess parents' views about teacher learning. Tool 5.5 is a Frequently Asked Questions sheet about teacher learning.

Another critical dimension of creating a web of support for collaborative professional learning is district support. Essential indicators of a district's support for school-based collaborative professional learning include:

- Tool 5.6 is the innovation configuration for central office staff regarding the Learning Communities standard. Central office staff members might use this resource to assess their support of school-based collaborative professional learning. In addition, central office staff might consider how they bring together teachers from across schools whose learning communities are outside of their school.

The diagram shows four concentric ellipses representing levels of learning teams, from innermost to outermost: **CONTENT**, **PROCESS**, **TEAM**, and **CONTEXT**.

Below the diagram is a table titled "Teachers to be skillful members of learning teams." The table has four columns: **LEVEL 1**, **LEVEL 2**, **LEVEL 3**, and **LEVEL 4**. The first row lists the characteristics for each level, and the second row is empty.

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
Teachers to be skillful members of learning teams.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> get along and have positive learning attitudes Provide supportive learning experiences in the group present in group to 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide team leaders supportive experiences in learn about group process, group dynamics, the range of group development, and ways that a group decides making 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide an professional development or modeling effectively utilizes learning teams 	

Creating the conditions to support teacher collaborative learning also means helping teachers build trust, relationships, and voice. Jody Westbrook and Shirley Hord describe conditions necessary for professional

Tool 5.4

Tool 5.5

Tool 5.6

learning communities that emerged from their study of developing this type of community in different school settings. In their work, they found “significant foundational factors — the presence of which contributed to PLC success, and the absence of which often presaged difficulty or failure in PLC implementation . . .

Trust. This element is a requirement among teachers, between teachers and administrators, between campus and district-level personnel, and between school personnel and co-developers. High levels of trust promoted risk taking, honest communication, and deep commitments to school initiatives, including the PLC project. The absence of trust distracted personnel from issues of instruction to conflicts of personality and practice. Conscious efforts to build trust characterize many efforts to create professional learning communities.

Teachers are heard. Schools in which the insight and input of teachers is solicited and utilized tended to move more easily into — or increase their practice of — the PLC dimensions of shared leadership and collective learning. Administrators who acted without the input of teachers tended toward autocratic styles of leadership; teachers who felt their knowledge was not honored, and their suggestions not welcomed tended to resist “top-down” directives of all ilks, including PLC.

Student centered. Although one might expect a focus on students to characterize any school, visits to a cross-section of the nation’s schools will quickly reveal the many ways teachers and administrators can be distracted from their students’ learning and well-being. The attention of administrators and teachers alike can be consumed by any number of issues, including: test scores, and their implications for funding, status, and consequences within a district; administrative turnover and political concerns; personality clashes; and issues of equity within and between schools.

Schools where personnel asked aloud and frequently of programs, practices, and initiatives: “Is it better for kids?” tended to more easily and deeply take on PLC dimensions, and could more easily tailor the expression of those dimensions to the particular needs and culture of their school.

Concerns about “add-on” programs. The plethora of new initiatives, innovations, projects and reform efforts, combined with the hefty demands of teaching, have led many school personnel to a sense of “so much to do, so little time.”

Rather than being a sign of resistance, questions about the additional responsibilities and time required

of a PLC effort revealed a healthy skepticism about poorly planned or implemented efforts at reform. When these concerns could be addressed openly and completely, teachers and administrators were able to more fully commit to creating a professional learning community at their school (Westbrook & Hord, 2000, p. 2-4).

Establishing supportive conditions for collaborative professional learning is challenging work. Yet, the easiest way to do so is to establish collaborative professional learning teams. When staff members begin to collaborate, they interact about teaching and learning since that is their common interest. They naturally develop trust and respect for one another when they engage in joint work. They also simultaneously increase the transparency of their work and create interdependence. There is a reciprocal relationship between creating teams and creating a collaborative culture. Act on one and the other responds.

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Tools For Schools		NATIONAL STAFF DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL						
<p>COMMENTS TO FACILITATOR</p> <p>This tool will help a school assess its culture based on the 12 norms of a healthy school culture identified by Jon Saphier and Mathew King in their article, "Good Seeds Grow in Strong Cultures," <i>Educational Leadership</i>, March 1985.</p> <p>The facilitator should prepare individual sheets ahead of the meeting and distribute to participants.</p> <p>After individuals declare their positions, the facilitator should collect the responses and tabulate privately. The cumulative responses should be shared at the next team meeting. The facilitator should then lead a discussion about possible implications of the responses. <i>In what areas is there already substantial agreement that the team is performing well together? What areas does this team need to work on? What are some strategies for improvement in that area?</i></p>		<h2>School culture survey</h2>						
		<p>The professional staff in this school use their talents and knowledge to help each other with challenges and needs.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>This school encourages and supports experimentation with new ideas and techniques.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>This school has high expectations for teachers and administrators.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>Staff and students in this school trust and have confidence in each other.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>Time and resources are available to support teachers to do their best work.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>Teachers and leaders in this school reach out to a knowledge base to inform their work with students and with each other.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>Good teaching is recognized and appreciated by the school and community.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>This school culture values caring, celebration, and humor.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>School leaders consistently involve staff in discussing and making decisions about most school issues.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>School administrators keep meetings and paperwork to a minimum in order to protect teachers' instructional and planning time.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>The school has traditions in both curriculum and recurrent events that are significant and known by all.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>Honest, open communications exist among staff members.</p> <p>Strongly Disagree Disagree Neutral Agree Strongly Agree</p>						
		<p>April/May 2001</p>						

a t i s s u e
C U L T U R E

An audit of the culture starts with two handy tools

By CHRISTOPHER WAGNER
and PENELOPE MASDEN-COPAS

As a pair of facilitators entered a North Carolina middle school, three 7th graders met them at the door. "What are you doing here?" one student asked. "We're looking for the best middle school in North Carolina," a facilitator answered. "You found it!" the student exclaimed, and the others heartily agreed. This chance encounter provided the facilitators just one of many clues in assessing the school's culture.

Schools have tried various improvements to create more effective schools, but many educators and researchers are discovering a "missing link" (Wagner & Hall-O'Phalen, 1998). That missing link has more to do with the school's culture than with elaborate curriculum alignment projects, scrimmage tests, and the latest buzzword reform efforts. Researchers agree that school culture is an important, but often overlooked, component of school improvement (Levine & Lezotte,

1995; Sizer, 1988; Phillips, 1996; Peterson & Deal, 1998; Frieberg, 1998).

Culture is the bracing for the bridge from previous to future achievement. If the braces are firm and strong, the chances of improving are high. Getting the culture right should always precede "programs" in efforts to raise student achievement. Schools with top-down, "do it or else" staff development plans rarely improve, while schools sensitive to their cultures are successful in improving

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42

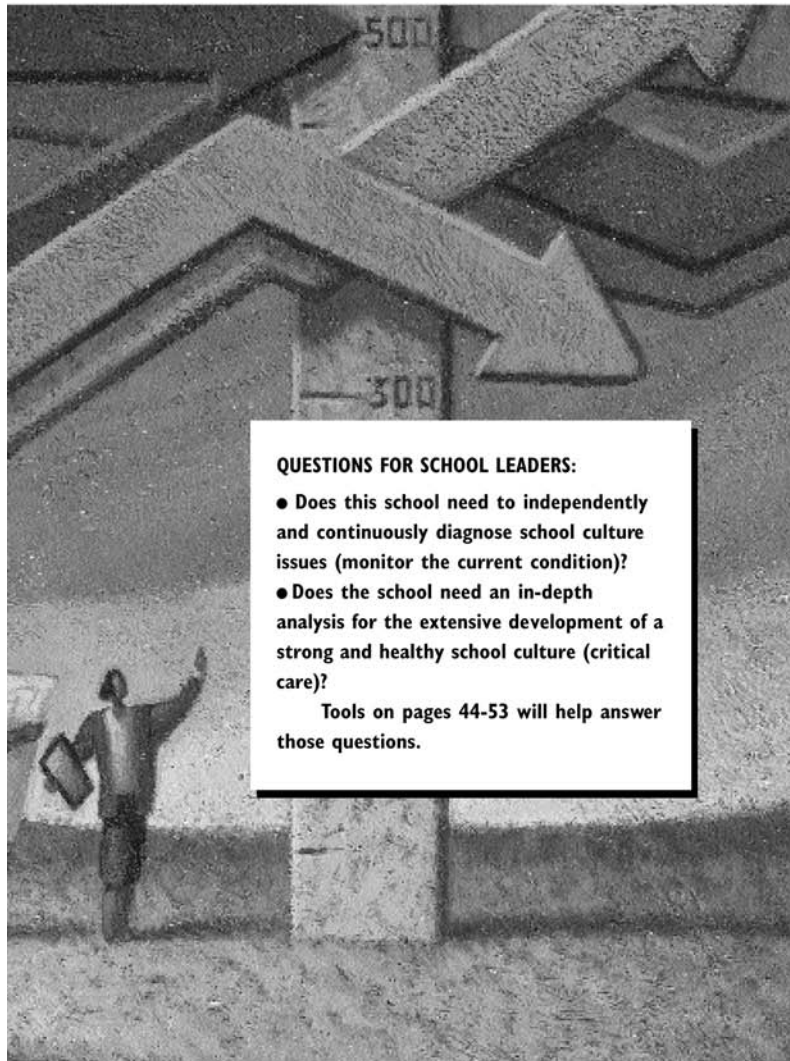


student learning. As Sheila Patterson, a teacher at South Stokes High School in Walnut Cove, N.C., recently said (personal communication, Oct. 10, 2001), "It's an attitude, not a program."

Without a healthy school culture, staff may not be open or receptive to professional learning opportunities. Traditionally, school improvement efforts emphasized an individual teacher learning new skills. The theory was, "If people don't improve, programs never will." This belief also promoted the notion of individual professional development as the primary means to school improvement. However, in reality, negative cultures,

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colleagues, and environments often overwhelm the best teachers.

The theory of individual professional growth has given way to a culture-centered approach toward professional learning aimed at collegial teams — learning and practicing together. Acknowledging that “unless teams of teachers improve together, schools never will” stresses the culture approach toward improvement and change. The goal of professional development is the inculcation of a continuous improvement philosophy among teams of professionals rather than individual teachers. This can only occur in a healthy school culture

designed to promote higher levels of professional collaboration, collegiality, and self-determination.

Determining the quality and health of the school culture is essential for all schools as they strive to improve. Yet most have not assessed their culture. Educators are more likely to dwell on raising scores and meeting state requirements than to examine a holistic view of the school and the relationships among the people who work, learn, and relate there.

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What is school culture?

Wagner (2000) describes school culture as shared experiences both in and out of school (traditions and celebrations), a sense of community, of family and team.

- Staff stability and common goals permeate the school.
- Curricular and instructional components, as well as order and discipline, are established through consensus.
- Open and honest communication is encouraged and staff demonstrate humor and trust.
- Stakeholders are recognized in schoolwide celebrations.
- The school’s leaders and district leaders provide tangible support.

SOURCE: Wagner, C. (2000, October 20). *School culture analysis*. Address conducted at the meeting of the Manitoba Association of Resource Teachers (MART), Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

MORE INFORMATION about school culture and school culture audits can be obtained from:

- The Center for Improving School Culture
www.schoolculture.net
- The National School Improvement Project
www.garyphillips.com

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SELF-ASSESSMENT: SCHOOL CULTURE TRIAGE

School culture requires consistent care. Determine the current condition of your culture. Do you need simply to monitor and maintain, or are you headed for intensive care?

Instructions: Copy and distribute this survey to teachers and instructional staff in the same school. Have them fill out the form completely, then tally individual scores. Add up individual scores and divide by the number in the group for an average. Compare that number with the Scoring Guide on the next page to determine the health of your culture.

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always or almost always
PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION					
1. Teachers and staff discuss instructional strategies and curriculum issues.	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teachers and staff work together to develop the school schedule.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Teachers and staff are involved in the decision-making process with regard to materials and resources.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The student behavior code is a result of collaboration and consensus among staff.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The planning and organizational time allotted to teachers and staff is used to plan as collective units/teams rather than as separate individuals.	1	2	3	4	5
AFFILIATIVE COLLEGIALLY					
1. Teachers and staff tell stories of celebrations that support the school's values	1	2	3	4	5
2. Teachers and staff visit/talk/meet outside of the school to enjoy each others' company.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Our school reflects a true "sense" of community.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Our school schedule reflects frequent communication opportunities for teachers and staff.	1	2	3	4	5
5. Our school supports and appreciates the sharing of new ideas by members of our school.	1	2	3	4	5
6. There is a rich and robust tradition of rituals and celebrations, including holidays, special events, and recognition of goal attainment.	1	2	3	4	5
SELF-DETERMINATION/EFFICACY					
1. When something is not working in our school, the faculty and staff predict and prevent rather than react and repair.	1	2	3	4	5
2. School members are interdependent and value each other.	1	2	3	4	5
3. Members of our school community seek alternatives to problems/issues rather than repeating what we have always done.	1	2	3	4	5
4. Members of our school community seek to define the problem/issue rather than blame others.	1	2	3	4	5
5. The school staff is empowered to make instructional decisions rather than waiting for supervisors to tell them what to do.	1	2	3	4	5
6. People work here because they enjoy and choose to be here.	1	2	3	4	5

Source: Penelope Masden-Copas

SCORING GUIDE: SCHOOL CULTURE TRIAGE

The lowest triage score is 17 and the highest score is 85. After using the triage questions in several program evaluations, our data suggest the following:

- 17 – 40 =** Critical and immediate attention necessary. Conduct a full-scale assessment of your school's culture and invest all available resources in repairing and healing your school's culture.
- 41 – 60 =** Modifications and improvements are necessary. Begin with a more intense assessment of your school's culture to determine which area is most in need of improvement.
- 60 – 75 =** Monitor and continue to make positive adjustments.
- 76 – 85 =** Amazing! We have never had a score higher than 75! Continue monitoring, though, with each school improvement planning cycle, or at least every two years, to be sure you stay in top shape.

Source: *Penelope Masden-Copas*

Note: To gain the most complete view of your school's culture, this assessment is best taken by all members of the school staff.

SCHOOL CULTURE AUDIT

This school culture assessment has been used successfully in public schools of North Carolina, Florida, and Kentucky over the last decade. It can be used with one school or an entire district. It provides immediate feedback, is cost-effective, and recognizes both strengths and challenges.

What is a School Culture Audit?

What are we looking for in a School Culture Audit? An audit is not a “find a problem and fix it” process. Rather than asking, “What is wrong with this place?” cultural auditors ask, “What, in your opinion, would make this school the best it can be?” School culture is assessed by examining three types of behavior (Phillips, 1993):

- **Professional collaboration**
Do teachers and staff meet and work together to solve instructional, organizational, or curricular issues?
- **Collegial relationships**
Do people enjoy working together, support one another, and feel valued and included?
- **Efficacy/self-determination**
Are people in this school because they want to be? Do they work to improve their skills as professionals, or do they see themselves as victims of a large and uncaring bureaucracy?

Each audit has five steps:

1. Interviews
2. Observations
3. Survey
4. Evaluation
5. Presentation

When combined, information obtained from these different vantage points produce a clear picture of the school’s culture. The facilitators should not be from the school being audited.

Directions

Step One: Interviews — Designate days when the facilitators will interview staff, parents, students, classified staff, and administrators. See Page 47 for more detailed instructions for the interviews.

Step Two: Observations — Designate days when facilitators will make informal observations of the school. These observations include discussions with students, faculty, and other stakeholders. See Pages 48-49 for more detailed instructions for the interviews.

Step Three: Survey — Designate days when representatives of all school community groups will take the school culture survey. See Pages 50-51 for the survey and more detailed instructions about administering the survey.

Step Four: Evaluation — Evaluate what has been learned during the School Culture Audit. See Page 52 for more detailed instructions about evaluating the results.

Step Five: Presentation — Present the findings of the School Culture Audit to the community. See Page 53 for more detailed instructions about the presentation.

Source: Christopher Wagner

STEP ONE: INTERVIEWS

Directions to the facilitators

1. Ask the school principal for a designated space for the interviews – a conference room, designated classroom, corner of the media center, or faculty lounge to conduct interviews. Make sure there are beverages and snacks available since most professional staff will be giving up their preparation period.
2. Randomly select groups of five to eight each of faculty members, parents, students, classified staff, and administrators to be interviewed. Interview the various groups separately.
3. Assign at least two facilitators to each group. Explain the process you will be using and how the information that you collect will be used. Tell interviewees that they are not required to answer any question. Do not use a tape recorder – nothing shuts down an interview quite as fast, and you want open, candid responses.
4. Ask each group a series of questions relating to the school's culture. Decide in advance which questions each facilitator will ask. Both facilitators ask questions, take notes, and record direct quotes.
5. Ask vision questions to encourage a positive picture of the future. Instead of asking "what is?," ask "what ought to be?" Keep the group's focus positive and avoid falling into a "woe is me" whining syndrome. Pay attention to the dominant emotions elicited from these "vision" questions:
 - When you awoke this morning and thought about another day in this school (as a teacher, student, custodian, etc.), what was the dominant feeling or emotion you experienced?
 - What factors caused you to feel that way?
 - Think of the previous week in terms of emotional peaks and valleys. Identify some peaks of bliss. Identify some valleys of despair.
 - Imagine a peak of emotional bliss next week as a teacher (student, administrator, etc.). How would you set it up for yourself? Who could you get to help?
6. Identify what is important to the group and how people improve. Look for whether their responses reflect the formal curriculum and stated professional development goals. Do improvement areas reflect the silent curriculum and unstated or spin-off outcomes? Note responses in which people say they are learning from each other or in more formal settings such as planned staff development sessions.
 - As a teacher (student, administrator, etc.), recall one way you have improved in the past year. What is something you are doing differently or better?
 - What were the major forces or who contributed to your improvement?
 - What is one way you would like to improve in the next 12 months? How could you make this happen?
7. Get to the heart of attitudes about differentiated instruction/ student achievement with a question and a follow-up. Typical responses to the first question detail the lack of study habits and poor parenting.
 - How have students changed over the past few years?
 - Since we all agree that students are not the same as they were a few years ago, how have you modified your teaching to reach every child?

Other questions might include:

- If you had the power to make today the best day of teaching you ever had, what would you do?
 - How could we make this staff come together in a unified, collective, and supportive manner?
 - What are some instructional highlights of your day and what can you do to experience them more often?
 - How can teachers make the classified staff feel more valued and respected?
8. Take a few minutes to debrief and compare notes after each interview.
 9. Analyze notes for evidence of the presence or absence of professional collaboration, collegiality, and self-determination. This information will be included in the School Culture Audit report, which will be shared with school stakeholders.

The responses to these questions will begin to yield the emotional status of each group. Facilitators identify sources of dominant emotions and hints for improvement from the "imagined bliss" question.

Source: Christopher Wagner

STEP TWO: OBSERVATIONS

Facilitators make informal observations of the school. These observations include discussions with students, faculty, and other stakeholders.*

Directions to the facilitators

1. Speak with a good cross-section of students and staff.
2. Separate and circulate throughout the school for best results.
3. Look for specific examples of 13 characteristics related to the three types of behavior being evaluated by the audit: **professional collaboration** (teachers planning together, sharing teaching modalities, teaming in their delivery, etc.), **collegiality** (friendly environment, emotional support, continuation of cherished rituals and traditions), and **efficacy/self-determination**. Make a note of each example and determine the degree to which each characteristic is present in the school. Share the notations in the profile presentation. Note both positive and negative examples.

Each of the 13 characteristics listed here is related to those three types of behavior. For example, 3, 4, 6, and 10 support professional collaboration; 1, 5, 7, 8, 11, 12, and 13 align with collegiality; and 2 and 9 represent efficacy.

Determine to what degree each of these characteristics is present in the school.

Examples:

- Facilitator observes shared and good-natured (as opposed to mean-spirited) humor in the faculty lounge as an example of characteristic #8.
 - Facilitator observes mutual respect exhibited between teachers and secretarial staff prior to the beginning of the school day. A notation is made on characteristic #1: collegiality.
 - Facilitator observes cooperative effort to secure reading grant and makes a notation regarding #4: experimentation and entrepreneurship, and #9: shared decision making.
4. After the observations, facilitators review notes in a debriefing session. Their notes are shaped and interpreted to more clearly specify the characteristics identified. The data are included in the School Culture Audit report to the staff and school community with all other collected data.

C H A R A C T E R I S T I C S

1. **Collegiality.** The way adults treat each other, i.e., respect and harmony vs. disrespect and discord.
2. **Efficacy.** Feeling of ownership or capacity to influence decisions; i.e., do people tend to live with or solve problems?
3. **High expectations of self and others.** Excellence is acknowledged; improvement is celebrated, supported, and shared.
4. **Experimentation and entrepreneurship.** New ideas abound and invention occurs.
5. **Trust and confidence.** Participants believe in the leaders and each other based on the match between creeds and deeds.
6. **Tangible support.** Improvement efforts are substantive with abundant resources made available by all.
7. **Appreciation and recognition of improvement.** People feel special and act special.
8. **Humor.** Caring is expressed through “kidding” or joking in tasteful ways.
9. **Shared decision making by all participants.** Those affected by a decision are involved in making and implementing the decision.
10. **Shared vision.** Participants understand what’s important and avoid trivial tasks.
11. **Traditions.** The school has identifiable celebrations and rituals that are important to the school community.
12. **Open and honest communication.** Information flows throughout the organization in formal and informal channels. Everyone receives information on a “need-to-know” basis.
13. **Metaphors and stories.** There is evidence of behavior being communicated and influenced by internal imagery.

Source: Christopher Wagner

* Note: Informal observations are not formal supervisory observations.

OBSERVATIONS

- 1. Collegiality.** The way adults treat each other, i.e., respect and harmony vs. disrespect and discord.

- 2. Efficacy.** Feeling of ownership or capacity to influence decisions; i.e., do people tend to live with or solve problems?

- 3. High expectations of self and others.** Excellence is acknowledged; improvement is celebrated, supported, and shared.

- 4. Experimentation and entrepreneurship.** New ideas abound and invention occurs.

- 5. Trust and confidence.** Participants believe in the leaders and each other based on the match between creeds and deeds.

- 6. Tangible support.** Improvement efforts are substantive with abundant resources made available by all.

- 7. Appreciation and recognition of improvement.** People feel special and act special.

- 8. Humor.** Caring is expressed through “kidding” or joking in tasteful ways.

- 9. Shared decision making by all participants.** Those affected by a decision are involved in making and implementing the decision.

- 10. Shared vision.** Participants understand what’s important and avoid trivial tasks.

- 11. Traditions.** The school has identifiable celebrations and rituals that are important to the school community.

- 12. Open and honest communication.** Information flows throughout the organization in formal and informal channels. Everyone receives information on a “need-to-know” basis.

- 13. Metaphors and stories.** There is evidence of behavior being communicated and influenced by internal imagery.

Source: Christopher Wagner

STEP THREE: SURVEY

Directions to the facilitators

- Ask representatives of all school community groups to take the School Culture Survey (*see next page*).
- Assure participants survey responses are anonymous.
- Surveys should be presented and collected in person – mailing is a waste of time and postage.
- Professional staff may complete the survey in 10 to 15 minutes in a faculty meeting. A faculty member collects the surveys at that time.
- The school secretary usually circulates and collects surveys from teaching assistants, other clerical staff, custodians, and bus drivers.
- Administer parent and student surveys immediately after their participation in the interview. Parent surveys also can be distributed during open house, parent/teacher conferences, or at a PTA/PTO meeting.
- A committee (formed for this purpose of an administrator, teacher, clerical staff member, etc., or the school improvement committee) tabulates the responses, creating separate scores for each subgroup to compare.

Tabulating survey results

A standing school committee (such as the school improvement committee) should tabulate the survey results, providing an average for what is perceived to be present and what is perceived to be important for each of the 13 questions.

The committee should then review the averages for gaps in the two numbers on each question. A general rule is that gaps of 3.0 or more need to be addressed.

Example

In the **presence** line for #1: Democratic decision making. Four people circle 2, eight people circle 3, two people circle 4, eight people circle 5, and two people circle 6. The sum of all rankings is 92. The mean, 92 divided by 24 (people) equals 3.8.

Then, in the **importance** line, two people circle 5, three people circle 6, 10 people circle 8, seven people circle 9, and two circle 10. The sum of all rankings is 191. The mean, 191 divided by 24 (people) equals 7.9.

The gap (difference) between importance and present equals 4.1. Conclusion: This school should address the issue of democratic decision making.

Source: Christopher Wagner. Survey adapted from Phillips, G. (1993). *The school-classroom culture audit*. Vancouver, B.C.: Eduserv, British Columbia School Trustees Publishing.

SCHOOL CULTURE SURVEY

Background: The 13 items in this survey have been identified as key indicators of a school's culture. Your opinion and ranking of these factors is important and will be valuable in assessing your school's culture. What is culture? For this survey, culture is defined as the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that characterize the school in terms of:

- How people treat and feel about each other;
- The extent to which people feel included and appreciated; and
- Rituals and traditions reflecting collaboration and collegiality.

Directions: Please rate each item twice. First, rate the item by circling an appropriate number reflecting its PRESENCE in your school. Second, rate the item by circling the appropriate number relative to its IMPORTANCE to you.

I am a: (Please circle one)

Student Teacher aide Custodian Parent
Secretary Administrator Teacher Bus driver Other

1. Democratic and participatory decision making.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

2. Strong leadership from administrators, teachers, or teams of both.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

3. Staff stability-low turnover from year to year.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

4. A planned, coordinated curriculum supported by research and faculty.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

5. Schoolwide selected and agreed-upon staff development.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

6. Parental involvement, engagement, and support.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

7. Schoolwide recognition of success for students and staff.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

8. An effort to maximize active learning in academic areas.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

9. District support for school improvement efforts.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

10. Collaborative instructional planning and collegial relationships.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

11. Sense of community, family, and team.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

12. Clear goals and high expectations for students and staff.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

13. Order and discipline established through consensus and consistent application.

Not present 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Always present
Not important 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Extremely important

Please use the space below to make any additional comments about the items on this survey.

Source: Christopher Wagner. Survey adapted from Phillips, G. (1993). *The school-classroom culture audit*. Vancouver, B.C.: Eduserv, British Columbia School Trustees Publishing.

STEP FOUR: EVALUATION

Directions to the facilitators

1. Analyze the data and identify strengths (presence of culture-rich examples) and weaknesses.
2. Organize the analyzed data into a written School Culture Profile answering questions such as:
 - What specific comments (quotes) were expressed about building professional collaboration in this school?
 - What did we observe that would lead us to believe there is a strong sense of collegiality here?
 - Which responses indicate the presence or lack of efficacy?
 - What gaps exist between what is present and what is important as revealed in the survey?
 - How do the survey results compare with information gathered in the interviews and observations?
 - What trends or common themes are revealed in the collected data?
3. If there are no specific examples of professional collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy/self-determination, then point to what is unhealthy about the culture and what is inhibiting improvement. Some examples:
 - When teachers say they feel isolated and want to spend more time with colleagues, there is an obvious lack of opportunity for collegial involvement.
 - If teachers cannot identify a source of help for an instructional dilemma, there is a problem with professional collaboration.
 - Constant complaints about red tape, central office policy and the ever-increasing demands made by the state department reveal the lack of self-determination and efficacy.
4. Present the written profile to the school improvement team and administration before making an oral presentation to the school community.
5. Many schools elect to do a School Culture Audit in the fall and again in the spring as a pre/post instrument.

Source: Christopher Wagner

STEP FIVE: PRESENTATION

Directions to the facilitators

1. Use an extended faculty meeting held immediately after school for the presentation, or better, report it at an evening PTA/PTO/School Council meeting. Since the meetings are always positive and extremely informative, schools typically make great efforts to invite the community.
2. Keep the presentation to an hour or less.
3. With two or more facilitators, one facilitator opens the meeting by sharing statements and direct quotes from the interviews. These statements are tied to the big three behaviors: professional collaboration, collegial relationships, efficacy/self-determination.
4. Another facilitator shares notes from the observation, including comments overheard or summaries of discussions. These comments answer the questions: How are people treating each other? What types of behaviors are staff members modeling for the children? How inviting does the school feel? What evidence is there of collaboration, collegiality, and efficacy?
5. Share information from the survey, noting any significant gaps between presence and importance.
6. Conclude with four or five recommendations for improvement. Facilitators also may agree to work with the school improvement team, site-based council, etc., to assist in planning and implementing improvements.
7. Facilitate a discussion among stakeholders about the findings. Addressing the following key questions provides a basis for sustained improvement that has the potential to involve and secure ownership from the entire school community:
 - What areas of our school's culture (professional collaboration, collegiality, efficacy/self-determination) appear to be strongest and why?
 - What can we do as a school community to maintain and/or improve these strengths?
 - What areas of our school's culture (professional collaboration, collegiality, efficacy/self-determination) present the greatest challenge for improvement?
 - What can we as a school community do to improve in these areas?

Source: Christopher Wagner

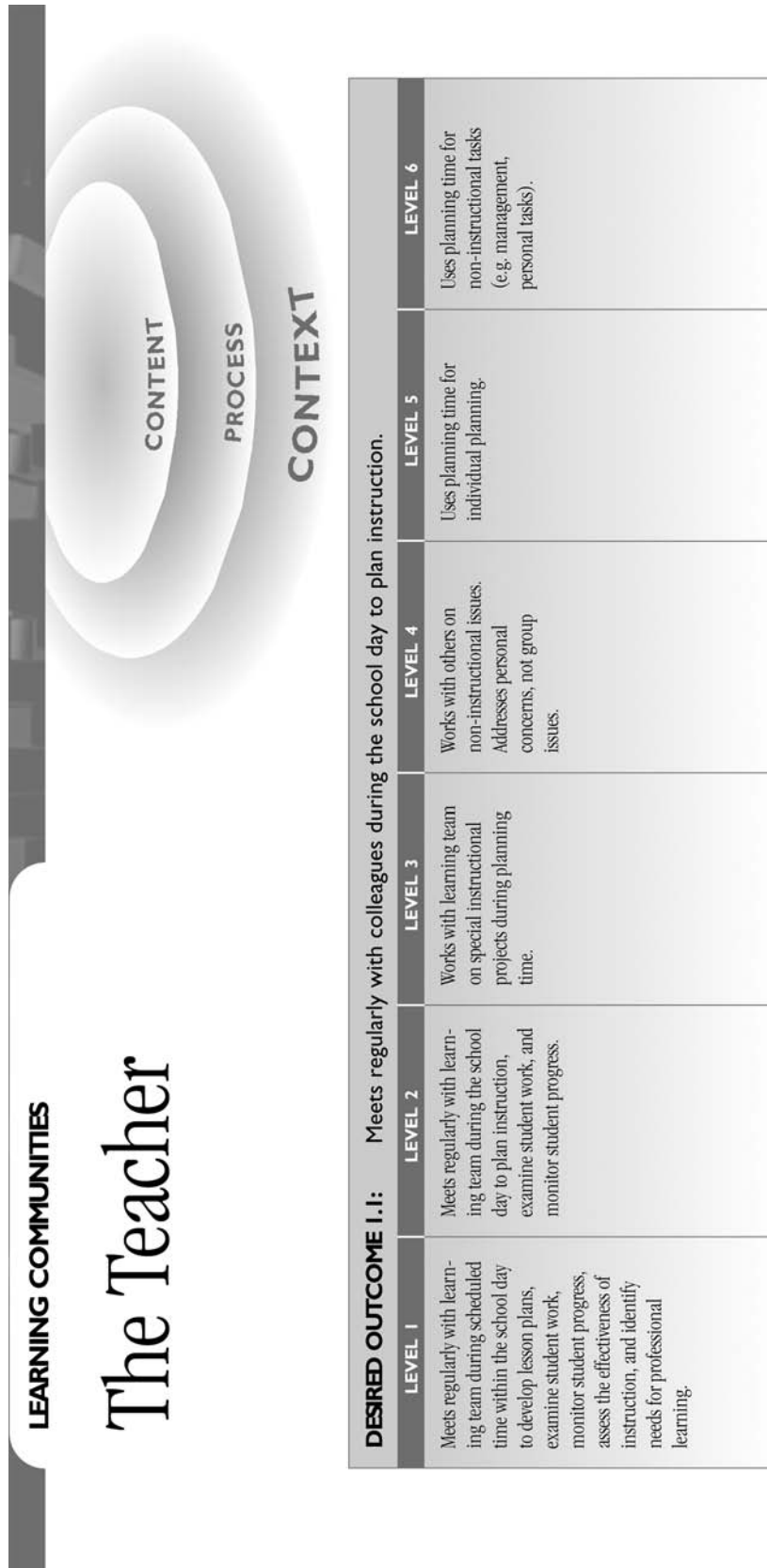
PRESENTATION TIPS

When presenting to the school community, take care to highlight school culture strengths. There is always something good to say.

A typical statement might be:

"During the interview, several people indicated a desire to develop thematic units with teachers in other disciplines. One teacher said, 'I respect my colleagues and would like the opportunity to just sit down and talk about what they teach. A few years ago, we worked together on a thematic unit. The kids liked it, we got a lot accomplished, and it gave us a chance to teach together. Many of us would like to do that again.' Another teacher reported an interest in learning more teaching strategies from her colleagues.

"Based on the data collected, one of the facilitator's recommendations for strengthening professional collaboration would involve planning time for several volunteers to develop a pilot thematic unit. Once the unit has been taught, the teachers involved could report their experiences to the entire faculty."

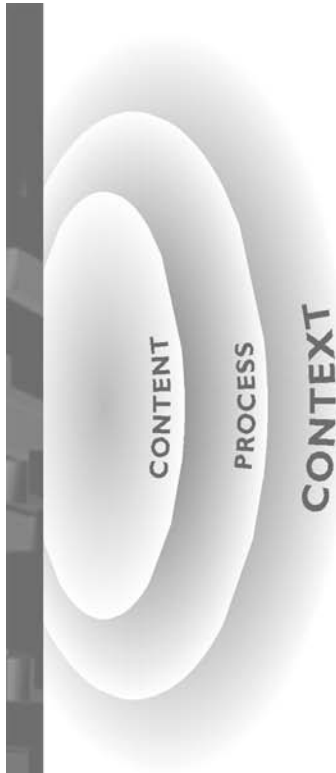


LEARNING COMMUNITIES: THE TEACHER

DESIRED OUTCOME I.2: Aligns collaborative work with school improvement goals.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Participates frequently with all professional staff members to discuss, document, and demonstrate how their work aligns with school and district goals. Engages in professional learning with colleagues to support this work.	Aligns the work of the learning team with school-wide goals. Works in a learning team (grade level, subject matter, interdisciplinary, vertical) to address issues related to the grade or subject area.	Works in a learning team (grade level, subject matter, interdisciplinary, vertical) to address issues related to specific grade or subject area.	Works alone; addresses individual issues rather than school or grade level issues.		
DESIRED OUTCOME I.3: Participates in learning teams, some of whose membership extends beyond the school.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Participates in state, regional, districtwide and/or national networks. Participates in interdisciplinary or subject matter/grade level learning teams.	Participates in districtwide and regional networks and interdisciplinary or subject matter/grade level learning teams.	Participates in both interdisciplinary and subject matter/grade level learning teams within the district.	Participates in interdisciplinary learning teams and/or subject matter or grade level teams only.	Participates in individual learning outside grade level, subject area, and/or school.	

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

The Principal



DESIRED OUTCOME 1.1: Prepares teachers for skillful collaboration.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Ensures that the role of group facilitator becomes the responsibility of everyone and rotates as the skill level of group members increases. Provides training and support to develop faculty members to serve as skilled facilitators who provide support during whole school and learning team meetings.	Provides training and support to develop faculty members to serve as skilled facilitators who provide support during whole school and learning team meetings.	Provides opportunities for team leaders to learn about group process, group dynamics, the stages of group development, and group decision-making. Schedules multiple sessions throughout the year as well as coaching experiences.	Provides support to learning teams and/or whole school meetings throughout the stages of group development by supplying a skilled group facilitator.	Does not provide teachers professional development to build collaboration skills.	
DESIRED OUTCOME 1.2: Creates an organizational structure that supports collegial learning.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Persists with a regular schedule for collegial interaction in the face of resistance. Structures time for teacher reflection about their learning. Monitors to ensure the time is used well.	Structures the daily/weekly schedule for regular meeting times during the school day for collegial interaction. Monitors to ensure the time is used well.	Uses staff meetings for collegial interaction and sharing. Grade level and content area groups meet throughout the year with the goal of sharing ideas, resources, and curricula.	Does not adapt the structure of the school to accommodate collegial learning.		

LEARNING COMMUNITIES: THE PRINCIPAL

DESIRED OUTCOME I.3: Understands and implements an incentive system that ensures collaborative work.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Works with teachers to create and implement an incentive system for learning teams. Recognizes and rewards joint work that results in student gains and accomplishes school goals.	Recognizes and rewards teams for working together to accomplish school goals and increase student learning.	Creates structures and processes to ensure there is mutual support among teachers while expecting each person to focus work on school goals and outcomes.	Requests that faculty members cooperate with each other.	Does not implement a support system for collaborative work.	
DESIRED OUTCOME I.4: Creates and maintains a learning community to support teacher and student learning.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Builds a culture that respects risk-taking, encourages collegial exchange, identifies and resolves conflict, sustains trust, and engages the whole staff as a learning community to improve the learning of all students.	Works with faculty to create a variety of learning teams to attain different goals. Facilitates conflict resolution among group members. Supports learning teams by providing articles, videos, and other activities for use during team time.	Works with faculty to create learning teams with clear goals, outcomes, and results outlined in writing. Expects and reviews team logs each month in order to coordinate activities within and among the teams.	Creates ad hoc study teams without clear direction or accountability.	Does not create learning teams.	
DESIRED OUTCOME I.5: Participates with other administrators in one or more learning communities.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Attends regularly learning community meetings organized at the district, regional, state, and/or national level to identify and solve school challenges, as well as to learn together.	Meets regularly with a district learning team to solve school challenges and learn together.	Meets informally with administrative colleagues to discuss school challenges.	Provides support to learning teams and/or whole school meetings throughout the stages of group development by supplying a skilled group facilitator.	Does not participate in any learning community.	

What does your community know and believe about teacher learning?

Use the survey on Page 3 with parent groups to stimulate a conversation about their knowledge about teaching and professional learning. The purpose of the discussion is to air parent perspectives on professional development, not to tell parents that their opinions are wrong.

Preparation:

1. Prepare slides of several key points that you want to make during your discussion of teacher learning. The best information to share with parents in your community will be information about the impact of professional development on the learning of your students, perhaps from your school improvement plans or annual school reports.

However, national information can also be helpful during these discussions. In advance of your meeting, visit the NSDC web site — www.nsdc.org/library/policy/SDLCCharts.pdf — and view slides that NSDC created to advance our policy work. Review those slides yourself to decide which are most applicable for your discussion.

Some that may be especially helpful during a discussion are:

- Slide #4:** Student achievement increases for various expenditures
- Slide #7:** Influence of professional development on student achievement
- Slide #14:** Teachers' views of the effectiveness of collaboration
- Slide #20:** Effects of teaching quality on student outcomes

2. Create a handout from Page 3. NSDC grants permission to any NSDC member to use this survey with parent groups in their communities. Provide pens and pencils for parents.
3. Distribute one copy of the survey to each person in the group. Allow about 10 minutes for parents to respond to these questions.
4. Presenting the results can be done in a variety of ways. Here are two options:
 - Option 1:** Read each question and ask parents to announce their responses publicly.
 - Option 2:** Tabulate the scores using the chart below and present the results to the group before beginning a discussion.

SCORING GUIDE

Indicate the number of responses in each category.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Not Sure	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
6.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
7.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
8.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
9.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
10.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
11.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
12.	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

What do you know and believe about teacher learning?

Please circle the response that indicates your views regarding each statement.

1. I want my child enrolled in a school that has a deep commitment to the continuous learning of the staff.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
2. Teachers will learn more through collaboration with other teachers than attending workshops.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
3. Teachers learned everything they need to know about teaching when they were in college.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
4. What teachers know about their subject area has a direct impact on how much their students are able to learn.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
5. Teachers should do all of their learning on their own time.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
6. Science is the only subject in which we know more today than we knew 20 years ago. That means that science teachers are the only teachers who need to keep learning about new content for the subjects they teach.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
7. Teaching is a natural skill that really cannot be improved upon.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
8. Teachers only need to spend a few hours each year learning how to improve their teaching.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
9. The changing demographics in my community present new challenges to teachers and means that all teachers need to learn how to more effectively teach all children.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
10. Teachers can learn a great deal about children and teaching by talking with other teachers and observing other teachers in their classrooms during the school day.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
11. The quality of teaching has a direct impact on the quality of learning for students.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree
12. Only bad teachers need to spend time learning how to improve how they teach. Good teachers will keep getting better without making any special effort.
Strongly Agree Agree Not Sure Disagree Strongly Disagree

Frequently asked questions

NSDC has answered parents' most frequently asked questions about professional learning. You have our permission to use any of these questions and answers in school or district newsletters or to post on your school or district web site as long as NSDC is credited in this way:

Source: National Staff Development Council, www.nsd.org.

Send other questions that you want us to answer for parents to NSDCJoan@aol.com. We'll answer them and add them to our online FAQs for parents at www.nsd.org/talkingtoparents.cfm.

What is staff development anyway?

Staff development describes the time that teachers and principals use to update their knowledge and skills so they can do their work better. Sometimes, it's called professional development, inservice, institute days, workshops, or training. Sometimes, districts enable teachers to use time during school days to meet with other teachers to plan lessons and examine student work. This is also a significant form of staff development. No matter what the name, however, staff development is time when teachers and principals learn more so students can learn more.

Why didn't teachers learn what they needed to know in college like other professionals do?

Most professionals update their knowledge and skills throughout their careers. Would you go to a physician or dentist, for example, who had stopped learning after they graduated from medical or dental school?

It's impossible for teachers to learn everything they need to know for a lifetime of teaching during just a few years in college. Some of the most important lessons can be learned only after they have their own students.

Plus many changes have occurred since teachers graduated from college. There have been new discoveries in science, new research on human learning and teaching, changing demographics in communities, and new expectations for what students should learn in different subject areas. Teachers have to stay on top of all of this in order to be good teachers for your children.

Why do teachers have to take half days off from school for staff development? Why can't teachers do this on their own time, at night or on the weekends so they don't take time away from their students?

The school district has a responsibility for ensuring that teachers are up to speed in what and how they teach. That means the school district is obligated to provide teachers with time to learn during their work day.

Many teachers will choose to take a university course during their personal time but that is different from the learning that the district expects of them and invests in.

Teachers in my child's school spend an hour to an hour and a half every day just talking to each other. I think this is really a waste of time. Why can't they spend that time teaching instead of talking to each other?

When teachers have grade-level or department meetings, they generally use this time to ensure that all teachers are on target with their instruction. They compare lessons, test results, homework assignments, and sometimes they plan lessons that each of them will teach. That helps ensure that students are equally prepared for the next grade.

In schools where teachers just go into their own rooms and teach whatever and however they want, students often finish the year with very different experiences. That can mean that some students are not prepared for the next grade. Regular team meetings are one way to prevent that from happening.

We have too many half days in this district. Teachers are still in the building so why aren't my children in class with them?

When children have a half day off from school, teachers are still working. They're just working in a different way.

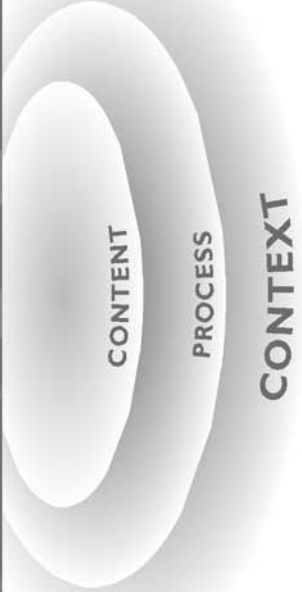
Ask the school's principal exactly what teachers are doing during these half days. A second question for the principal is whether other options for teacher learning would be just as effective as half days and less disruptive to a child's school day. (See NSDC's list of options for professional learning at www.nsd.org/talkingtoparents.cfm.)

I hear teachers say that staff development days are a waste of time because they learn nothing. If teachers don't think they're valuable, why does my school keep doing them?

When a teacher complains, ask him or her to tell you exactly what goes on during staff development. Try to determine if teachers had a voice in deciding what they would learn. Ask if this teacher's concerns are shared by others. Did teachers object to learning something new or did they object to the way the new information was provided for them? Were teachers just sitting and listening or were they doing work related to their classrooms? Were they overwhelmed by what they heard? Judge for yourself whether you believe the time could have been valuable for that teacher.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Central Office Staff Members



DESIRED OUTCOME 1.1: Prepare administrators and teachers to be skillful members of learning teams.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Develop a cadre of teachers and administrators who can work with learning teams within the schools and district. Provide intermittent support to teams by a skilled facilitator throughout the stages of group development. Schedule a skilled group facilitator to coach team leaders during learning team meetings. Provide team leaders an ongoing series of experiences to learn about group process, group dynamics, the stages of group development, and using data in group decision making.	Provide intermittent support to teams by a skilled facilitator throughout the stages of group development. Schedule a skilled group facilitator to coach team leaders during learning team meetings. Provide team leaders an ongoing series of experiences to learn about group process, group dynamics, the stages of group development, and using data in group decision making.	Schedule a skilled group facilitator to coach team leaders during learning team meetings. Provide team leaders an ongoing series of experiences to learn about group process, group dynamics, the stages of group development, and using data in group decision making.	Provide team leaders ongoing experiences to learn about group process, group dynamics, the stages of group development, and using data in group decision making.	Provide no professional development on working effectively within learning teams.	

LEARNING COMMUNITIES: CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF MEMBERS

DESIRED OUTCOME 1.2: Maintain and support learning teams.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Consider learning teams as an essential component when aligning the district's comprehensive staff development program with school and district goals.	Coordinate activities between and among learning teams to maximize opportunities for all. Review learning team logs in order to provide articles, videos, books, and training to support team learning goals.	Provide experiences for teachers and administrators to learn how to work within learning teams. Review learning team logs in order to provide articles, videos, books, and training to support team learning goals.	Create ad hoc study groups that meet at their own discretion but have no accountability.	Do not address issues of collegial learning within the district or school.	
DESIRED OUTCOME 1.3: Participate with others as a member of a learning team.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Work with other members of a formal national, regional, and district learning team to acquire new knowledge and skills related to district priority goals.	Work with other members of a formal regional and district learning team to acquire new knowledge and skills related to district priority goals.	Work with other members of a formal district learning team to acquire new knowledge and skills related to district priority goals.	Meet in informal district learning teams with those who have similar professional interests and goals.	Work alone and do not participate in a learning community to improve professional skills and knowledge.	
DESIRED OUTCOME 1.4: Support learning team use of technology.					
LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4	LEVEL 5	LEVEL 6
Provide access to technologies that will assist learning team members in accomplishing their goals (e.g., web conferencing, online surveys, decision making tools).	Provide resources to support the goals of learning teams who are using technology.	Provide a communication system for learning team members such as e-mail, online discussion forums, and bulletin boards.	Do not provide access to technology for learning teams.		