"10 Fundamental Cultural Building blocks of PLC_Greg Kushnir"

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As a Solution Tree associate for the last 7 years, I have had the privilege of working with many groups of educators as they try to develop their Professional Learning Community (PLC). One of the things I try to make abundantly clear is that to become a PLC they must re-culture their school. Whether they are positive, negative or somewhere in between, all schools have preexisting cultures. The problem most schools face when beginning their journey is that the cultural ideals of a PLC are often in direct violation of their existing culture. As in the real world; when cultures clash there is often conflict. Change means stress and, as a result, school leaders can expect a certain degree of push-back. Whether this push-back is able to derail a school's PLC efforts is dependent on the skill of the leadership team in supporting the desired cultural shift. I believe the schools that successfully move from conflict to collaboration have leadership teams that pay attention to 10 fundamental cultural building blocks.

1) Communication:

- There is a clear core purpose and it is communicated both verbally and through adult action;
- A non-negotiable list is created to clarify staff expectations;
- The language of "I" and "Try" is replaced with "We" and "Will". The word "Will" is a commitment to action and "We" means no one person is responsible for accomplishing our goals;
- Goals are created and publicly communicated. Publicly communicating goals makes them much more likely to be accomplished.

2) Commitment:

PLC schools don't pick and choose. They commit to deep implementation of all PLC concepts. Doug Reeves put it this way, "We found that for many change initiatives, implementation that was moderate or occasional was no better than implementation that was completely absent."

3) Participation and Shared Responsibility:

Professional Learning Communities find ways for all staff members to contribute toward the accomplishment of their stated goals. This means that office staff, custodians, part time employees, educational assistants and singleton teachers must all feel like their efforts are making a difference.

Collaborative teams must be allowed to make decisions related to their work. It is ill advised for school leaders to believe that shared responsibility can be developed in a school where the leaders control every decision. Helping to facilitate the work of collaborative teams is very different than telling them what to do.

4) Shared Accountability:

If a school is to close the achievement gap and actually accomplish the mission of high levels of learning for every student, the teachers must develop an accountability to each other. Teachers have to take

shared goals. They understand that success breeds more success!

A universal truth in becoming a professional learning community is that it doesn't happen overnight. However, school leaders can shorten the journey and make the road much smoother by understanding the importance of paying attention to their school's cultural development.