



*A Facilitator's Guide to*  
**Professional Learning Teams**

*Creating on-the-job opportunities  
for teachers to continually  
learn and grow*

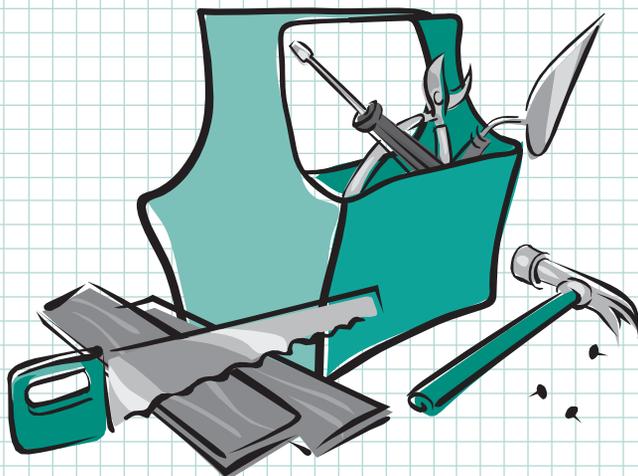
**SERVE**

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*Creating on-the-job opportunities  
for teachers to learn and grow*



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# A Facilitator's Guide to Professional Learning Teams

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# Foreword

Since writing *Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement* nearly eight years ago, I have learned that the attributes associated with such communities—supportive and shared leadership, learning and its applications, shared values and vision, supportive conditions, and shared personal practice—are not easily introduced into schools steeped in traditional ways of doing business. The “schools-as-cells-and-bells” and “teacher-as-solo-artist” mental models are just too strong.

So I will paraphrase now what I said then: Professional development is an entry point for changing teachers’ mental models. Earlier research finds teachers’ attitudes and abilities are shaped and reinforced not through traditional models of staff development but in the contexts in which they work and learn, including the communities formed by their relationships with other professionals. How, then, do we organize to create and sustain such communities of professional development?

Part of the answer may lay in this most impressive and comprehensive guide written for SERVE by Anne Jolly. I believe that this guide can make a real contribution to the profession and to those working on becoming professional learning communities. I believe that the professional learning community is not only an excellent professional development strategy but is also essentially a first-rate continuous improvement process. Anne has taken the essentials of an improvement or reform process and translated them ever so well into the activities of a learning community of professionals in the school. Thus, the process should be somewhat familiar to educators and a useful idea in this new setting.

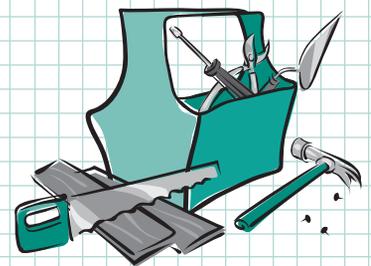
I am impressed with the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of this guide. The steps are very clear, concrete, and extensive and provide a splendid, formalized method to create the building blocks of professional learning among communities of practitioners. I believe that this product is an excellent addition to what we have available, and I can see myself using it.

Shirley M. Hord, Ph.D.  
Scholar Emerita, Southwest Educational Development Laboratory  
Austin, Texas

July 2004

# Introduction

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The story is told of a young World War II soldier who decided to take a short walk in camp the night before a major battle. General Dwight D. Eisenhower approached and quietly walked beside the young man. The general's identity went undetected. "What are you thinking about, son?" asked the general. "I guess I'm afraid," the young man replied. "Well, so am I," said Eisenhower. "Let us walk together and perhaps we will draw strength from each other."

— DuFour and Eaker,  
*Professional Learning  
Communities at Work*



For a more detailed description of the following events, see "Reforming Instruction Through Collaboration: A Better Method for Informing and Sustaining School Change"

—*Middle Ground*, February 2001,  
pp. 28–31

## The Story of a Teacher

When I entered the teaching profession, a set of unwritten rules seemed to govern teacher behaviors and interactions.

- 📌 You are responsible for *your* students and *your* subject. (Translation: Don't tread on other teachers' territory. You take care of your business, and they will handle theirs.)
- 📌 Find efficient teaching routines and methods, and stick with them. (Translation: Find a comfortable way to teach, and avoid change.)
- 📌 Be wary of changes in curriculum and instruction—these, too, shall pass. (Translation: students and society always will have the same basic needs, so just ignore the new-fangled stuff.)

At first, this peculiar way of thinking actually made sense to me. After all, these beliefs were rooted in long-standing education traditions and deeply embedded in school culture. Before long, however, reality hit. I realized that, however well-prepared I felt when I entered the classroom, I definitely needed more knowledge and skill to help my students learn better. Instead of being cautious of changes, I found myself grabbing for new ideas. As often as I could, I made my way into my colleagues' classrooms, asking questions and running ideas by them. Try as I might, I never found that mysterious "efficient teaching routine" that I could use with students time after time.

After 12 years of teaching, I took a three-year leave of absence from the classroom to work in a teaching/professional development role. In 1998 I re-entered the classroom, invigorated with even more enthusiasm and anticipation than I felt with my first position. This time I felt *really* prepared to teach. I was armed with a toolkit of strategies to deal with a new generation of students. I was ready to tackle the challenges of rapidly shifting demographics and changing academic requirements. I felt sure I had the knowledge and skills to prepare young adolescents for a complex, fast-paced, high-tech workforce. I was wired for action!

By the end of the first month, I looked at my students hard at work on their science assignment and realized that, instead of revolutionizing my classroom practices, I had fallen back into many old teaching patterns. Caught up in the familiar day-to-day routines

and expectations that still dominate school cultures, I found it surprisingly hard to put new routines and innovating teaching ideas into operation. While I found this situation perturbing, I was curious as well. Why wasn't I rapidly transforming my teaching practices with flexible, innovative strategies that I knew would work better? I felt knowledgeable and motivated. What, exactly, was my problem? Were there other teachers who wanted to change but who, like me, found change like swimming up a waterfall?

Three ideas proposed by Linda Darling-Hammond made a lot of sense to me as I considered my dilemma. Darling-Hammond works extensively in the area of professional development. She and her colleagues made the following recommendations in a September 1996 report for the National Commission on Teaching For America's Future.

- Change in instruction begins with learning new ideas, followed by planning, trying out new strategies, getting feedback, and reflecting *together* with other teachers to learn from experience and refine practice.
- School organizational patterns must allow teachers to work *collaboratively* to address student needs and to develop a shared feeling of responsibility for students.
- School schedules and staffing must create regular blocks of time in teachers' schedules so they can work *together* on teaching and growing professionally.

The isolated classroom scenario simply wasn't working for me anymore. My students needed to learn more material and new skills faster, and I needed to improve my teaching expertise and make permanent changes in my teaching practice. I wondered what it would be like to work in an environment that encourages teacher collaboration, support, and personal growth. What would happen if teachers worked *collectively* to increase our expertise and change our teaching practices? Together, could we break the chains of tradition and forge a new way of doing business?

With the encouragement of an astute principal and grants from two organizations—the SERVE Regional Educational Laboratory and the Mobile (AL) Area Education Foundation—I set out to answer these questions. Two middle schools served as action research sites. After the first year, both schools had functioning collaborative teacher learning teams. In both schools, student achievement scores increased in team focus areas (although other variables factored into

that success). Members of one of the school teams—Judy Duke, Phyllis Hartselle, Derek Hyder, and Karen Ryals—graciously allowed me to relate their struggles and successes as they learned to work collaboratively toward a common instructional goal. I've included their story (pages x-xv) to illustrate both the promise and the potential pitfalls of collaborative work.

Intrigued by the possibilities of teachers working together regularly and systematically, I began working to develop, establish, support, and document a process of teacher collaboration in other schools. The collaborative teacher groups described in this book are called *learning teams* for two reasons: (1) teacher and student *learning* are at the heart of the process, and (2) teams are groups of people who share a common goal and work together to achieve that goal. The learning teams process centers around the belief that teachers are the professionals in the best position to design instruction that works for their students. Since some schools group students into clusters they call “learning teams,” I refer to the teacher groups I work with as *Professional Learning Teams*, to make the distinction.

This guidebook provides tools and information that can help facilitators establish Professional Learning Teams in schools and help teachers who commit to this process to stay on track throughout the year. What I offer the reader are the results of my own search for professional community and my work with committed teachers and principals who started learning teams in their schools. We learned as many of you are learning—out of a need and by trial and experiment. I share these tools and ideas in the hope that you will become accomplished in transforming schools into a place where teachers continually learn and grow.

Much information in this guidebook has been pulled together from ideas I read, tried, and found to work. I, therefore, owe credit for many ideas and procedures in this guidebook to a number of wise and wonderful people. The collaborative process described here was originally adapted from a professional development approach designed by Carlene Murphy in 1986. Her book, *Whole-Faculty Study Groups: A Powerful Way to Change Schools and Enhance Learning* (1998), was a valuable resource for the project, as was her advice. Robert Garmston provided deeper insight into collaborative team work through his seminars and his stimulating book, coauthored with Bruce Wellman, *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups* (1999). Richard DuFour will also recognize ideas in this guidebook from his workshop and book, coauthored by Robert

Eaker, *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement* (1998).

Shirley Hord and D'Ette Cowan with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL) generously supplied resources and information from SEDL's work with professional learning communities. Ruth Ash, dean of education at Samford University in Birmingham, AL, and Maurice Persall, dean of Samford's graduate program, spent hours sharing their work on Formative Leadership. Their sound thinking helped me decide how to implement and facilitate the learning team process. Members of the SERVE staff, including Rick Basom, Steve Bingham, Pam Finney, Jane Griffin, Barbara Howard, Wendy McColskey, Nancy McMunn, Jerry Natkin, and Jean Williams acted as valuable sounding boards, asked the hard questions, and worked with me on the initial program logic. Pam Finney developed some of the evaluation tools and helped with site evaluations. Carolyn Akers, executive director of the Mobile Area Education Foundation; Jack Sanders, former executive director of SERVE; and Don Stringfellow, my former principal, believed in this project and made it happen. Brenda Haskew, professional development coordinator for the Mobile County Public School System, supplied support and wise mentoring throughout the early going. Brenda Litchfield, professor of Instructional Development and Design at the University of South Alabama, provided the initial inspiration to write this guidebook and spent hours editing my early attempts. Other sources of ideas and information came from books and articles listed in the "Resources" section.

My heartfelt appreciation to my mother and language arts teacher, Rebecca Baker, who diligently read and edited each word of this book, as she has all of my writings. Special thanks also to Joan Richardson, director of publications for the National Staff Development Council for her expertise and encouragement, and to my initial editor and friend, John Norton, who expertly, resolutely, and tenaciously steered me through the ins and outs of the initial writing-for-publication process.

As you start the challenging job of creating lasting changes in your school, be flexible, ready to accept detours, and determined to stay the course. Above all, be ready to offer encouragement and support to teachers as they engage in the hardest task you could possibly ask of them—the task of changing their teaching practice in the middle of the daily brushfires that erupt in classrooms and the status-quo mentality that often permeates schools and school systems. The real winners will, of course, be your students.

## The Story of a Professional Learning Team

*This story is based on an analysis of logs from this Professional Learning Team.*

Four seventh-grade teachers at Cranford Burns Middle School in Mobile, AL, began the learning team process by developing a learning plan with a goal to improve student writing. Lacking clear guidance on how to approach this, they initially focused entirely on student learning rather than teacher learning. For example, their team goal included objectives such as

Students need to:

-  Demonstrate ability to identify the main idea and supporting ideas.
-  Use mechanics of writing and correct grammar to express ideas clearly.
-  Construct good paragraphs.
-  Summarize information concisely without paraphrasing or plagiarism.

Teachers planned activities such as developing pre- and post-tests for summarization skills, sharing teaching strategies, correlating strategies between subject areas, creating opportunities for students to make their writings public, maintaining student portfolios, and looking for teacher resource materials.

Teachers also established team norms that included a regular meeting time and place, arriving on time, and being prepared. They agreed to respect each other's ideas and to establish a "safe place" for expressing concerns and opinions. Norms included listening as well as sharing, not being judgmental, sharing the team responsibilities equally, and preventing interruptions in order to focus intently on team activities.

### Kicking Off

Learning team meetings kicked off the first week with a discussion of rubrics and a look at student writing samples. During the first meeting, team members looked at student prewriting samples, developed guidelines for student writing, and correlated some writing activities.

During the next two meetings, teachers struggled to find real value in their collaborative efforts. Each teacher taught a different subject, and while willing to work together to increase students' writing skills, the teachers were uncertain how to proceed. The primary question that surfaced during their first meetings was not surprising but no less frustrating for its predictability: "What are we supposed to be doing?"

By the end of the fourth meeting, team members felt their whole approach to the collaborative process was too narrowly focused on traditional student objectives. They realized that they were missing the real point of learning team meetings—professional growth. In addition, they were now struggling with a new problem. This teaching team had 11 students identified as "gifted" and others who were high achievers. For the most part, these students were unmotivated, underachieving, and created problems in class. The teachers decided that, as a learning team, they were learning and doing nothing new or different to reach their students. They needed to move in a fresh direction.

Team members decided to rewrite their team plan to address the need to motivate and challenge the *high-performing students* in their classrooms. They felt that developing successful approaches and experiences for high-performing students would provide them with creative, stimulating strategies that would motivate students at all levels to achieve at higher levels. With this "out-of-the-box" approach, teachers began breaking new ground at the school and possibly in the school system.

### **Learning, Planning, and Changing**

Team members realized right away that they lacked the knowledge and skills needed to implement their plan. Instead of focusing on student learning objectives, they focused on teacher learning objectives that would help them broaden their own knowledge base. They planned to:

- Identify materials and sources of information for working with gifted and high-achieving students.
- Learn and develop new teaching strategies for engaging and involving these students.
- Apply what they were learning in their classrooms and monitor results.

During the next few learning team meetings, team members examined activities already underway (i.e., Science Olympiad) that could



provide challenging interdisciplinary experiences for their students. The teachers also assumed a learner mode as they searched for information on modifying their regular classroom curricula for high-ability students. Each team member read and shared current research articles on facilitating learning for gifted students in the regular classroom. Through this reading/sharing process, the team began focusing on strategies related to open-ended questions, stimulating higher-order thinking skills, and encouraging students to express and defend personal opinions.

Through ongoing research, team members began to build a toolkit of new strategies and ideas for teaching. Members incorporated group research projects for gifted and motivated students. They decided to allow students to do several individual projects based on interests as well as projects related to topics being studied. The team developed rubrics and guidelines for these projects.

The toolkit grew as team members began modifying assignments and offering optional assignments that allowed students to build on their strengths rather than focus on their weaknesses. They also offered compact assignment options for students who finished work quickly and correctly and scored high but did not show high ability and high interest in their daily work. Teachers established a plan for conferencing individually with these students, outlining what each student was to do, and establishing time frames for students to complete their work.

Learning team members packed their toolkit with information about new cooperative learning designs. They used both homogeneous groupings and heterogeneous groupings, depending on the nature of the task. They examined case studies for successful elements they could incorporate into their practice. As they progressed, team members continued to feel a need for more extensive training and knowledge and decided to involve the school's gifted teacher as a consultant.

As the team members researched, planned, shared, and learned, they were already trying new strategies in their classrooms, sharing results with the entire team, and asking for advice from one another.

 The math teacher offered students an alternative assignment option—a data analysis involving open-ended, thought-provoking questions that students had to defend with logic. She reported students responded well to the assignment, had a higher interest level, and were more engaged.

At this point, teachers began engaging in a different level of collaboration. Instead of trying individual strategies and sharing, they decided to begin using the same strategies across disciplines and comparing results.

- The team developed a cross-curricular approach to encourage all students to advance in higher-order thinking and began an intensive focus on using open-ended questions across disciplines. They observed that many students tended to be strongly opinionated but were unable to support their opinions through reason. Team members looked for ways to help students engage in logical thinking processes. They also noted that when responding to open-ended questions, students were more interactive and took more ownership in their learning and that classes became more “student-powered.”
- The learning team members continued to work together to develop the open-ended question technique and incorporated this into student writing assignments. Each teacher used open-ended questions as lead-ins for writing activities. At this point, team members also began a search for rubrics or other assessment methods to use in evaluating responses to open-ended questions.

During learning team meetings, teachers continued to read and share information from the research on instructional strategies for high-performing students. They examined and developed methods for encouraging students to explore a topic in depth, ways to involve students in peer-editing groups, and ways of engaging students in publishing their own work.

At this point, the team again reevaluated its learning plan. Always hungry for more resources, the team brought in the teacher of gifted students for specific suggestions. With her help, team members targeted library resources, including videos and online research. The next learning team meeting took place in the library as the learning team members continued to focus on increasing their grasp of best educational practices.

New “out-of-the-box” teaching ideas began to dominate learning team meetings. Teachers began providing all students with optional assignments they could choose in place of a traditional assignment. The social studies teacher reported offering his classes a challenging,



Many students tended to be strongly opinionated but were unable to support their opinions through reason.

optional assignment originally intended to motivate and stimulate his high-performing students. To his surprise, over 90% of students of all levels opted for this more difficult assignment, completed it, and turned it in. The quality of the students' work exceeded that of their regular assignments, and students of all levels reported they enjoyed doing it. The teacher calculated that 84% of his regular students made high scores on the more challenging assignment, compared to 86% of high-achievers. He concluded that, in this case at least, the optional assignment approach significantly reduced the achievement gap between his low- and high-achieving students.

Following through with the optional assignment approach, the language arts teacher offered students the option of engaging in dramatic presentations or preparing children's books rather than traditional book reports. She also offered choices in other areas and reported that, with the use of optional assignments, a higher percentage of students turned in work, and their work quality was generally better.

In math classes, students worked together in heterogeneous groups to design surveys, collect and analyze data, and make class presentations. The math teacher found all students were more actively engaged in determining what to do and how to do it, and they tended to take more ownership for their learning. She also provided opportunities for students who mastered mathematics concepts quickly and accurately to work together during class on optional assignments. She met with these students ahead of time and explained that these alternative assignments would be more difficult and mean more work. Nevertheless, all high-achieving students opted for the alternative assignments and performed well. The teacher felt this provided a way to reward and encourage students who did good work. In the meantime, she was able to direct more class time toward helping students who did not master the math concepts as easily.

The learning team also decided to initiate an information exchange with students in a Japanese school. This initiative provided their students with additional opportunities for differentiated assignments. Science students were preparing brochures on local ecology as a way to start this international "conversation."

Teachers reported the learning team process engaged them in regular, systematic thinking about their teaching practice so they could better meet the needs of their students. As they learned how to challenge high-achievers without simply giving them more work, their instructional strategies influenced the learning of all students. Team

members also reported that the learning team process provided them with the confidence to experiment with innovative teaching strategies they might otherwise avoid. The team structure provided the support they needed to stick with these new strategies rather than to fall back into a more comfortable teaching routine. As one teacher put it, “A lot of this, I would not have tried by myself. We challenge each other.”

### Looking Back

In looking back on the changes that occurred during this year of heightened collaboration and support, a team member remarked: “Kids are changing. They are not like they were when I started teaching. Teachers need to make adjustments and to challenge all kids. Kids will rise to expectations, and teachers are as guilty as students in believing that some cannot achieve.”

Perhaps one of the most rewarding spin-offs of the learning team’s efforts was the high degree of parent satisfaction with their children’s learning experiences. Parents provided positive feedback throughout the year. On Teacher Appreciation Day, parents sent these team members so much food that the teachers were hard pressed to find a space for it in their team room.

Teachers acknowledged that changing their practice was hard work and took a lot of time. Yet, they found this to be a powerful and effective professional development experience. They plan to continue systematically collaborating, reflecting, experimenting, documenting discussions and classroom applications, and continually learning how to improve their teaching.

In reading this story for accuracy, the teachers on this learning team acknowledged that, while the information is accurate, they feel their efforts are a work in progress rather than an exemplary model. They are correct about this being a work in progress. Many learning teams are doing a noteworthy job. This case study is offered as a type of road map illustrating one way a team of teachers began thinking about their practice, changing, and growing professionally as a result of working together to address student needs. The real winners were their students.

## How to Use This Book

This guidebook provides a set of tools for implementing Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) with an entire faculty or part of a faculty. The book is organized in 10 short chapters, or steps. Each step features a variety of tools to use while establishing, maintaining, and evaluating a specific part of the learning team process. Steps 1 and 2 establish a rationale for learning teams and provide a brief overview of the process. Each subsequent step explains a different part of that process. Step 3 gives suggestions for organizing the teams and finding resources and time for them to meet. Steps 4 and 5 guide teams in establishing ground rules for their meetings and determining via data analysis where they most need to focus their instructional efforts. Steps 7 and 8 give teachers concrete ideas for how to engage in the real work of the teams and support teams as they begin and continue their work. Step 9 provides tools for assessing the impact of the PLTs and gathering data for decision-making. Step 10 provides facilitators with additional tips and ideas for successfully supporting the Professional Learning Team process. While most schools generally follow this sequence of steps when implementing learning teams, the sequence may vary, depending on what faculties already know about collaborative work.

The Professional Learning Team facilitator may be a principal, a lead teacher, or another school staff member. Each step begins with background information for the facilitator. This is followed by a guide that describes the tools for that step and suggests ways to use them. Adjust these ideas to best facilitate the process for the teachers you work with. Sometimes the best use of a tool may be to stimulate your thinking or provide you with a better plan.

Some tools may suit your purposes better than others. Mix and match tools from different steps to best suit your requirements and modify them as needed. These tools may be copied and used in workshops and learning team settings.

As you read this book you may notice an occasional overlap of information in different tools. That's planned. These tools are designed for different parts of the process, and the information may bear repeating.

Notice that each step begins with a brief glimpse into a journal kept during the first year I worked to establish Professional Learning Teams. You can access the entire text of my action research diary on MiddleWeb at [www.middleweb.com/mw/images/jollydiary.pdf](http://www.middleweb.com/mw/images/jollydiary.pdf).

SERVE has created an area in the Education Leadership section of its website to expand the resources provided in this book. Visit the “Support for Professional Learning Teams” web page for up-to-date information, web links, and other materials. [[www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php)]

## A Note to the Facilitator

The learning team process you facilitate may involve your entire faculty or may engage a few groups within your faculty who create teams around topics of interest, subject areas, grade levels, or even across school boundaries. In deciding which type of approach to use, consider this recommendation by Dr. Shirley Hord, Scholar Emerita with the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. Dr. Hord studies the change process in schools and colleges, as well as leadership factors required to initiate and manage change. In a letter to the author, she recently commented:

*I must admit that I am prejudiced to the whole school concept of a learning community of professionals, rather than a team here and a team there, perhaps working on different aspects of student work. Therefore, I like the idea of small teams all working toward the same overall school goal, for this gives force and significance to the effort and means everyone is heading in the same direction, albeit in somewhat different ways dependent upon their team's students' needs. When the school is consistent across its teams' goals, then there is consistency for students when they move from one grade to the next.*

Whether you involve your entire faculty or groups within the faculty, before you begin implementing Professional Learning Teams, decide on two vital issues:

1. How are you going to provide feedback and support to these teams?
2. How are you going to evaluate their progress and effectiveness?

The ongoing success of this adventure in instructional change will revolve around the quality of follow-up and support you provide. In her book, *Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement* (1997), Hord identifies two types of supportive conditions necessary for establishing productive learning communities: physical conditions and people capacities.

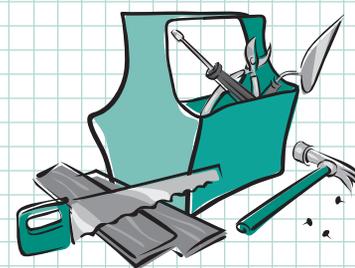
Physical conditions include resources and schedules that reduce isolation, provide time for collaboration, and provide effective communication. People capacities include willingness to learn new knowledge and skills, develop respect and trust, and work together to improve. Throughout this guidebook, you will find tools that can help you with these tasks.

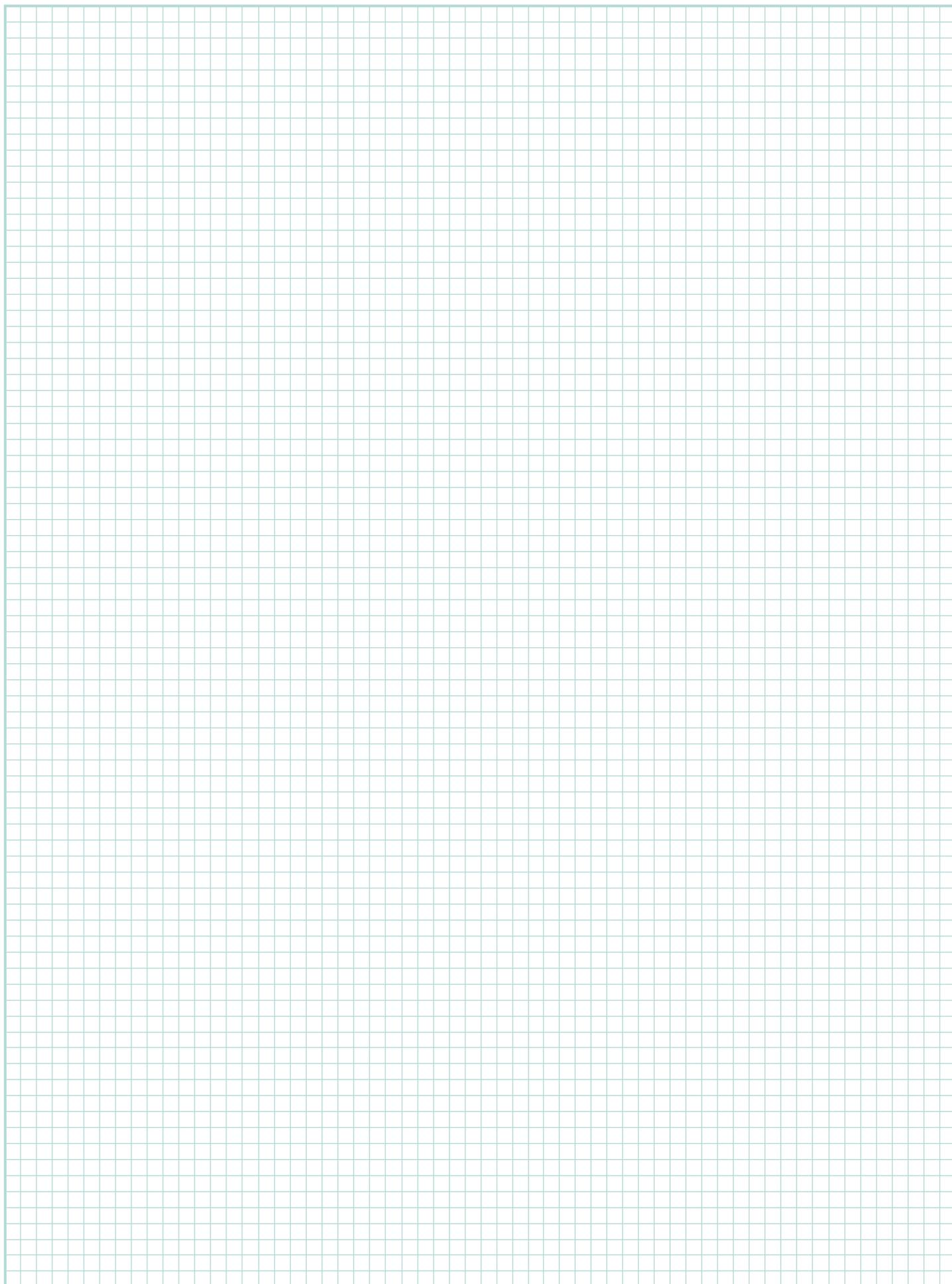
A second essential factor to the success of Professional Learning Teams is careful, upfront attention to how you will determine if this collaborative process is working. How will you know if PLTs are making a difference for teachers, students, and instructional effectiveness? According to Killion, in *Assessing Impact: Evaluating Staff Development* (2002), evaluations are often an afterthought and should be planned at the beginning of a program or initiative. Ongoing assessment of how the Professional Learning Team process is working is crucial to making needed changes and adjustments along the way. Some assessment tools are included throughout this guidebook, and Step 9 is devoted entirely to tools for gauging team progress.

Before you begin, read this guidebook and select tools that are most appropriate for your situation. You can find additional tools on the Professional Learning Team support website ([www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php)), and you may also find effective tools from another source. May you enjoy this adventure and find it rewarding!

# Prepare to Do the Work

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# Step 1: Build the Foundation

**Entry 2:** For weeks I've been reading all sorts of research on professional development models. Not exactly fast-paced reading. I'm looking for research rooted in something more substantive than traditional "hit-and-run" workshops. This professional development process needs to focus directly on instruction and student learning. It needs to take place at the school site. A gnawing sense of urgency drives me to get a better handle on exactly what this particular process will look like—fast! The only thing I feel certain about at this point is that this process needs to result in teachers becoming a highly professional community of learners.

—Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

## Background

Congratulations on being on the cutting edge of one of the most important change processes taking place in schools today. As a facilitator, you may already understand the potential of learning teams and be eager for action. Along with your personal enthusiasm, however, the success of this collaborative process ultimately depends on the commitment of all educators involved.

Ideally, the teachers in your school will buy into the concept of focused, collaborative team work. Teachers are often willing—even eager—to try new ideas and approaches to instruction. However, the day-to-day routines of the school and escalating job demands often make the task of taking on new initiatives seem overwhelming. How will teachers feel about another meeting during the week? What might motivate teachers in your school to buy into Professional Learning Teams?

Teachers may buy into the idea of working in learning teams for some of the following reasons:

**Relevance and value:** Teachers will likely support Professional Learning Teams if they see that the work they do in these teams has value for themselves and for their students. Once involved, teachers need to find that their efforts produce effective instructional practices they can use daily in their classrooms. When teachers recognize that students are more successful because of the knowledge and expertise that teachers gain through Professional Learning Team work, they are likely to become active, faithful participants.



### This section will help the facilitator:

-  Provide teachers with a research-based rationale for working together in teams on instruction.
-  Help teachers identify benefits of collaboration for themselves and their colleagues.
-  Build teacher enthusiasm for Professional Learning Team participation.

**Collegial support:** No one goes into teaching to become a millionaire. Most people who enter the teaching profession have a genuine desire to make a difference for students. All too often, teachers' working environments rob them of much needed energy and passion for their chosen profession. Learning teams can provide teachers with collegial support, build skills and confidence, and boost morale.

**A sense of urgency:** A strong motivator in jumpstarting school change, including implementing a learning team process, is a sense of urgency. Many schools currently face serious state sanctions if student achievement fails to improve. The threat of these sanctions creates a culture of urgency. New teacher quality requirements along with national legislation requiring that increasing percentages of teachers receive professional development add yet other pressures. The National Commission on Teaching and America's Future warns of another critical urgency:

*There has been no previous time in history when the success, indeed the survival of nations and people, has been so tied to their ability to learn. Today's society has little room for those who cannot read, write, and compute proficiently; find and use resources; frame and solve problems; and continually learn new technologies, skills, and occupations. Every school must be organized to support powerful teaching and learning....America's future depends now, as never before, on our ability to teach.*

—*What Matters Most: Teaching for America's Future*, 1996, p. 3

This warning provides two sobering reminders for most teachers: (a) accomplished teaching may well be the deciding factor in whether students succeed in our society, and (b) teachers must continually stay abreast of current developments in their fields and find new and effective ways of helping students learn. They must engage all students in academic work that supports high achievement and help all students master challenging curricula. Because they desire to see students succeed, many teachers may welcome an opportunity to work collaboratively with colleagues as a way of adding to their teaching skills.

**A method of mentoring:** Teachers may also become enthusiastic about this learning team process as a way to induct and mentor new teachers. Regularly working with experienced teachers and building habits of continual learning are good ways to help new

teachers jump-start a successful career. Experienced teachers can likewise benefit from the up-to-date information and ideas these beginning teachers acquired through their recent college experiences. On successful learning teams, teachers play the roles of both mentor and learner.

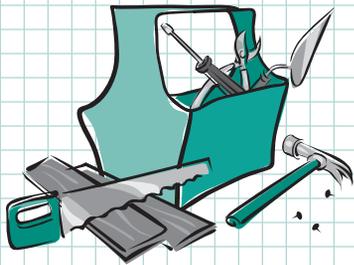
**Implementing schoolwide initiatives:** Teachers may also see value in the Professional Learning Team process as a disciplined, systematic method for successfully implementing a new schoolwide initiative, such as teaching reading in all content areas or examining student work to drive instruction.

These types of needs provide opportunities to generate interest in learning teams as a way for teachers to work together, learn, and engage in planned, focused, systematic collaboration. The success of even a single learning team, when properly shared and showcased, can trigger a domino effect as more and more teachers grasp “what’s in it for me.” In time, that may change to “what’s in it for us, as a school.”

Over the next decade, student achievement will hinge increasingly on teachers becoming continual learners and constantly adapting their knowledge, expertise, and instruction. How can you help teachers recognize and appreciate that working together at their school is a powerful way to accomplish this? The first step involves building a foundation for collaboration by providing teachers with opportunities and information to answer four basic questions:

1. Why do we need to collaborate on instruction?
2. Why should we use a learning team process?
3. How can this make a difference for us?
4. How can this make a difference for our students?

The Step 1 Guide and tools can assist you with this task.



## Step 1 Facilitation Guide

For Step 1 you will find six tools designed to engage teachers in exploring the purpose of instructional collaboration, the value of learning together, and how this can make a difference for their students. Use these tools to help teachers gain understanding of and enthusiasm for working together in Professional Learning Teams. These tools include checklists, readings, discussion, and role-play. Rather than trying to use all of these tools, select the one or two that are most appropriate for the teachers you are working with.

This guide contains an explanation of each tool and a suggested method of using that tool with groups of teachers. Note that most tools contain one or more questions for reflection. As an option to the suggested procedures, you may give teachers a moment to complete the activity and reflect quietly, and then ask them to discuss their reflections with a partner or a small group.

In selecting tools, consider your audience. What do they already know and believe about collaboration, and how much time, if any, will you need to spend in building a foundation for implementing learning teams? Also consider the size of your audience, the setting, and amount of time available. You can locate Power Point slides for presenting Step 1 information at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php). You may also find additional tools and information related to this step at that site.

### Tool 1.1 What Do I Know? What Do We Know?

This tool can help participants engage in a brief problem-solving activity that builds knowledge through collaboration. If participating teachers have already selected a focus for their collective efforts through Professional Learning Teams, such as teaching reading comprehension, you may substitute that topic for the “small group instruction” topic suggested on Tool 1.1.

-  Distribute a copy of this tool to each participant. Give participants three to five minutes to individually jot down responses to the two questions on the activity.
-  Ask teachers to work in groups of 3–4 and share their answers. As they share, ask each participant to note additional ideas and information he/she learns.
-  Ask participants what value they see in the group sharing.

Point out that group members gain new information and insight and all participants are now on the same page and have the same information.

- Ask teachers to suggest what value teacher team work might have for a school's instructional program. Explain that increasing teacher knowledge is only one value of working together on instruction and that exciting times are in store for teachers working in Professional Learning Teams.

### Tool 1.2 Think About Your Professional Development.

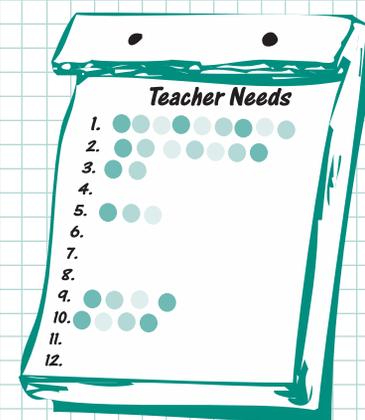
Use this tool to introduce teachers to some standards for quality professional development.

- Suggest that teachers individually think about and write comments for each statement. If you use this tool in a large group, allow time for teachers to briefly “pair and share” and to discuss answers. If participating in a small group (3–4 people), teachers may discuss their responses as a group. Propose that they use a round-robin approach if engaging in a small group discussion so that each participant has an opportunity to share.
- When teachers complete this activity, point out that each of these statements is characteristic of quality professional development. When properly implemented, Professional Learning Teams can address all of these areas.

### Tool 1.3 Look at Teacher Needs.

Use this tool to help teachers think about the personal and professional needs at their school.

- Ask each teacher to place a checkmark beside all sentences that apply.
- When teachers have completed the activity, ask each one to select and share what she considers to be the top three needs.
- Keep track of participants' responses as a way of determining what the faculty sees as its greatest needs. For a quick way of determining which needs the faculty sees as most pertinent, number 1–12 down the left side of a sheet of chart paper. Give each teacher three colorful, adhesive-backed dots. Ask teachers to place one dot beside the number of each of their top three areas of concern.



- After identifying the top areas of concern for the faculty, point out that Professional Learning Teams provide a vehicle to help them meet those needs.

### Tool 1.4 Will Collaboration Work?

This activity provides an entertaining method of involving teachers in thinking about how Professional Learning Teams might work in their schools and about barriers that might need to be addressed. It will provide the facilitator with information on what the faculty sees as important for making Professional Learning Teams work in its school.

- Duplicate and cut apart the cards.
- Provide each team with chart paper and markers.
- Ask teachers to work in small teams. Give each team one of the cards. (Try to distribute the two different cards evenly among teams.)
- After each team finishes brainstorming, ask a team member to share the team's ideas. List the ideas from "Design, Inc." on one piece of chart paper and the ideas from the "Sabotage, Inc." on a different sheet.
- Ask teachers to discuss how their current school culture and organization can facilitate and/or hinder the success of learning teams. If you have a large group, ask teachers to discuss this in their teams and have a spokesperson share with the whole group.
- Suggest that each team make a list of the things needed at the school to successfully implement Professional Learning Teams. Collect these lists.
- Following the work session, compile and distribute a list of teachers' ideas for making collaboration work. Work with appropriate school personnel to address as many of these concerns and suggestions as possible.

### Tool 1.5 Focus Questions.

Use this tool with Tool 1.4 to help teachers answer four basic questions that can help them understand the need for and benefits of professional collaboration.

- Give each teacher or group of teachers a copy of the Focus Questions. If you are working with groups of teachers at tables, cut these apart and fold them to make tents to set on the table. (You may prefer to write each question on the bottom half of a 4" x 8" card and fold it to make a tent.) Place a different question at each table.
- Ask teachers to look for answers to these questions as they read the handout, "What Do the Experts Say?" (Tool 1.6).

### Tool 1.6 What Do the Experts Say?

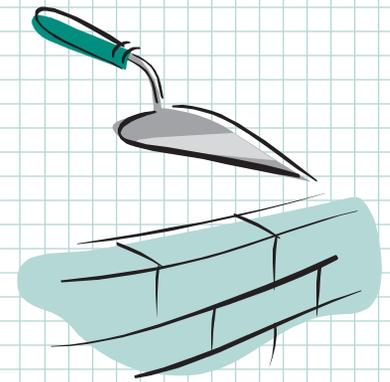
This handout provides teachers with information on the importance of continually improving teaching expertise and the need for ongoing professional development.

- Distribute a copy of this information to each teacher as a method of providing additional information about collaboration.
- Ask teachers to look for information to answer the "Focus Questions" (Tool 1.5) as they read. Suggest they highlight this information.
- If teachers worked on the Focus Questions individually, invite them to hold up one, two, three, or four fingers to indicate what question they would like to answer. Then ask them to locate another person in the room who wants to answer that same question and discuss their thoughts with that person.
- If groups of teachers answered different questions, lead them to share answers for the question on their table with the large group. List their responses on chart paper.
- Ask teachers to turn to a partner and share one reason why he or she believes that working in Professional Learning Teams will be a valuable experience.





1. Fits naturally with our school system or school goals.
2. Provides a consistent focus and ongoing training and assistance.
3. Creates a collective commitment among teachers to deepen their content knowledge and to learn and use research-based instructional practices.
4. Provides time and opportunities for groups of teachers to meet regularly in order to share, reflect, and work together on instruction.
5. Empowers teachers to make decisions about their own professional learning needs.
6. Is relevant and useful to the situations teachers face each day in the classroom.
7. Provides a way for teachers to learn and grow in a supportive atmosphere.
8. Honors the knowledge and skills of teachers.
9. Provides teachers with a process for addressing student diversity, individualizing instruction, and holding high expectations for all students.
10. Engages teachers in using multiple sources of data to determine student needs.
11. Provides continuing opportunities to grow professionally at the school site.
12. Engages teachers in spending greater amounts of time in professional development.



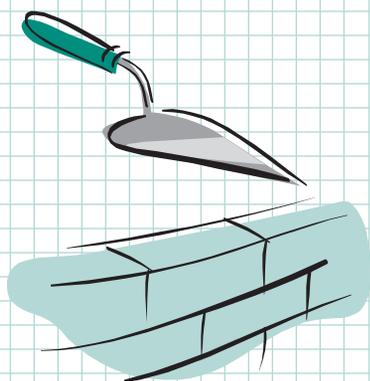
**Directions:** How do you think the staff development you normally receive measures up? Here are some statements that describe some benefits of quality staff development. Write a brief comment below each item to indicate how your usual professional learning experiences compare.



**Reflect:** Why would this kind of professional development be valuable?

## Tool 1.3

## Look at Teacher Needs



**Directions:** Think about your school as you read the statements at the right. Which of these statements describes the needs of teachers at your school? Discuss the items you check with other participants nearby, and explain your thinking.

**Reflect:** How could regularly working together help us meet these needs?



1. We need a way to increase student achievement.
2. We need a way to increase our own knowledge and expertise.
3. We need to strengthen professional relationships and become less isolated from one another in our work.
4. We need a way to systematically examine whether our teaching is making a difference.
5. We need support in changing the way we teach over the long-term.
6. We need to develop leadership capacity.
7. We need an effective way of mentoring new teachers.
8. We need a flexible professional development process.
9. We need an efficient way to share ideas.
10. We need to be regarded as valuable professionals.
11. We need a cost-effective way to engage in professional development and continual learning.
12. We need a practical way to implement a new initiative.



## Professional Design Team

You are members of Design, Inc., a professional firm that specializes in creating opportunities for professionals to engage in on-the-job collaboration and to increase their skills and productivity.

Your firm has been hired by Innovation High School to help teachers regularly work together in teams to increase their instructional knowledge and teaching skills. How will you do this? What information, opportunities, and working conditions will teachers need in order to do this effectively?

Brainstorm ideas and jot your plans on the chart paper. Your design team has 10 minutes.



## Professional Sabotage Team

You are members of Sabotage, Inc., a firm that specializes in undermining attempts to allow professionals to engage in on-the-job collaboration and to increase their skills and productivity.

Your firm has been hired to tackle a “problem” at Innovation High School. This school plans to create teams of teachers who work together regularly to increase their teaching knowledge and expertise. The school plans to provide teachers with information, support, and working conditions that foster success.

Your job is to sabotage this plan. How will you undermine efforts to create a collaborative culture at the school? Consider addressing attitudes, information, opportunities, and the working environment.

Brainstorm ideas and jot down your plans on the chart paper. Your sabotage team has 10 minutes.



Why do we need to collaborate on instruction?

**Question 1**

**Question 1**

Why do we need to collaborate on instruction?

Why should we use Professional Learning Teams?

**Question 2**

**Question 2**

Why should we use Professional Learning Teams?

How can this make a difference for us?

**Question 3**

**Question 3**

How can this make a difference for us?

How can this make a difference for our students?

**Question 4**

**Question 4**

How can this make a difference for our students?

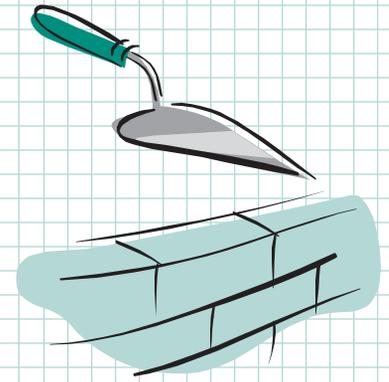
### Teacher expertise matters.

Recent studies verify that competent, committed, qualified teachers are the most important factor in improving student achievement and preparing students to meet higher standards. The 1997 follow-up report of the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future, *Doing What Matters Most: Investing in Quality Teaching*, spotlights teacher knowledge and expertise as the single most important influence on what students learn. According to the report, teachers who know a lot about teaching and learning and work in school environments that allow them to know their students well can overcome many of the conditions outside of school that often impair students' chances of success.

A growing number of studies validate the importance of teacher expertise. An analysis of 900 Texas school districts by Harvard professor Ronald Ferguson points to teacher expertise as a primary influence on student performance. Researcher Linda Darling-Hammond points out that the effect of teacher knowledge and skill in this study was so strong that, "after controlling for socioeconomic status, the large disparities in achievement between black and white students were almost entirely accounted for by differences in the qualifications of their teachers" (2000). Ferguson also presented evidence that "highly qualified teachers have a cumulative effect on students, so that those who score low in the early grades may still achieve at high levels in the upper grades" (1999).

More evidence comes from a 2002 report in which researcher Judith Langer compared student performance in reading, writing, and English in 88 classrooms in California, Florida, New York, and Texas. Unlike the Ferguson study, none of these schools was low achieving. In fact, all of these schools were characterized by active and engaged students and teachers in well-supported classrooms. Yet over a two-year period, Langer found student achievement to be higher among students with more skilled teachers. In fact, students with the most accomplished teachers achieved at an even higher level of literacy than expected.

The results of Wright, Horn, and Sanders' 1997 study indicated that the most important factor affecting student learning is the teacher. In addition, the results show wide variation in effectiveness among teachers. The immediate and clear implication of this finding is that seemingly more can be done to improve education by improving the effectiveness of teachers than by any other single factor (p. 63).



"All teachers will have access to high quality professional development and regular time for collegial work and planning."

— National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. *What Matters Most, Teaching for America's Future*, 1997, p. 63

What, exactly, defines teaching expertise? According to the National Staff Development Council's *Standards for Staff Development, Revised* (2001),

*Successful teachers have a deep understanding of the subjects they teach, use appropriate instructional methods, and apply various classroom assessment strategies. These teachers participate in sustained, intellectually rigorous professional learning regarding the subjects they teach, the strategies they use to teach those subjects, the findings of cognitive scientists regarding human learning, and the means by which they assess student progress in achieving high academic standards. (p. 32)*

The bottom line is that for students to consistently achieve at higher levels, a school must have a faculty of teachers who continually work on and improve their own knowledge and expertise in content, teaching strategies, and assessment. No initiative or program a school adopts will substitute for effective teachers who have the knowledge and skills to help their students master subject matter.

## **Teacher learning opportunities matter.**

How will teachers gain more expertise? In its report *Teacher Quality: A Report on the Preparation and Qualifications of Public School Teachers*, the National Center for Education Statistics points to three criteria as particularly important in bringing about long-term changes in teacher skills and performance:

1. Teachers must spend more time in professional development than they currently spend.
2. Teachers must engage in collaboration and on-the-job learning in a climate that supports professional growth.
3. Teacher learning must be ongoing and must maintain momentum over the long term.

Although most states, districts, and school systems offer substantial amounts of staff development, a recent report by the U.S. Department of Education, *A Talented, Dedicated, and Well-Prepared Teacher in Every Classroom*, points out that teachers still have too few opportunities to improve their knowledge and skills and spend too little time in meaningful professional development. Staff development experiences remain largely short-term and are often unrelated to teachers' current needs. In addition, many staff development offerings

are of low quality. Most professional development is not collaborative in nature. Even though teachers and other experts say that regularly scheduled collaboration among teachers is more effective than most traditional professional development approaches, currently, much that passes for professional development falls far short of providing teachers with the knowledge and support they need to be highly effective.

Clearly, schools need a better way to build teacher expertise. Teacher learning should be ongoing, job-embedded, and continually supported. Schools must provide more frequent opportunities for teachers to gain all the skills and knowledge they need to prepare students for a demanding curriculum and an ever-changing, high-tech society.

## Teacher opportunities to work together matter.

If school leaders expect teachers to gain expertise, they must provide an environment where teachers can continually learn together. The payoff can be enormous. James Stigler, author of *The Teaching Gap*, analyzed why working together to prepare and design lessons achieved such benefits for students and teachers. In researching the Japanese lesson study process, Stigler discovered that by working in groups, teachers were able to describe and analyze classroom teaching and to teach each other about teaching. Working together provided teachers with benchmarks to gauge their own practice and to identify things that could be improved. Collaborating with colleagues on instruction also created a mindset of teaching as a joint responsibility, rather than the responsibility of single individuals.

According to author Richard DuFour, author of *Professional Learning Communities at Work*, actively participating in a learning community can revitalize teachers and teaching because teacher energy stays focused where it should be—on the students. A growing body of literature and experience supports DuFour's assertions. Teachers engage in a powerful form of professional development when they work together in an ongoing, results-focused cycle of inquiry, reflection, dialogue, action, analysis, and adjustment. In their introduction to *Education in a New Era*, Ann Lieberman and Lynn Miller describe the greater sense of responsibility for the success of all students that emerges in collaborative groups. Teachers gain assistance and support from each other by sharing teaching strategies, trying out new ways of teaching, getting feedback, and redesigning

“We need systems that empower staff to define their professional path and grow in ways that are meaningful in their work with students.”

— Wald and Castleberry,  
*Educators as Learners:  
Creating a Professional  
Learning Community in  
Your School*, Association for  
Supervision and Curriculum  
Development, 1998, p.11

“Professional learning communities can increase staff capacity to serve students, but success depends on what the staff do in their collective efforts.”

— Shirley Hord. *Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement*, SEDL, 1997, p. 58

“The best structure for fostering collaboration is the team—the basic building block of the intelligent organization.”

— DuFour and Eaker. *Professional Learning Communities at Work*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998, p. 118

lessons and methods of instruction. They make the transition from exclusive concerns about “my classroom” and “my students” to a more inclusive attitude about “our school” and “our students.”

Students benefit most when teachers work together. According to Linda Darling-Hammond in *The Work of Restructuring Schools: Building from the Ground Up*, schools where teachers worked collaboratively on teaching and learning showed academic improvement more quickly than schools where this did not happen. These schools provided teachers with opportunities to share what they knew, consult with peers about problems of teaching and learning, and observe peers teaching. Darling-Hammond concludes that teachers must have opportunities to reflect critically on their practice and to create new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learning.

Shirley Hord examined a large body of literature on teacher collaboration for her book, *Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement*. Hord cites Ernest Boyer, who concluded that “the most successful student learning occurs when teachers...find solutions together. In such schools, teachers operate as team members, with shared goals and time routinely designated for professional collaboration. Under these conditions, teachers are more likely to be consistently well informed, professionally renewed, and inspired so that they inspire students” (p. 25).

Many things influence whether teacher teams accomplish something worthwhile for themselves and their students. These include the team’s desire for accomplishment, members’ understandings of the purpose of the collaboration, the clarity of the goals and focus, and the school conditions in which teachers work. Hord concludes that professional collaboration among teams of teachers can increase teacher effectiveness, but success depends on what the teachers do in their collective efforts.

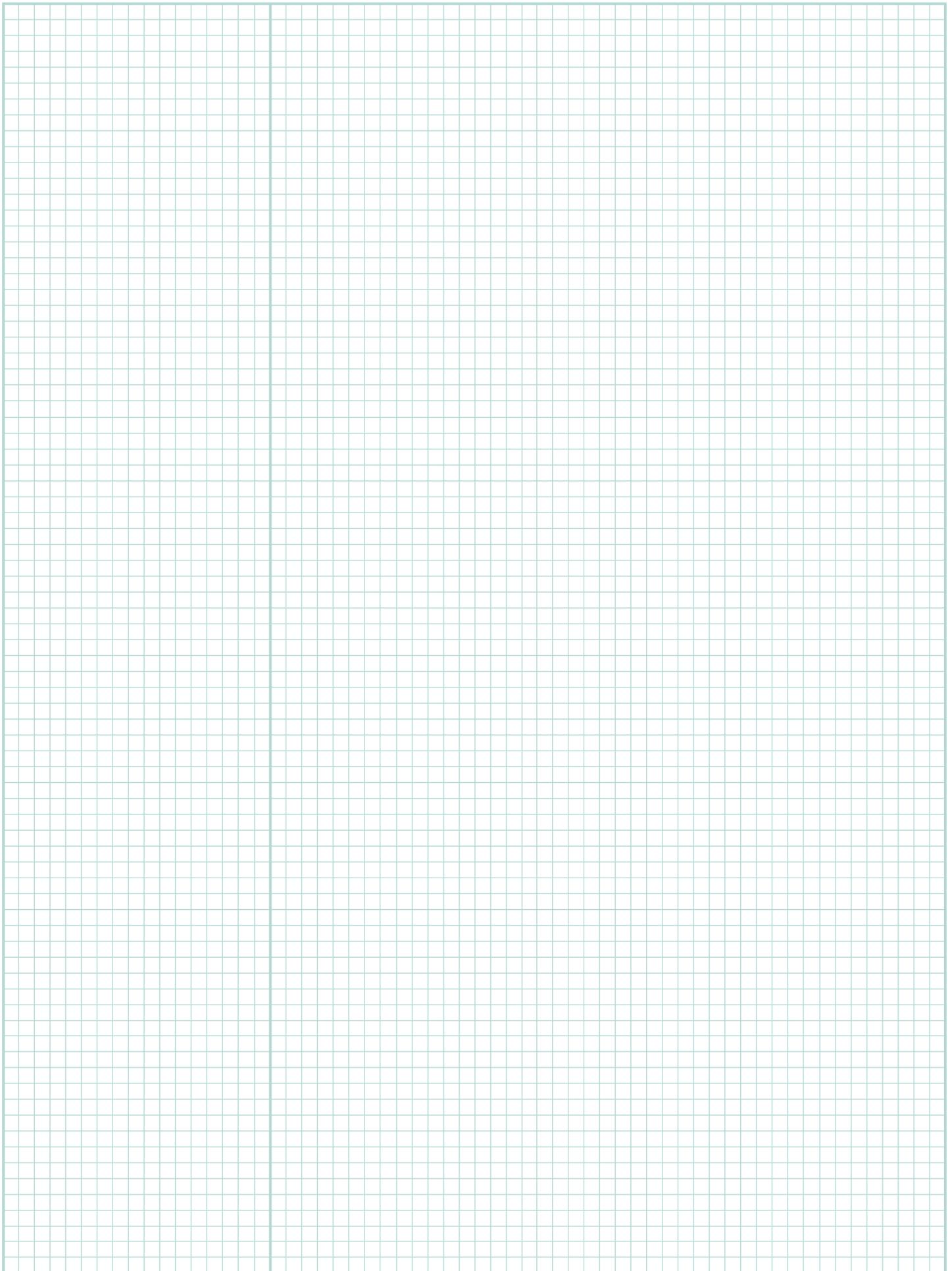
## Doing what matters.

Evidence says that teachers must increase their expertise and that this should be a continual, ongoing process. Teachers must spend more time growing and learning, and much of this activity should occur at the school site. Teachers need to work together in a structured, disciplined manner, and the school culture, including scheduling and staffing, must support this need. In short, schools must be places for teacher learning as well as student learning.

According to DuFour, “The best structure for fostering collaboration is the team—the basic building block of the intelligent organization.” Schools that want to support powerful teaching and learning must find ways to establish and support powerful teacher learning teams. Through the team structure, teachers can build their knowledge and skills in their own classrooms. The learning team process also provides an avenue to support and extend the training teachers gain through workshops and seminars. As teachers work together and challenge one another, they are more likely to sustain their commitment to new innovative and effective instructional practices. Last, but certainly not least, learning teams provide an ideal setting for mentoring and inducting new teachers.

**Reflect:**  
What are the three most powerful points you want to remember from this reading?





## Step 2: Preview the Process

**Entry 6:** Teacher collaboration is the heart of the Professional Learning Team process. The more I learn about this process, the more convinced I am that it will make a significant difference for teachers and students. It has all the right ingredients. Imagine groups of teachers working together to increase their content knowledge and to design and develop dynamic teaching strategies based on student needs. Envision teachers meeting regularly, supporting each other, sharing information on what works and what doesn't, and then revising strategies and lessons accordingly. Would those things make a difference in student achievement? Yes. Studies say those things make a big difference.

—Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

### Background

How is our Professional Learning Team work going to be different from any other teacher meeting? Don't we work together already? Those questions may flash through teachers' minds as they prepare to put learning teams into operation. Before beginning the Professional Learning Team process, teachers need an understanding of what this process looks like.

Chances are that teachers in your school already work together in school-based committees. Groups of teachers may meet together at times to plan specific school activities, develop the school improvement plan, or help with a special school initiative. Perhaps teachers in your school also meet and plan together as departments. What's the added value of learning team meetings? How are these different?

Some Step 2 tools clarify some basic differences between working on traditional school committees and working in Professional Learning Teams.

### Professional Learning Team Basics

Professional Learning Teams provide a strategic, disciplined approach for engaging teachers in working together. This collaborative work focuses on teacher growth and development and is guided by specific goals and purposes.



#### This section will help the facilitator:

- Clarify the difference between learning teams meetings and other types of team meetings.
- Provide teachers with an overview of the Professional Learning Team process.

## STEP 2

## Preview the Process



“Effective schoolwide change and enhanced student learning require a structure or a process for greater collaboration among teachers.”

— Murphy and Lick. *Whole Faculty Study Groups: A Powerful Way to Change Schools and Enhance Learning*, 1998, p. 14

Although there are a variety of structures for engaging teachers in collaborative learning and action, several elements are common to most:

-  Teams serve as vehicles for teacher professional development and ongoing learning focused on instruction.
-  Team goals are determined by student data and needs.
-  Teams meet regularly throughout the school year and use a systematic approach to guide their work.
-  Team activities revolve around an action-inquiry cycle that engages teachers in questioning, studying, planning, experimenting, reflecting, and assessing.
-  Team members rotate roles and share responsibilities equally.
-  Teams keep documentation of their work and share this publicly.

In introducing teachers to information about Professional Learning Teams, keep in mind that you are up against a formidable foe—years of ingrained and accepted practices of teacher isolation. Morton Inger (1993) notes: “By and large...teacher collaboration is a departure from existing norms, and in most schools, teachers are colleagues in name only. They work out of sight and sound of one another, plan and prepare their lessons and materials alone, and struggle on their own to solve their instructional, curricular, and management problems.”

## Stages of Collaboration

Today’s strong student achievement emphasis has catapulted teacher collaboration onto the center stage as a way of helping teachers acquire new skills needed to help students succeed. Four types of collaboration usually exist in schools with regard to teaching and instructional practices. These are listed below according to the degree to which they result in a change from norms of isolation to norms of collaboration.

- 1. Informal conversations.** This is the most basic stage of instructional collaboration and generally takes place in the hall, lunchroom, and other times when teachers meet informally during the school day. While these conversations may involve discussion about instruction,

researcher J. W. Little (1990) reacts skeptically to the idea that “brief stories told of classrooms could advance teachers’ understanding and practice of teaching.” These types of conversations can, however, promote collegial relationships among the staff.

- 2. Individual assistance.** Teachers are generally agreeable to supplying advice to colleagues when asked. How much this advice actually improves a colleagues’ teaching practice depends on the quality of the questions asked, the advice given, and the follow-up provided. Formal one-on-one mentoring programs often produce genuine benefits and advancement for new teachers. However, a mentoring program alone may not be enough to overcome the norms of isolation and individualism pervading a school’s culture.
- 3. Group sharing.** When meeting in groups, teachers usually share ideas, lesson plans, and materials with one another. Most learning team meetings begin with this stage. In fact, group sharing may even be a necessary first step in the development of more meaningful collaboration. Inger (1993) notes that teachers need time to overcome years of habit and organizational separation, and sharing can be a safe and enjoyable activity for teachers. While this is a good use of time during early meetings, without careful nurturing, teams may never deepen and expand their collaborative work to the next level.
- 4. Joint work.** When groups of teachers work together as interdependent colleagues and engage in rigorous mutual examination of teaching and learning, they are engaging in high-level collaboration. In this type of collaboration, teachers work together on teaching and coordinate their instructional practices. They feel a collective sense of responsibility for the success of each team member and joint responsibility for the students they teach. When this type of collaboration is schoolwide, the school becomes a professional learning community in the truest sense.

As you introduce teachers to the characteristics of Professional Learning Teams, remind them that their teamwork will be an evolutionary process. As they stay the course and work together



“The evolution of each learning team is an amazing adventure—an adventure of risk taking, collegiality, and leadership development. However, students are the real beneficiaries of learning teams. We know that powerful learning occurs when teachers are steeped in the knowledge of best practices and when they are confirmed to be effective instructional decision-makers.”

— Dr. Allan Smith,  
Superintendent, Edenton-  
Chowan Public Schools,  
North Carolina

over time, their teams can become a great resource for personal and professional growth, energy, and support.

This true story of a Professional Learning Team in a North Carolina middle school illustrates the evolutionary nature of learning team collaboration.

### **Team Progress Over Time**

When eighth-grade teacher Molli Rose first heard the news, she felt a surge of apprehension. She took a deep breath and thought to herself, “*How am I going to do this? How are any of us going to pull this off?*” It’s not that Rose and other teachers at Chowan Middle School didn’t see the value in the new, schoolwide focus on reading; it’s that some of the staff at Chowan, located in Tyner, North Carolina, felt ill-equipped to tackle the imposed challenge.

The goal of the initiative was clear: to improve reading scores for all students. Determining how to reach this school goal, however, was less clear. In the spring of 2001, the school agreed that SERVE would provide the professional development to assist teachers in learning how to teach reading in all subjects and across the three grade levels. As the vehicle for improving instructional strategies, SERVE would facilitate the implementation of Professional Learning Teams with a disciplined purpose—meeting students’ instructional needs in reading better.

The school already used the teaming concept and common planning time for teachers to engage in ongoing, instructionally focused learning. SERVE suggested Chowan establish Professional Learning Teams to focus on the schoolwide goal with teachers spending one 60-minute planning period per week in professional inquiry about reading instruction and developing research-based reading strategies to pilot in their classrooms. Convincing teachers of the benefit of regular collaboration on instruction, however, is not as simple as it sounds. Because most teachers tend to plan and do their work in isolation, they aren’t accustomed to opening up a dialogue about teacher practice with their peers.

Not surprisingly, when the notion of Professional Learning Teams was first mentioned, Chowan teachers didn’t express delight at

having to participate in what they suspected was “just another meeting” that would eat up their time. In addition, they weren’t thrilled at the thought of planning teaching strategies with their colleagues in other disciplines on a weekly basis, and they weren’t sure how this process looked, why it was necessary, and how it differed from other types of planning meetings.

Despite their doubts, the teachers gamely embarked on interdisciplinary Professional Learning Teams. Each team contained four teachers who shared common students. Team members began by sharing what they were already doing to assist students in reading. They began looking at information about teaching reading and deciding what strategies could best help their students. From there, they chose common strategies, applied these in their classrooms, met back to reflect on student responses, and worked together to revise their strategies and monitor students’ learning. Teams also kept logs to document their progress and note how effectively they were collaborating and meeting student needs. They shared these logs with the principal, SERVE staff, and other teams.

Working so closely enabled team members to focus collectively on specific problems the students were grappling with and tailor their instruction to meet those needs. This process brought an instructional uniformity and coherence across classrooms that positively affected both students and teachers. Teachers reported that students seemed more excited about reading. Additionally, teachers gained new knowledge about reading and effective teaching practices.

One key to successful learning teams is building trust among teammates, and that may take time. Year One of implementation was similar to the commitment someone makes to change his or her overall health. A long-term health change means you can’t expect to see immediate results; rather, you must adopt long-term lifestyle changes and remain committed to keeping your focus. The same is true when establishing and maintaining healthy Professional Learning Teams. Long-term commitment equals long-term results.

“During Year One, most teachers didn’t see the relevance of learning teams,” admits Shannon Byrum, an eighth-grade teacher at Chowan. In Year Two, however, a noticeable shift in

thinking occurred when Molli Rose videotaped a lesson in which she modeled a reading strategy (called a “think-aloud”) to her classroom. The lesson wasn’t highly successful, and Rose knew it, which is precisely why she shared the video with her team. She asked them to critique her lesson, help her determine why her approach didn’t work, and offer suggestions for what she could do differently next time. She also had another motive for sharing.

“Teachers usually see videos of accomplished teaching and don’t know how the teacher reached that point,” says Rose. “I wanted to show them where I started.” Before long, other Professional Learning Teams at Chowan asked to see Rose’s video.

During Year Two, teams e-mailed their logs to the entire school staff to encourage schoolwide sharing of ideas. By this second year of implementation, teachers not only realized the value of collaborating on instruction but also saw for themselves the importance of continual learning.

“I know now that last year wasn’t a waste after all,” says Byrum. “You have to evolve to this point.”

Over time ,the teams at Chowan progressed from working in isolation to sharing individual strategies in a team setting to ultimately working together as partners and co-learners in a schoolwide learning community.

“Learning teams have become an integral part of the way we operate—a way to collaborate and learn together, a way to talk about and focus on improving student learning,” observed Principal Winborne.

District administrators are impressed as well. “Our goal was to create an environment where self-directed learners met high expectations,” says Allan Smith, superintendent of Edenton-Chowan Public Schools. “PLTs have provided the framework whereby teachers direct their own focused professional growth to this end.”

—Story by Christy Casbon, SERVE

## Step 2 Facilitation Guide

For Step 2, you will find six tools designed to introduce teachers to the Professional Learning Team process. Use these tools to help teachers get an overview of what the learning team process involves. These tools range from FAQ sheets to a skit.

This guide contains an explanation of each tool and a suggested method of using that tool with groups of teachers. Adapt these suggestions as needed. Note that some tools contain a question for reflection. As an option to the suggested procedures, you may give teachers a moment to complete the activity and reflect quietly; then ask them to discuss their reflections with a partner or a small group. In using these tools, consider your audience. What do they already know and believe about collaboration, and how much time, if any, will you need to spend in previewing this process? Also consider the size of your audience, the setting, and amount of time available. You can locate additional tools for presenting Step 2 information at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php).

### Tool 2.1 Professional Learning Teams: Not Your Ordinary Teams.

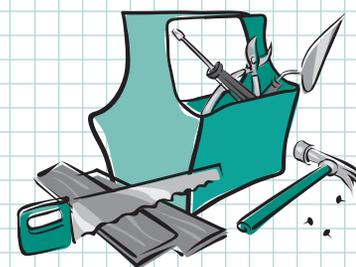
This tool identifies characteristics of Professional Learning Teams that set them apart from other types of team meetings.

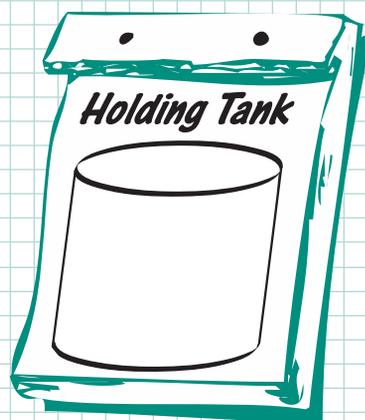
- Make copies of this tool and distribute it to teachers.
- After teachers read this, ask them to reflect on the question at the bottom of the handout and discuss their ideas with a partner.

### Tool 2.2 Glossary of Terms: Professional Learning Teams.

This glossary can serve a two-fold purpose: it can help to build a common language about learning teams and can introduce teachers to some of the basic components of the process.

- Give a copy of this glossary to each teacher.
- Explain that these definitions represent characteristics of Professional Learning Teams.
- Ask teachers to work in pairs or small groups to discuss the terms and to place checkmarks beside those that





already characterize professional development in their school.

- 🗣️ Allow time for a question-and-answer session about the glossary terms if needed.

### Tool 2.3 Professional Learning Team FAQs.

This FAQ sheet addresses some Professional Learning Team logistical information.

- 🗣️ Give a copy of this information to each teacher.
- 🗣️ Prepare a “holding tank” for questions that will not be answered at this meeting. To prepare a holding tank, draw a large outline of a cylinder on a sheet of chart paper, and write “Holding Tank” at the top.
- 🗣️ Ask teachers to read the information silently, reflect, and list questions they have about the process.
- 🗣️ Hold a short question-and-answer session. If the answer to the question has not yet been determined (for example, “When are our teams going to meet?”), write the question in the holding tank. Explain that these questions represent important concerns that will be addressed when that information is available.
- 🗣️ Explain that the logistics for each particular school work out somewhat differently. However, the central question “What do teams do?” describes a cycle that remains stable from school to school.

### Tool 2.4 What Did You See and Hear?

This tool is designed for use with the skit. It can help teachers build an understanding of some basic components of a team meeting.

- 🗣️ Distribute this handout to teachers before they watch the Professional Learning Team scenario skit.
- 🗣️ Ask teachers to silently read through the handout so they will know what to look for during the skit. Invite them to jot down answers for the questions as they watch the skit, and allow about two minutes following the skit for them to complete their responses.

### Tool 2.5 What Do We Do in Our Team Meetings?

This tool provides a brief overview of some possible components of the Professional Learning Team process. Use this tool *after* presenting the skit (Tool 2.4).

- Distribute copies of this tool after teachers have inferred, from the skit, what they consider to be components of the Professional Learning Teams.
- Ask teachers to examine the list, and ask them these two questions:
  1. What is on this list that you saw happening in the skit?
  2. What did you see in the skit that is not on the list?
- Give teachers opportunities to examine the list and ask questions. Explain that all learning teams are different and that their meetings will differ from one meeting to the next. All meetings, however, focus on the same outcome: teachers learn and work together to improve instruction for the purpose of improving student learning.

### Tool 2.6 Professional Learning Team Scenario.

This skit illustrates some basic activities of a Professional Learning Team meeting. With a little editing, you can adapt this scenario to a variety of meeting situations and team goals. This one focuses on a learning team made up of middle school teachers.

- Make five copies of the skit. Also, have chart paper and a marker available.
- Get four coffee cups, a pencil, and a notebook to use as props. (Large, colorful cut-outs of coffee cups and a pencil add interest and lighten the mood.)
- Invite four volunteers from the audience to read the parts of team members. You will read the part of the narrator.
- Distribute the props. Be sure the person who plays the role of Maria has the pencil and Sue has the notebook.
- Invite volunteers to read the parts aloud and to pantomime in an impromptu fashion during the skit.



## STEP 2

## Preview the Process—Facilitation Guide

- After the skit, invite teachers to talk about what they saw. Ask them to share their answers from the handout (Tool 2.4). From watching the skit, teachers should be able to identify some key components of learning team meetings such as looking at new information, reviewing, planning, decision-making, and so on. They should also be able to identify some ways of working together in a professional manner.
- List teachers' responses on chart paper. Compliment them on their insight and refer to these responses throughout the meeting whenever you discuss characteristics of learning teams that they identified.
- If their insights from the skit address any of their questions listed in the holding tank, address these as well.

**Directions:** Read about the differences between Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) and traditional teacher teams. Then, reflect on the questions at the right of the page, and share your thoughts with a neighbor.

-  PLTs focus exclusively on instruction. You will work together to increase your teaching skills and students' learning in your classrooms. As you engage in joint work, you will assume collective responsibility for the academic well being of all students.
-  PLTs place decision-making in the hands of the teachers. You will determine your own goals as well as procedures and activities for meeting those goals. Teachers are in charge of what they learn, where they learn, and how they learn.
-  In PLTs, teachers focus on developing supportive relationships. Important characteristics of PLTs include developing collegial relationships, supporting one another, and relying on one another. Teams have shared norms and values and interdependence among members. Your PLT work should create a welcoming, friendly meeting environment.
-  PLTs provide ongoing teacher professional development. You will learn and grow as a teacher in the best possible context—at the school site and possibly during the school day.
-  PLTs increase teaching expertise for participating teachers. If implemented throughout the faculty, these teams can raise the quality of teaching throughout the school. This pays vast benefits for students and teachers.



**Reflect:** How do PLTs differ from traditional meetings in which teachers are involved?



**Reflect:** Based on this information, how would working together in Professional Learning Teams help your students?



**Directions:** Read and discuss the terms in this glossary with others. Put a checkmark by those terms that describe current professional development in your school.

**Reflect:** Which of these terms already characterize professional development at your school?



- Collaborative**—involves working together with other teachers
- Continual learning**—updating knowledge and skills on a regular, ongoing-basis
- Data-driven**—based on an analysis of student data and information
- Instructional focus**—meetings focus totally and only on classroom instruction
- Job-embedded**—professional development occurs at the school site
- Logs**—written records of team discussions and activities during meetings
- Norms**—rules and procedures for how members will work together
- Professional Learning Team**—a group of three to five teachers who work together systematically to increase their knowledge and skill in teaching and help their students learn at higher levels
- Research-based**—instruction built on studies of education theory and practice that have been tested and found to be effective
- Shared leadership**—team responsibilities rotate weekly or monthly
- Systematic**—meetings occur on a regular basis, preferably once each week or more often

### How large are the teams?

Learning teams typically include 3–5 teachers. This allows all team members to participate, share leadership, and develop supportive relationships.

### Who are on the teams?

The teams may form around grade levels, interdisciplinary teaching teams, subject areas, or other criteria.

### When do the teams meet?

Teams meet on a regular basis. For best results, teams should meet a minimum of one to two hours each week. Optimum meeting time is during the school day.

### What do teams do?

Each learning team:

- Establishes ground rules (norms) to ensure effective meetings.
- Examines student and school data.
- Determines a goal. What do team members want this team to accomplish?
- Develops an initial plan to increase teacher expertise and knowledge and the quality of instruction.
- Engages in a process of questioning, studying, planning, designing, and/or implementing new teaching strategies, assessing progress, reflecting, revising, and documenting.

### What kinds of documentation do teams keep?

Each team keeps written records (logs) of all meetings. These include summaries of conversations and activities during the meeting. (Note: All learning team meeting conversations and activities should pertain to the team's instructional goal.)



**Directions:** You will receive further information about each of the following questions. This tool is intended to give you a quick overview of what Professional Learning Teams involve.

**Reflect:** What other questions do you have about the learning team process?





**Directions:** You are about to get a glimpse of a team conducting a Professional Learning Team meeting. Answer the questions as you watch the skit, and prepare to share some of your ideas.

*As you watch the skit, notice...*

What are the teachers talking about?

How do they interact?

What activities do they engage in during/between meetings?

**Reflect:** After watching this skit, what things do you think are characteristic of a Professional Learning Team?



**Reflect:** How do PLT meetings differ from other meetings in which teachers are involved?

### All meetings

- Document! Document! Document!** Keep written records (logs) of all team meetings. These include summaries of conversations and activities during the meeting.
- Share best practices or ideas from each week.



### Initial meeting(s)

- Take care of team logistics.
- Set team norms.
- Determine a long-term goal.
  1. Look at student data/school improvement needs.
  2. Decide on an area in which teachers need to increase expertise.
  3. Examine current assumptions and beliefs about teaching in this area.
  4. Determine the “teaching gap” between current practices and desired practices.
  5. Plan an initial course of action.
  6. Determine what information and resources are needed.
  7. Plan teacher actions between meetings.

### Early meetings

- Look at research, and discuss information (books, articles).
- Share new learning from research and information.
- Begin to apply new ideas in the classroom.
- Reflect on and discuss classroom applications.
- Decide on common approaches/strategies to try.
- Plan teacher actions between meetings.

### Continuing meetings

- Look at research, and discuss information (books, articles).



**Directions:** While there is no one “right” way to conduct PLT meetings, this tool overviews a common framework for conducting collaborative teacher meetings. Use this to examine and discuss activities that might occur during PLT meetings.



**Reflect:** In what other ways can teachers work together during PLT meetings to learn, grow, and increase their teaching expertise?



- Plan joint work on an instructional approach or strategy and coordinate teaching activities among team members.
- Develop joint or coordinated lessons.
- Examine student work and responses to particular activities and strategies.
- Examine teacher work, such as classroom assignments.
- Observe teachers using specific activities with their students.
- Reflect on the effectiveness of teaching strategies and approaches.
- Share, develop, and/or modify instructional practices.
- Share challenges and problems, and plan methods for overcoming these.
- Reflect on the team's progress toward instructional goals.
- Reflect on the team's functioning as a collaborative group.
- Plan teacher actions between meetings.
- Make the team's work "public." Engage other teachers, run ideas by the faculty, let them know what the team is doing, and honor their input. Build enthusiasm for Professional Learning Teams among the faculty.
- Develop a toolkit of information and practices that can help all teachers grow professionally, work together, and increase teaching expertise.
- Revise your plans and course of action as needed.
- Modify and improve the PLT process throughout the year.

**Note:** The process described on these pages and in the following steps is adapted from a variety of sources, including DuFour and Eaker, *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (1998); Garmston and Wellman in *The Adaptive School* (1999); Murphy and Lick in *Whole Faculty Study Groups* (1998); Wald and Castleberry in *Educators as Learners* (2000); and Richardson in *Tools for Schools* (August 2001).

*Team members sit in the designated area, with coffee cups, notebooks, and pens in hand. (You may use large cut-outs for the cups and pens.)*

**Narrator:** (standing to the side and gesturing to the team members) *Since teachers do not normally work together on a regular basis to examine instruction closely, knowing exactly what to do during learning team time may be puzzling, at least at first. To give you an idea of how to proceed, consider the following scenario.*

*Your learning team members are geared up and ready to go. Your team has already met and decided on a goal and guidelines for the meeting. Now you've come together as part of a yearlong process of working together to grow professionally—coffee cups and notebooks in hand. You are looking expectantly at one another. Now what?*

*These team members—Sue, Maria, Roy, and John—are members of a middle school learning team. They are working together to learn how to help students in reading comprehension. Each teacher teaches a different core subject—science, math, social studies, and language arts. They share the same group of students.*

*As team members take their seats, Sue opens the notebook where the team keeps logs of their meetings and takes out a blank log form. Maria volunteers to record today's discussions and activities on the log. Looking at last week's log, Sue begins:*

**Sue:** At our last meeting, we decided to learn some ways of teaching that will help our students improve their reading comprehension. To reach that decision, we looked at their test scores which indicate that they need help in reading comprehension. We've also noticed that many of them don't read their assignments. When they do, some of them either don't remember what they read or don't seem to understand it. We agreed that teaching reading strategies in each of our subject areas would be the best way to help our students understand their textbooks. Roy, you volunteered last week to look for some strategies we can use with our students. What did you come up with?

**Narrator:** *Roy gives everyone a copy of some information he found.*



**Instructions to volunteers:** Thank you for participating in this skit! Please read your part with expression and, when appropriate, use the actions and body language suggested by the script. You can also pantomime the actions suggested as I read the narrator's part.

**Roy:** Well, I found out that our kids are typical of kids all over the nation. I located several research-based ideas for helping our kids learn to read and understand their textbooks. Best of all, these strategies can help our students develop strategic thinking skills and take responsibility for their own learning.

**Narrator:** *For the next 15 minutes, Roy shares information with his team members. (Pause, then continue.) Then Maria, the math teacher, comments:*

**Maria:** So, basically, we're turning our kids into good thinkers, and that helps them to understand what they read. That makes me feel better! To be honest, I was having trouble figuring out how and when I was going to teach reading comprehension. I had nightmares about having to spend time in math class doing something totally different from math. But, if I have this right, what I need to do is teach my students how to use the same thinking strategies that you will be using in your subject areas—like graphic organizers, prior knowledge, and think-alouds—only I can apply these strategies to math concepts.

**Roy:** Sure looks that way to me. But that brings up a question. Exactly which of these strategies are we going to use? And are we all going to use the same strategies?

**Narrator:** *Team members have a conversation about various reading strategies they could use with their students. The team agrees to initially focus on working with students to develop critical thinking skills in two areas: pre-reading strategies and vocabulary understanding and use.*

**John:** Okay, so what now? Do you want me to look for more information on these two topics before our next meeting and come up with some suggestions for specific activities we can use?

**Roy:** Sounds good to me. You know, I have some language arts journals at home that have information on reading strategies. I'll bring them and leave them in the workroom. Why don't we all look for information related to pre-reading and vocabulary strategies next week and see what we come up with? That way, we'll already know something about these two topics when we meet.

**Sue:** Hey, I just had another idea! Ms. Duke does some of this pre-reading stuff with her students. How about if I go to one of her classes next week and watch her teach those strategies?

**Maria:** Good idea. Think she could meet with our team for 15 minutes or so one day and give us all some tips?

**Narrator:** *Team members like Maria's idea, and Sue recalls that Ms. Duke has conducted several teacher workshops on reading comprehension. The team decides to ask Ms. Duke to be a resource for them throughout the year.*

**Sue:** Okay, so we've decided what strategies we'll focus on as a group in our classes. During the week, we'll gather information on how to help kids build the vocabulary they need in

order to understand their textbooks. And, we'll look for pre-reading strategies to help them develop strategic thinking skills for reading and understanding their textbooks.

**Roy:** Are we moving fast enough with this? I mean, what are we going to do in our classrooms this week? What if the principal comes in and says, "Hey, Roy. What are you doing to help your kids with reading?"

**Maria:** *(Waving the log in the air)* That's one reason we have this log. Here, we have a record of when we're meeting, what we're learning, and how we're planning and preparing. That's part of any good professional development process. With this log, we can keep track of our progress and document what we are doing.

**Narrator:** *The team goes over its plan to work together all year to locate, design, and fine-tune a set of common strategies that work to help students read and understand their textbooks. Team members decide that they all will use these same strategies so that they will become second nature to the students.*

**John:** Hold on a minute. How are we going to know that these thinking strategies really help our students understand what they read? What kind of evidence are we going to collect?

**Narrator:** *The team discusses different kinds of data and information they can gather, and John volunteers to call the reading specialist to ask for ideas to bring back to the team at the next meeting.*

**John:** You know, I could put together a web page where we can post information about reading strategies and assignments and examples of what our kids are doing.

**Roy:** What a great idea! Want to post our team logs there also? Then our students and parents can all see what we're doing. The kids can see that we believe learning is important because we're learning, too.

**Narrator:** *Team members agree that a web page would be a valuable resource and that continual learning is an important concept they can model for their students. They decide to ask the media specialist about setting up a learning team center in the library. In it, they plan to keep information and materials on reading strategies and will invite other learning teams to do the same.*

**Sue:** Okay, now let's recap what we've done. Today, Roy gave us information and an overview on critical thinking strategies for teaching reading in content areas. Then we decided on two areas to focus on. We're starting with pre-reading and vocabulary strategies. All of us will get some information on these two strategies before our next meeting. Roy will check with the librarian to see about setting up a teacher resource area in the library. John will talk to the reading specialist to get some ideas on ways to tell if we're making a difference for students. John will also start developing a web page. Maria will get our team logs ready to post on the web page. I'll ask Ms. Duke to meet with our team one day after school, and

I'll also see if I can observe her working with students on pre-reading strategies. Now, who wants to be the team leader next week?

**Roy:** What does the leader do?

**Sue:** Well, as this week's team leader, I checked with all of you to be sure you remembered this meeting. I asked Roy occasionally how he was coming along with getting information for the meeting. I also asked the office folks not to interrupt us during the meeting, and I reminded the librarian that we'd be using this corner in the library for our meeting. Basically, I just tried to keep the meeting on everybody's front burner. Once we got here, I tried to help keep us on track by summarizing where we were from time to time.

**Maria:** I guess I can do that next week.

**Sue:** Now, does anyone have any concerns or recommendations about today's meeting?

**John:** We don't have enough time. This is the kind of stuff we need to be doing more of as teachers. We've just scratched the surface today. Maybe we need to meet more often, at least until we get some specific procedures and materials in place for teaching reading in our subject areas.

**Narrator:** *The team discusses the possibility and then decides that they will stick to one meeting per week and meet more frequently when they can.*

**Maria:** Before we go, what's one idea from our meeting today that we can share with other teams?

**Narrator:** *The team agrees that setting up a library center where teams can contribute information is an idea worth sharing. They also decide to share their idea about setting up a web page, and John volunteers to work with other teams that want to do the same thing. Maria records this information on a sheet titled "Today's Best Ideas" and prepares to put this in the principal's box for copying and distributing to other teams. Grabbing their now-empty coffee cups, team members head for their classrooms.*

## Step 3: Organize the Teams

**Entry 16:** The middle-school faculty considered three learning team options. (1) Each team would determine its own focus based on needs of students on that team. (2) Teams within each grade level would decide on a common focus based on needs of students at that grade level. (3) The entire faculty would focus on the same student needs.

After some discussion, the faculty voted for a whole faculty focus on reading and writing. What a difference for students this faculty will make, with each learning team focusing on the same areas of student need!

—Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

### Background

The first step in establishing Professional Learning Teams as a school's way of doing business involves taking care of some organizational logistics. Who will participate? What will the teams look like? When and where will they meet? What resources will they need initially?

### Who Will Participate?

Deciding whether Professional Learning Teams at the school will be voluntary or required poses an interesting dilemma. Some researchers, such as Gable and Manning (1999), suggest participation in collaborative groups should be voluntary. Murphy (1998) suggests that the whole faculty should participate when a high percentage (75%) of the faculty agrees. Others, such as DuFour (1998), believe that “[c]ollaboration by invitation does not work.” DuFour asserts teacher isolation is such an ingrained way of doing business in our schools that invitations to collaborate aren't enough. He recommends purposely incorporating meaningful teacher collaboration into the school day and embedding it into the daily way of doing business in the school.

Whether these teams are voluntary or required is a decision best made at the school level and determined by the reason for implementing Professional Learning Teams.

Consider *requiring* teacher participation if the answer to the following questions is *yes*.



#### This section will help the facilitator:

-  Introduce teachers to options for team organization.
-  Provide teachers with information to help them decide when and where teams will meet.
-  Assist with other organizational logistics.



“The isolation of teachers is so ingrained...that invitations to collaborate are insufficient. Meaningful collaboration must be systematically embedded into the daily life of the school.”

—Richard DuFour, *Professional Learning Communities at Work*, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 1998, p.118

- 🗣️ Is there a specific initiative that needs to be implemented schoolwide?
- 🗣️ Do teachers need to address a schoolwide student achievement problem in a specific area?
- 🗣️ Does the school need a way to embed ongoing professional development and continual learning into the school day?
- 🗣️ Does the school culture need to become more collaborative?

Professional Learning Teams may be *voluntary* if the answer to the following questions is *yes*.

- 🗣️ Do teachers want to meet regularly with colleagues to work on personal professional development plans?
- 🗣️ Does the school need an effective process for mentoring new teachers?
- 🗣️ Do teachers in one department or subject area want to accomplish specific instructional goals?

In order for Professional Learning Teams to be successful either as a voluntary or a required activity, the school must have a principal or key leader who is committed to making the process work.

## What Will the Teams Look Like?

Professional Learning Teams typically include three to five teachers. Most experts recommend no more than six. This small number allows all participants to play an active, involved role and to rotate leadership positions. The teams can be organized in a variety of ways to address student needs.

In some schools, all teams may work on a single initiative such as teaching reading comprehension across all content areas. At other schools, teachers may organize around topics of interest such as examining student work, student learning styles, or small group instruction. Teams at still other schools may organize around specific subject areas. **The bottom line:** Organize the teams in a way that will produce the best results for the students rather than the one that is most familiar and comfortable for teachers.

Different organizational options are overviewed in “Learning Team Options” (Tool 3.1). Note that this is not an exhaustive list and other

options may apply. Also note that teams within the same school may be organized in different ways, and a team may meet the criteria for more than one option.

In the best-case scenario, teachers will have input into how the teams are organized and will base their decisions on their analysis of student data. However, in some schools, the principal decides how the teams will be organized. In either case, this decision needs to be based on student data and information. If the faculty needs to take a firsthand look at the data at this point, you can use some Step 5 tips and tools to help them examine and analyze that data.

## When and Where Will Learning Teams Meet?

Most experts suggest that teams meet weekly. Some suggest meeting for one hour per week, and others suggest two hours or more. Since learning team meetings ideally take place during the school day, time for teachers to meet must be built into the school day and year. All teams should meet on a regular basis and at scheduled times.

Lack of time for teams to meet during the school day can stifle the whole learning team initiative. Tool 3.2, “Time to Meet,” can help the principal and faculty think through ways to make time for this initiative.

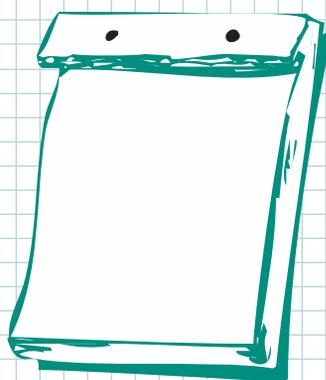
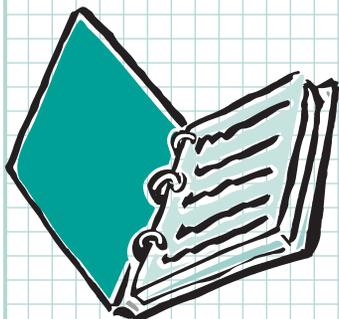
Teams also need to decide where they will meet. This location needs to be as comfortable and as free from interruption as possible. A teacher’s classroom, a conference room, or a special area set aside in the school library might suit the purpose. Holding learning team meetings in the library has an added advantage of allowing students to see teachers studying and learning together. Teachers can publicly model learning as a valuable activity that continues throughout a person’s life.

If your school library is large enough, the librarian might set up a special learning team resource center. In that way, teams can share articles, books, and other information and resources with one another by leaving them on shelves in the designated area. This resource center could house a central collection of learning team materials and include a bulletin board or location to post questions and information for other teams. Teams could also leave records or logs of their meetings in this area as a means of sharing their work with teachers, parents, and administrators.



We recommend that teachers be provided with the professional time and opportunities they need to do their jobs.

—*Prisoners of Time*, The National Education Commission on Time and Learning, 1994



## What Resources Will Teams Need to Begin?

While teams may add more resources to their wish lists as they begin meeting, the minimal necessities for each team include these items:

- A team notebook (three-ring binder) and a set of tabs
- A school calendar with holidays and important dates marked
- Chart paper and markers for recording team members' ideas during group discussions
- Multiple copies of log forms (one for each meeting) unless teams will use computers to keep meeting logs
- Handouts with information about the learning team process (some tools in this book provide useful information for teams)
- Books, articles, and other sources of information relating to student needs the team will address, if determined

Teams also need a place to keep their work. Items they need to store may include the team notebook, a team portfolio, samples of student work, and information they have gathered about their particular instructional focus.

After taking care of logistics, teams will be ready to begin the next step in the Professional Learning Team process: reaching consensus on some teamwork basics.

## Step 3 Facilitation Guide

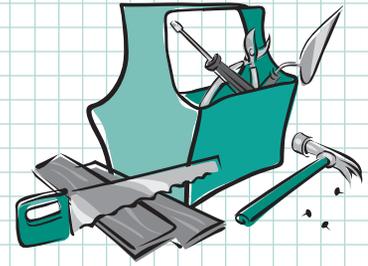
This tool box contains an explanation of three Step 3 tools and a suggested method of using each tool with groups of teachers. Decide whether you need to use a particular tool based on the current decisions that need to be made. Then, adapt the tool and suggested procedures as needed for the size of your group and the amount of workspace. You may also find additional tools and information for this step at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php).

Often, decisions about team organization are best addressed after a look at student data. If an examination of student data needs to come first, use tools in Step 5 to help the faculty with this.

### 3.1 Learning Team Options.

If teachers will decide how the learning teams will be organized, this tool can help them consider a variety of options. As they reflect on each option, ask them to consider this question: “What can we learn using this option that will help our students?”

- 🔧 Ask teachers to work individually or in pairs to decide on student needs that might be addressed using each option.
- 🔧 Ask teachers to answer the reflection question silently and to check the option(s) they selected.
- 🔧 When they complete the activity, ask, “Which of these options seems most suitable for your faculty to use in addressing the learning needs of your students?”
- 🔧 Clarify options as needed, and insist that everyone’s view be heard and respected. Invite teachers to suggest other options that may better fit their school situations.
- 🔧 Record the most popular options on chart paper, and canvass teachers to reach a consensus.
- 🔧 At this point, the principal may use this information to make a final decision. If teachers will make this decision, lead the group to discuss the following questions, and record their answers on chart paper.
  1. What is the decision that needs to be made? (*Who will be on each learning team?*)



2. What are some things we need to take into consideration when assigning teams? (*Common planning times, teachers who want to work together, student needs that will be addressed, etc.*)
3. Do we want a committee to look at these considerations and make a recommendation?
4. If yes, who should be on the committee? What time frame should the committee follow?
5. If no, how will we proceed? If teachers decide to make this decision now, you may use the following procedure to help teachers form teams, such as special topics teams. Note that you would not necessarily use this process for forming grade-level teams or teams with common planning times. Those teams are usually already “set.”

-  Give each teacher a sticky note, and ask each one to write his/her name in it.
-  Suggest they go to blank wall space and place their sticky notes in groups according to the topic or the team they want to work with. Remind them that no group should have more than five people.
-  Have blank sheets of paper and markers available in case you need to make titles for groups before teachers place their sticky notes.
-  Ask one person in each group to make a list of group members.

**TOPIC: Reading comprehension**



### 3.2 Time to Meet.

This tool can give the faculty and administration ideas for ways to make time for Professional Learning Teams to meet during the school day. While not all ideas are workable for each school, this activity can generate some “out-of-the-box” thinking by both principals and teachers and help them consider creative ways to organize the school day so that teachers can work together.

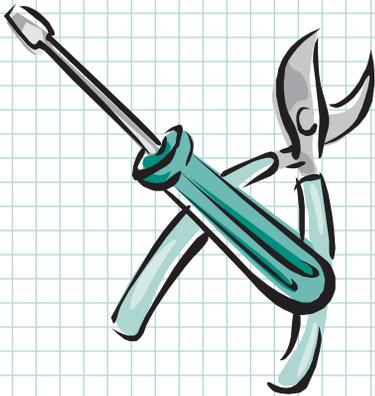
-  Suggest that participants work individually or with one or two partners in their area to complete the activity.
-  Ask the principal and a subcommittee of teachers to tally these preferences and determine which options are doable.

**3.3 Resources on Time.**

This tool provides an annotated bibliography of articles on finding time for professional development during the school day. Distribute copies to teachers and administrators. Explain that these articles can be accessed on the Web, and invite teachers to check the Professional Learning Team site at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php) for updates.

## Tool 3.1

## Learning Team Options



**Directions:** Read each option, decide what student learning needs you could address using each option, and record your thoughts in the right-hand column.

**Reflect:** Which option(s) will produce the best results for your students?



Option	Description	Advantages/ Disadvantages
Whole-Faculty Teams	The entire faculty participates in learning teams focused on the same initiative.	
Special-Topic Teams	Teachers group themselves in teams around topics of interest that relate to instruction.	
Interdisciplinary Teams	Teams of teachers work together who share common planning times and the same students.	
Grade-Level Teams	Teachers work together on effective instructional practices for students at a particular grade level.	
Grade-Range Teams	Teachers work together across grade levels to address specific student needs across grades.	
Subject-Area Teams	Teachers address instructional and learning needs within their subject areas.	
Between-School Teams	Teachers from different schools work together on a common initiative.	

**Bank time**

- Lengthen the regular school day. Save the extra minutes to create larger blocks of time when teachers can plan or learn together.
- Adjust arrival and dismissal times so that school begins 30 minutes early on Monday through Thursday and dismisses two hours early on Friday so that teachers can meet collaboratively each Friday.
- Create regularly scheduled early dismissal/late start days.
- Shave minutes off the lunch period and “save” that time for teacher learning time.
- Total the number of hours teachers meet after school and do not require teachers to report to school for that amount of time on regularly scheduled teacher work days.

**Buy time**

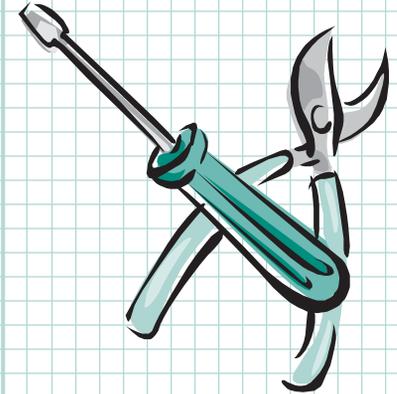
- Use paraprofessionals to release teachers during the school day for meetings.
- Hire a team of rotating substitute teachers to release teachers and enable them to plan or learn together.
- Hire one or two “permanent” subs to regularly fill in for teachers in order to free them for Professional Learning Team meetings.
- Schedule a team of substitute teachers for a day to release teachers on a rotating basis for learning team meetings.
- Hire more teachers, clerks, and support staff to expand or add learning time for teachers.

**Use common time**

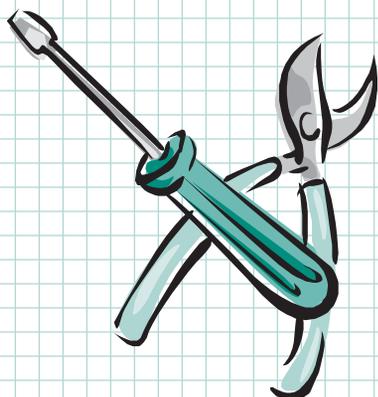
- Use common planning time to enable teachers working with the same students, the same grade level, or the same subjects to meet in Professional Learning Teams.
- Organize nonacademic subjects into blocks of time to create common time for teachers to meet.
- Link planning periods to other non-instructional times, such as lunch periods, giving teachers the option to use their personal time for shared learning time.

**Free teachers from instructional time**

- Enlist administrators to teach classes.



**Directions:** Place a checkmark (✓) by ideas that appeal to you, and circle those you think are most workable for your school. Talk your decisions over with others from your school or with nearby participants.



**Reflect:**  
Your thoughts, please! Which options do you prefer?



**Reflect:** Which options do you think are most doable from the school's standpoint?

- Authorize teaching assistants and/or college interns to teach classes, always under the direction of a teacher.
- Pair teachers so one teaches while the other meets with his/her Professional Learning Team.
- Plan daylong, off-site field experiences for students, and use the large block of time created for teacher Professional Learning Team meetings.
- Ask parent volunteers to take classes for an hour for a learning team to meet.
- Arrange educational activities for students led by professionals from local colleges, businesses, governmental agencies, and community agencies.

**Free teachers from non-instructional requirements**

- Use non-homeroom teachers to occasionally perform homeroom duties so teachers can meet for an extended time before school and through homeroom.
- Reassign school personnel to allow teachers to meet during pep rallies and assemblies.
- Provide more time for teachers to engage in collaborative work by removing non-instructional paperwork, clerical, and school management tasks from teachers' plates and encouraging teams to use that extra time to meet and focus intently on instruction.

**Add professional days to the school year**

- Create multi-day summer learning institutes for teachers to give them needed depth in the areas of focus for the Professional Learning Teams.
- Create a mid-year break for students, and use those days for teacher learning.

**Use existing time more effectively**

- Set aside faculty meeting times for professional learning, and put all general faculty announcements in newsletters and/or emails to teachers.
- Spread time from existing planning days across the calendar to provide more frequent, shorter school-based opportunities to learn.

*Adapted from Richardson, "Think Outside the Clock: Create Time for Professional Learning." Tools for Schools, 2002. National Staff Development Council. Reprinted with permission of the National Staff Development Council, [www.nsdc.org](http://www.nsdc.org). 2004. All rights reserved.*

***Finding Time for Faculties to Study Together by Carlene Murphy***

Murphy states that if a faculty agrees that schools are learning organizations for the adults in the building as well as for children, time will be found. She cites numerous examples of real schools that are finding time for staff development.

***Making Time for Adult Learning by Pricilla Pardini***

Pardini cites eight real-life examples of schools that use a variety of strategies to find time for professional development. She provides contact information for each school cited.

***Target Time Toward Teachers by Linda Darling-Hammond***

Darling-Hammond writes about numerous schools that have restructured for ongoing professional development. She discusses strategies that (a) allow for shared planning, (b) support stronger relationships and deeper knowledge of learners, and (c) create longer blocks of instructional time while reducing teaching loads and increasing planning time.

***Time, It's Made, Not Found by Stephen Barkley***

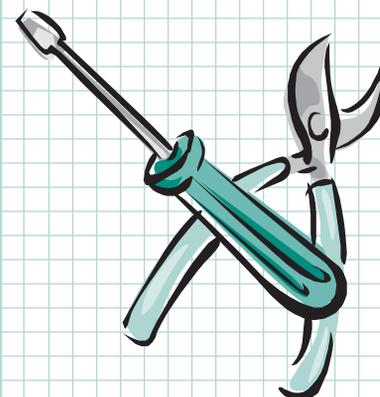
Barkley argues that school reform is slowed due to lack of time for professional learning. He cites examples of making time, including periodically regrouping students into larger classes, thus freeing up to half the faculty for meeting together.

***Think Outside the Clock: Create Time for Professional Learning by Joan Richardson***

Richardson offers examples of real schools that have made time for teachers to learn during the school day. She cites experiences of staff developers and consultants who offer insights into the problems and possibilities of finding time.

***Prisoners of Time by the National Commission on Time and Learning***

This is an excellent resource that thoroughly examines the challenge of time for teaching and learning. The Commission makes realistic, powerful recommendations concerning the use of time as a factor to support learning, not a boundary that marks its limits. The entire document is available online at [www.ed.gov/pubs/PrisonersOfTime](http://www.ed.gov/pubs/PrisonersOfTime).

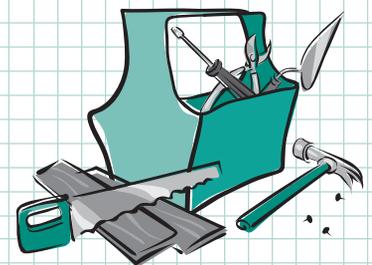


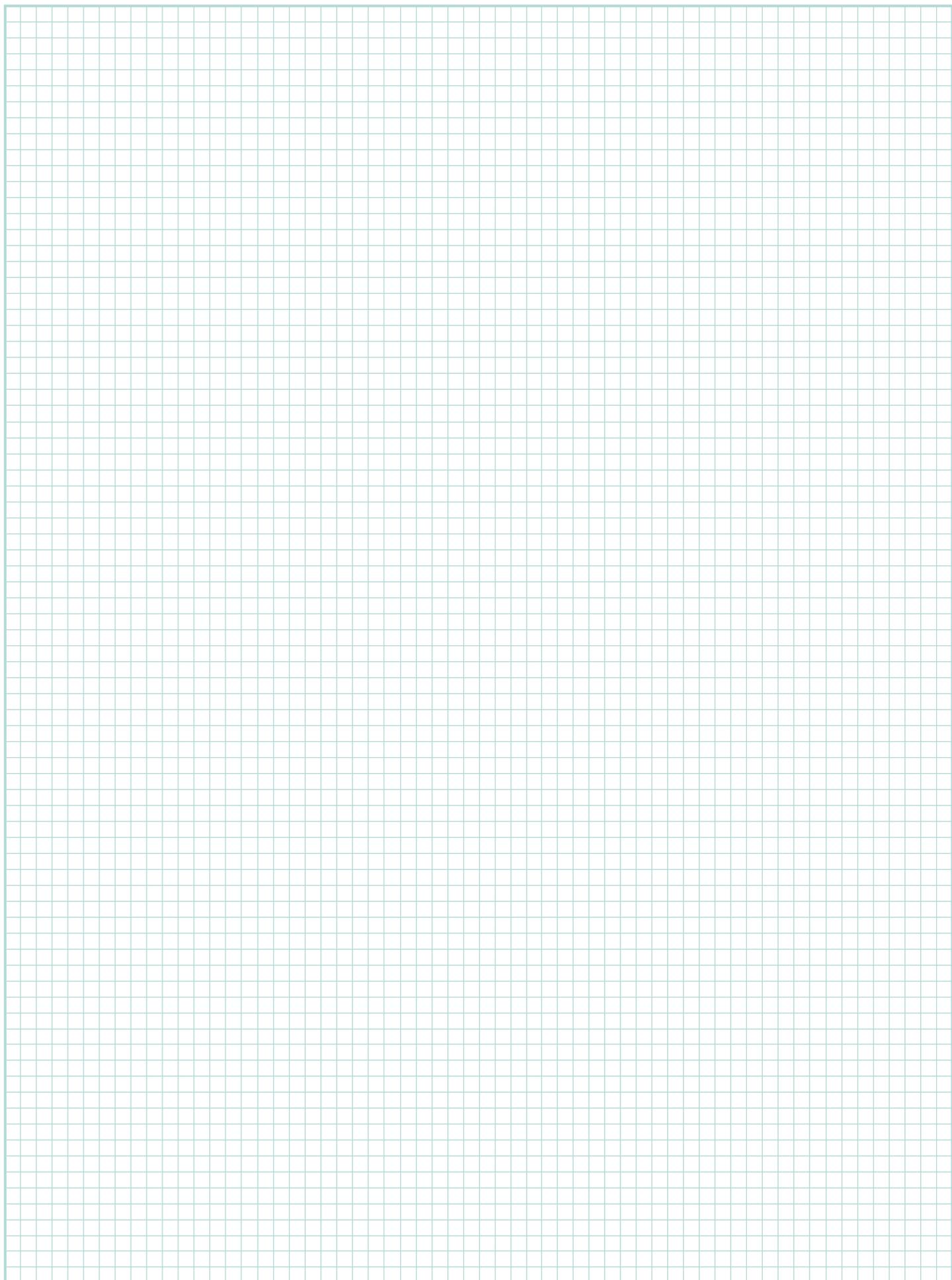
**Directions:** The articles at left are available online at [www.nsd.org/library/resources.cfm](http://www.nsd.org/library/resources.cfm). This section of the National Staff Development Council's online library website offers links to additional articles and web links related to finding and effectively using time for onsite professional development. If finding time is an issue, check these out!



# Do the Work

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Step 5: Analyze the Data .....	5-1
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Step 8: Maintain the Momentum .....	8-1





## Step 4: Define Team Expectations

**Entry 21:** Most learning teams probed to find out exactly what I want them to do, or whether or not some idea is “right.” I have to keep explaining that “right or wrong” is not the issue. And what I want has nothing to do with anything. Learning-team members decide what they need to do to grow professionally and to help their students succeed. Then they set up some regular meeting times, establish some team norms, and they’re off and running! Initially, most teachers looked uncertain, then thoughtful, and then brightened when they realized that they have autonomy under this process—autonomy, reduced isolation, and an opportunity to succeed at a challenging activity. Sounds like a recipe for success to me!

—Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

### Background

The first Professional Learning Team meeting should focus on establishing rules that team members agree to follow as they work together. Teachers typically do their work in isolation from one another, and meeting with colleagues on a regular basis to share professional skills and knowledge may be foreign to their school experience. Consequently, teachers often find themselves in unfamiliar territory when sitting down together to hold professional conversations about their instruction and to take action based on group decisions. Assumptions for how to go about working together on a team will probably vary from teacher to teacher, and team members need to be explicit about what they expect from each other before beginning work on instructional issues. Tool 4.1 can provide teachers with an opportunity to think about valuable traits for good team members.

Occasionally, team members will bypass this norm-setting step in beginning their team work. Teams may be made up of teachers who have already worked together in some capacity and who believe they are capable of operating effectively without formal procedures in place. Their attitudes may mirror the attitude of this fictitious teacher quoted in the August/September 1999 issue of *The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) publication, Tools for Schools*: “Everyone attending these meetings is an adult. Adults know how



#### This section will help the facilitator:

- Introduce teachers to traits of good team members.
- Guide teachers in establishing team norms.

to behave and participate in meetings. We just want to get to work when we get into one of these meetings. We don't want to sit around and talk about how we're going to do that work.”

The NSDC article suggests that norms are necessary to ensure that all team members participate fully in meetings. Many team members are thoughtful individuals who don't push their way into conversations. Without some rules of participation, dialogue, and decision-making, one or two people may end up dominating the conversation and coming up with ideas and actions other team members can't support, even though they may not say so openly. Establishing norms helps teams build discipline and trust. If the team does not operate smoothly, then meetings will not be productive, and team members will feel frustrated.

### **Introduce Norms**

Before the first meeting, ask your team members to read *Norms Put the 'Golden Rule' into Practice for Groups*. You can obtain a copy of this short publication from the National Staff Development Council (NSDC) by calling 513-523-6029. The NSDC allows you to make copies of this tool for workshops. You may also obtain the opening article of this tool from the “Staff Development Library” link at the NSDC website: [www.nsd.org](http://www.nsd.org).

During the first meeting, team members should clarify expectations and procedures for attendance, preparation, participation, confidentiality, and decision-making. Tools 4.2 and 4.3 can assist with this task. Note that each team may choose different norms to emphasize—norms must fit the group. For example, a middle school in Mobile, Alabama, was composed of a team of teachers who were extroverted and chatty. Team members set a norm to “stay on task for the entire meeting” but found this to be difficult because of their tendency to share personal information. They finally agreed to modify the norm so that they had five minutes for personal sharing and then stayed on task for the remainder of the meeting.

### **Assess Meeting Quality**

Throughout the year, the team needs to monitor the quality of its meetings by reviewing team norms, assessing team members' adherence to these norms, and making needed changes. Taking stock of the current situation and answering the following questions may help team members decide how much time they need to spend revisiting norms, procedures, and expectations.

Tools 4.4 and 4.5 contain self-assessments that teams can use to evaluate their functioning.

You can also determine whether teams are functioning smoothly by carefully reading team logs, visiting team meetings, and debriefing teams from time to time. As you work with teams, look for some of these characteristics of high-performing teams. These characteristics are adapted from *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups* by Garmston and Wellman, 1999, p.157.

High-performing teams are more likely to:

- Have a sense of identity as a group.
- Gain more knowledge.
- Be better organized.
- Plan efficient and effective meetings.
- Do more in less time with less effort.
- Maintain good relationships with other team members.
- Become better at their work as time goes on.
- Spend a greater amount of time trying to understand a problem with students' learning or a teaching strategy.
- Effectively plan, field test, and revise their approach to improving their instructional practices.
- Monitor the results of their instructional strategies on student learning.
- Be reflective and continuously learn through experience when exploring new ways of teaching.
- Arrive at creative solutions for helping students learn.
- Reach ingenious and insightful solutions for effectively instructing students.
- Have fun working together.

### Deal With Conflict

Team members may become discouraged if initial meetings do not go smoothly. Learning to work together is a gradual process that may begin with friction among team members. As the team establishes procedures and coalesces around a common purpose, meetings usually evolve into collegial interaction, interdependence, and trust. As you work with teams, advise team members not to smooth over

STEP 4

Define Team Expectations

or cover up conflicting ideas and perspectives. Different perspectives often lead to rich understandings and creative solutions. However, personal conflict is another matter. Following norms of respect, listening, and honoring all ideas can keep conflict focused on ideas rather than people.

## Step 4 Facilitation Guide

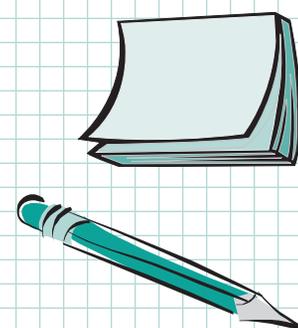
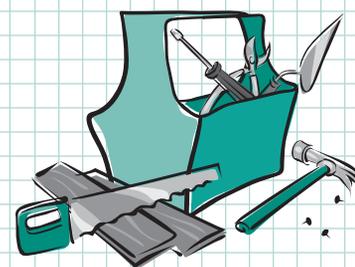
Step 4 offers five tools designed to help teachers establish rules for working together, along with an explanation of each tool and a suggested method of using that tool with groups of teachers. Note that some tools contain a question for reflection. As an option to the suggested procedures, you may give teachers a moment to complete the activity and reflect quietly, and then ask them to discuss their reflections with a partner or a small group. You may also find additional tools and information related to this step on the Professional Learning Team website at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php).

In selecting tools, consider your audience. What do they already know about working together, and how much time will you need to spend helping them understand the value of norm-setting? What level of help will you need to provide in engaging them in serious thought about their team's operating procedures?

In the event that you need to provide structured guidance to teachers to help them establish norms, use this procedure:

### Guiding Teams in Setting Norms

1. Provide sticky notes and pens/pencils.
2. Provide examples of norms by distributing these tools from Step 4. Allow time for teachers to look over these.
  - Tool 4.1 Traits of Successful Team Members
  - Tool 4.2 A Norm Sampler
  - Tool 4.3 Team Norms
3. Give each team member at least six sticky notes and a writing tool. (Giving the same kind of writing tool to each teacher will help ensure anonymity for participants.)
4. Ask teachers to think about behaviors they consider ideal for working on a team. Ask them to write one idea on each of their sticky notes.
5. Invite team members to place their sticky notes on the chart paper. Then ask them to examine the sticky notes and group similar ideas together.
6. When all of the sticky notes have been sorted into groups, ask the teachers to identify the norm suggested



by each group of sticky notes. Record these norms on a new sheet of chart paper.

7. Review the proposed norms with the team. Determine whether team members can support each of the norms.
8. Ask team members to examine the tools and information they have and to pull from their own experiences to determine if they need to include additional norms. Add those on which the group reaches consensus.
9. When the team feels satisfied with its list of ground rules, ask a team member to record the norms on the “Team Norms” tool and put this in the team notebook.

### **Tool 4.1 —Traits of Successful Team Members.**

This tool describes some attitudes and interpersonal skills that characterize successful team members.

-  Distribute a copy of this tool to each teacher.
-  Ask teachers to follow the directions on the handout.
-  Allow individuals to reflect quietly on their effectiveness as team members.
-  Invite volunteers to suggest reasons why each of these traits is important.

### **Tool 4.2 A Norm Sampler.**

This tool provides an example of types of norms that a typical team might develop. These cover expectations for team members and meeting procedures.

-  Distribute copies to each teacher.
-  Ask teachers to read the Norton High School norms. Then, invite them to check the norms they think are worth considering for their own teams.
-  Request that teachers discuss the questions at the bottom of the page with a partner.
-  Ask volunteers to share one norm they feel is a “keeper” for teams.

### **Tool 4.3 Team Norms.**

This tool offers five questions team members should consider when setting group norms.

- Give each teacher a copy of this tool.
- Ask teams to establish norms for each section. Request that team members give serious thought to suggestions rather than jotting down every idea that comes to mind. Use the nine steps suggested under “Guiding Teams in Setting Norms.”

### Tool 4.4 Quick Check.

This is a self-assessment tool that can be used following team meetings to generate brief discussions of how well the group is functioning.

- Give several copies of this tool to each team to place in the team notebook.
- Explain that teams can use this tool following each meeting to determine whether members are following the ground rules. This tool is useful if team members tend to get off-track or if team meetings seem less productive than they should be.
- Suggest that teams set aside two minutes of “think time” after a meeting to evaluate the team’s success in following its own norms.

### Tool 4.5 Revisiting the Team’s Norms.

This tool can help team members fine-tune their meeting guidelines and procedures to make sure they’re using team time efficiently.

- Give several copies of this tool to each team to place in the team notebook.
- Explain that teams should use this tool for routine, periodic “tune-ups.” Is the climate supportive? Do the team’s products reflect the work of the whole team and not just a few members? The team may also use this tool when meetings seem out-of-focus or negative behaviors surface and disrupt the flow.

## Tool 4.1

## Traits of Successful Team Members



**Directions:** In their training materials on Transformational Leadership, Ruth Ash and Maurice Persall list six traits of successful team members. Assess yourself on these traits. Use the scale to rate each statement in terms of how well you think it describes you (or will describe you) as a team member. Add comments to explain or clarify your scores.

**Reflect:**  
What other traits can make me a successful team member?



4	Strongly Agree
3	Agree
2	Disagree
1	Strongly Disagree

Trait	Comment	Score
1. I am committed to the Professional Learning Team and its goals.		
2. I show respect and understanding toward other team members.		
3. I contribute to a team culture of help, support, and mutual trust.		
4. I participate in a way that creates a comfortable atmosphere for sharing both successes and failures.		
5. I have a high tolerance for discussion, debate, and disagreement.		
6. I am willing to question, get outside my current mindset, and be open to new ideas and solutions.		

### What rules will govern attendance?

- All members will arrive on time and stay for the entire meeting.
- We will start on time and end on time.

### What rules will govern how we talk together?

- No “zingers” or put-downs.
- All members will join in the team’s discussions.
- Each member will listen attentively as others speak.
- No one will dominate the discussions.
- Everyone’s point of view will be considered.
- Our conversations will reflect our respect for and acceptance of one another.
- We will disagree with ideas, not individuals.
- We will keep confidential any information shared in confidence.

### What other expectations do we have for team members?

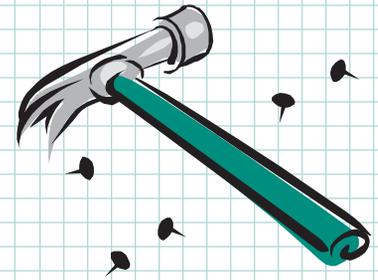
- Each team member will commit to participate actively for the school year.
- We will rotate the team leader role.
- All members will be prepared for the meeting when they arrive.
- All members will be “totally present” during the meeting and will refrain from grading papers and working on other things.
- All members will turn off cell phones.
- All members will work to keep team meetings positive and productive.
- The atmosphere will remain cordial and friendly throughout the meeting.
- We will have fun and enjoy working together.

### What decision-making procedures will we use?

- We will reach decisions by consensus.

### How will we assess our team functioning?

- We will revisit our norms periodically and decide which ones we need to follow better and which ones we need to change.



**Scenario:** A learning team at imaginary Norton High School has decided that this set of norms will help them operate efficiently and productively as a team. What do you think?

**Reflect:**  
How might these norms affect team meetings?



## Tool 4.3

## Team Norms



**Directions:** As you begin working together, establish some rules and procedures to guide the way the team does business. Ideally, your team meetings will enhance interpersonal skills, trust, and mutual respect among team members.

### What procedures will govern meeting attendance?

- Will team members arrive on time and stay for the entire meeting?
- Will they stay on task, avoid side conversations and interruptions, and focus on the task at hand?

### What procedures will govern teacher dialogue?

- How will team members react to others' work and ideas?
- Are "out-of-the-box" and "off the wall" ideas welcome?
- Are differing opinions welcome?
- Will what members say be held in confidence?
- How will the team encourage listening and discourage interrupting?

### What rules will govern decision-making?

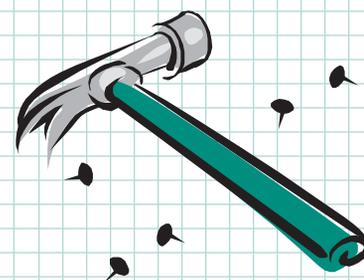
- Will the team reach decisions by consensus?
- How will members deal with conflicts and differences of opinion?

### What do you expect from team members?

- Are all team members expected to be prepared and participate?
- Will they be “fully present,” both mentally and physically?
- Will they put away other work (grading papers, filling out reports, etc.)?

### How often will your team evaluate its functioning, and what indicators will you evaluate?

- Are team members abiding by the team’s agreed-upon norms?
- What ground rules did you use well?
- What norms do you need to reemphasize, add, or adjust?



**Reflect:**  
Are there any missing categories?



## Tool 4.4

## Quick Check



### Directions:

After each meeting, take a minute to consider whether team members followed some basic ground rules.



### Remember:

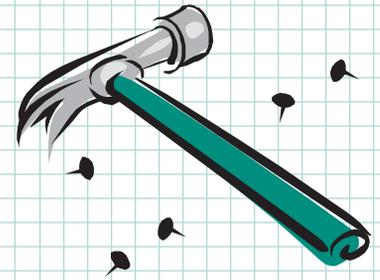
-  Have FUN working on a Professional Learning Team!
-  Laughter (so long as it is not at the expense of others) and a sense of enjoyment can boost collegiality and morale.
-  Deadly serious teams sap energy levels and can create a mindset that lowers chances for success.
-  Try humor and fun!

- Did every member join in the team's discussions?
- Did each member listen attentively as others were speaking?
- Did any single member (or two) dominate the discussions?
- Did all members arrive on time and stay for the entire meeting?
- Were all members prepared for the meeting when they arrived?
- Were all members "totally present" during the meeting?
- Did each member of the group believe that his or her time at the meeting had been well spent?

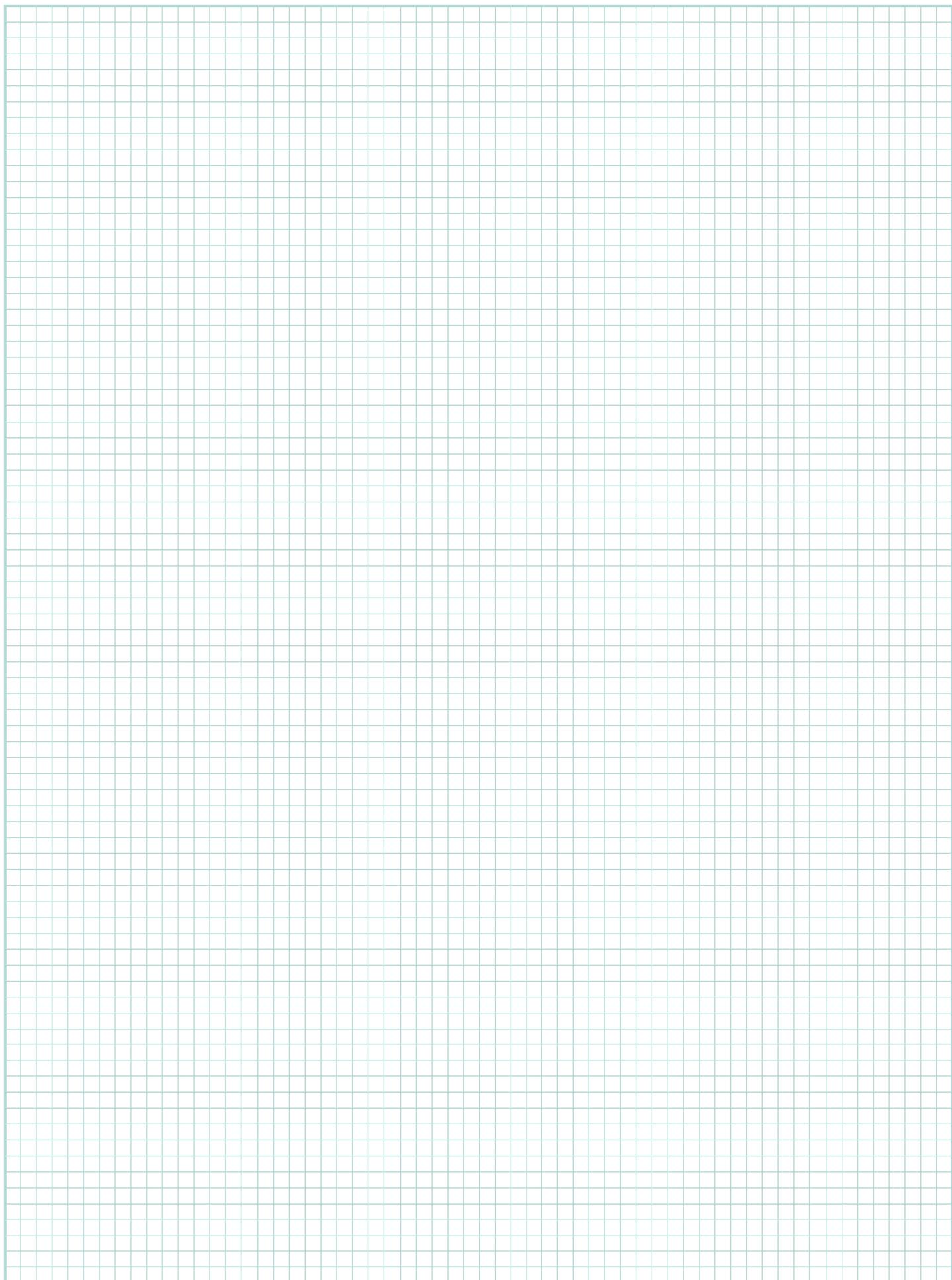
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1. What norms do we usually observe well?
2. Which ones do we seem to ignore?
3. What behaviors are team members using now that seem to be useful?
4. What behaviors surprise you or make you uneasy?
5. Based on our answers to these questions, what norms do we need now?

List new and adjusted norms below.



**Directions:** If team meetings need some smoothing out, the team should revisit the norms set during earlier meetings. Have chart paper available to record any new procedures and ground rules on which the team reaches consensus. The leader for this meeting can use these questions to guide the discussion. The recorder should document any changes in the team notebook.



## Step 5: Analyze Student Data

**Entry 79.** In August, teachers will use two days of staff development to prepare for the Professional Learning Team process prior to the beginning of school. During that time, teachers will analyze student data and adopt a faculty-wide focus....For the moment I have the feeling that things are in order. Obviously, I'm not a quick learner.

—Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

### Background

Effective Professional Learning Teams are driven by a sense of purpose. They accomplish good things for students because they focus their collective energy toward an instructional goal that addresses specific student needs. Without a clear goal, teams may meet faithfully and engage in an impressive amount of sharing, swapping, and exchanging of information and activities, but their lack of purpose generally guarantees that they wind up nowhere in particular.

A strong sense of purpose and a clear sense of where they're going can also keep teams on track after their initial enthusiasm for this new initiative wears down. Consider what teachers are attempting to do through learning teams—they are trying to change the way they teach *while they are teaching*. This requires extraordinary commitment. Daily brush fires and competing responsibilities, coupled with the already difficult demands of teaching, undermine teachers' energy levels and compete for their limited time. Discouragement can set in because changes in teaching do not necessarily produce quick, obvious results in student performance. Concrete, targeted goals are crucial, along with short-term milestones that give teams the sense of accomplishment they need to maintain their energy level and motivation. The first step in developing team goals involves examining a variety of information about school and student performance. In successful schools, goals flow from data.

### Examine the Data

**Collect student data.** If the school is like most, teachers will have plenty of standardized test data to examine to identify student academic strengths and needs. Their examination of data must not



#### This section will help the facilitator:

-  Provide teachers with help in examining student data.
-  Guide teachers to identify areas of student strengths and weaknesses.
-  Assist teachers in determining where they most need to focus their instructional efforts.



“Staff development that improves the learning of all students uses disaggregated student data to determine adult learning priorities, monitor progress, and help sustain continuous improvement.”

— National Staff Development Council's *Standards for Staff Development, Revised*, 2002, p. 5

stop there, however. Gather up recent school surveys, state writing and math assessments, student grades, samples of student work, and other information on the students. Too often, we think of “data” as just test scores or report card grades. But schools that are truly “data-driven” are increasingly creative in uncovering information that can help improve student and school performance. See Tool 5.1 for some examples of data that teachers can use in making decisions about their students.

**Disaggregate the data.** To measure academic performance, teams should probably collect, at a minimum, standardized test scores, grades, and classroom assessments. Using at least three types of data for any study leads to more valid conclusions. Team members (or the entire faculty) should disaggregate (separate) the academic data by categories such as gender, race, socio-economic factors, English language ability, and other categories that apply.

**Analyze the data.** Early on, teachers may need specific guidance to analyze patterns among groups of students and draw valid conclusions about student needs. As an example, team members might examine student demographics in relation to test scores and answer questions such as these:

-  Do some groups of students achieve at higher levels than others?
-  If so, in what specific areas?
-  If so, to what degree?
-  Is there evidence that students who were challenged more also achieved more?
-  What are the implications of this data for the team’s goal and learning plan?

The “Subgroup Analysis Chart” (Tool 5.2) can help team members analyze subgroups and patterns within the data.

In analyzing available data, teachers might focus primarily on student data relating to a specific school initiative such as improving reading comprehension. Or teachers might examine data about their own groups of students. Depending on the scope of the team’s inquiry, it may be useful to look at data across subjects or grade levels. Whenever teams examine student performance, they should identify both strengths and weaknesses. Building on strengths is often a more effective strategy than focusing only on weaknesses.

“Reflecting on the Data” (Tool 5.3) can engage teams in discussing the data, targeting central concerns, and identifying areas for instructional focus.

### Decide on Data-Driven Goals

**Identify areas of relative weakness.** As team members analyze data, areas of relative weakness will appear in student achievement categories and probably among subgroups. This information can provide teams with areas of focus for goal-setting. When deciding on the team goal, team members should make sure that:

- The goal is important to all team members.
- The goal focuses on academics and instruction.
- The goal centers on teacher learning that results in higher student achievement.
- The goal is challenging.
- The goal is doable.

Each team should write the goal in sufficient detail to provide team members with a clear focus throughout the year and make the goal plain to those outside the team.

**Ask the right question.** Wald and Castleberry suggest phrasing the team goal as a question, such as, “What can we do differently to [help students achieve in...]?” This might be called a “focus question” because it helps teachers focus in on specific actions they can take to address student needs. Stating the goal as a teacher-centered question also provides a powerful reminder that Professional Learning Team meetings focus on teacher learning and change. While teams vary in their method of stating goals, the goal should give teams a sense of purpose in their learning team work.

**Use the “Deciding on Our Team Goal”** (Tool 5.4) to guide team members in the goal-setting process. Suggest that teachers post their team’s goal/focus question on the walls of their classrooms and readily advertise that they are working and learning together. This makes students aware that learning is ongoing and important at any age.



### The No Child Left Behind legislation suggests that schools:

- Analyze data from state assessments and other examples of student work to identify and address areas of need.
- Identify and implement professional development, instructional strategies, and methods of instruction to improve a school’s weak areas.

## Sample Topics From Some Professional Learning Team Schools

### Curriculum area focus

- 🎧 Reading comprehension in the content areas
- 🎧 Math manipulatives and hands-on instruction
- 🎧 Inquiry-based teaching approaches in science
- 🎧 Effective approaches for teaching social studies
- 🎧 Special needs students
- 🎧 Writing across the curriculum

### Topical focus

- 🎧 Looking at student work
- 🎧 Differentiated instruction
- 🎧 Inclusion
- 🎧 Small group instruction
- 🎧 Alternative assessments
- 🎧 Critical thinking strategies
- 🎧 Active learning strategies
- 🎧 Using technology for learning
- 🎧 Teaching reading in physical education

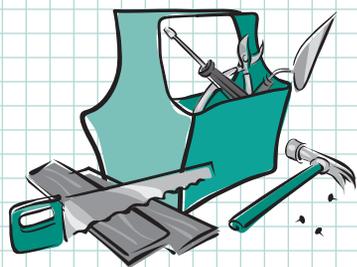
## Sample Focus Questions or Goals

### Stated as focus questions:

- 🎧 What can we do differently in our classrooms to improve student achievement in math across all grade levels?
- 🎧 What research-based teaching strategies can we use to increase student reading comprehension in all content areas?
- 🎧 What differentiated instruction practices can we use in our classrooms to effectively teach all ethnic groups in our school?
- 🎧 What can we do differently in our classrooms to assess students effectively and use this information to guide our instructional strategies?

**Stated as declarative sentences:**

- We will build a literacy program based on research-based assessment and instructional practices that will result in ongoing improvement in student learning and achievement.
- We will gain knowledge and skill in using inquiry-based methods of teaching science to engage students in higher levels of thinking and learning.
- We will use small-group instruction and other research-based methods of increasing students' writing proficiency.
- We will use research-based teaching strategies designed for gifted students to motivate and engage all students in higher-order thinking and to help them take more responsibility for their own learning.



## Step 5 Facilitation Guide

For Step 5, you will find four tools designed to help teachers gather, analyze, and use data.

This guide contains an explanation of each tool and a suggested method of using that tool with groups of teachers. Adapt these suggestions as needed. Note that some tools contain a question for reflection. As an option to the suggested procedures, you may give teachers a moment to complete the activity and reflect quietly and then ask them to discuss their reflections with a partner or a small group. In using these tools, consider your participants. Are they experienced in analyzing data? How much time, if any, will you need to spend in explaining this process? You can locate additional help for presenting Step 5 information at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php).

### 5.1 What Are Data?

This tool can introduce participants to a variety of school and student information sources and spark new ways of thinking about identifying needs and establishing goals.

- 🛠️ Ask teachers to work in small groups. If they have already formed Professional Learning Teams, ask teams to work together. Distribute copies of this tool to each teacher.
- 🛠️ Suggest that teachers scan the list of data sources and identify data that are present in the school and are potentially useful.
- 🛠️ Ask groups to brainstorm other available data sources. They may use this list, along with other data sources they identified, to help them decide which sources of data they need in order to get necessary information about their students.

### 5.2 Subgroup Analysis Chart.

This tool can help team members with data disaggregation. In other words, it can help them “take apart” the data and look at it in different ways.

- 🛠️ Make multiple copies of this tool for teachers—one for each subgroup they will analyze.
- 🛠️ Provide data from which teachers can gain information about students.
- 🛠️ Ask team members to fill in the name of the subgroups, such as “Gender,” in the “Subgroup” section of the table header.

They should then list the subject or other area about which they will be getting data. (Note: team members may work together disaggregating the data for the same subgroup, or each member may work on a different subgroup.) Next, team members should fill in the categories in that subgroup, such as “Female” or “Male.” Not all of the columns will be filled in for every subgroup.

- Ask team members to go through available data and fill in the remaining categories with as much of the information as possible about each subgroup.

### 5.3 Reflecting on the Data.

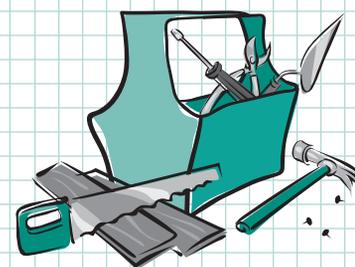
This tool can help teachers personalize the student data they examined by reflecting on “ahas!,” questions, concerns, and implications for teaching and learning.

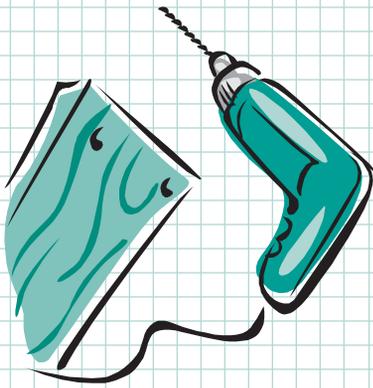
- Make multiple copies of this tool so that participants can respond to the questions for each set of data they examine.
- If you are working with a large group, ask teachers to discuss the questions in groups of three or four so that everyone will have a chance to process and explain their ideas.
- Ask a volunteer from each group to share some of that group’s ideas.
- Ask a volunteer to record teachers’ responses and make copies available to all teams.

### 5.4 Deciding on Our Team Goal.

Use this tool with individual learning teams or with the entire faculty after using tool 5.3 to help teams (or the faculty) reach consensus on where their Professional Learning Teams should focus their time and energy this year.

- Give each teacher a copy of the tool.
- Ask teachers in each group to discuss and reach consensus on the answers.
- Instruct team members to focus on recommendations for a team goal. Remind them that they may state this goal in the form of a focus question, and they may begin this with the phrase, “What can we do differently in our classroom to...?” This phrasing will keep them focused on their own learning and professional growth.





**Directions:** Grades and test results are important to data-driven schools, but a lot more information is available that can help teams as they think about ways to improve teaching and learning. This is a sample of data sources reported by Alabama schools that use data as an important part of their school improvement process.

*Adapted from Norton, "Data Driven Schools," Alabama Best Practices Center's Working Toward Excellence Journal, Summer 2002 (Volume 2, Number 3). Compiled with the help of Ruth Ash, Dean of the School of Education at Samford University. Used with Permission of the Alabama Best Practices Center.*

**State and National Test Results**

- State-mandated, subject-area assessments
- Writing assessments
- Graduation exams
- College entrance exams
- Advanced placement exams
- Annual yearly progress reports
- Achievement gaps among subgroups

**Commercial Assessments**

- Packaged program assessments
- Individual reading assessments

**Classroom Assessments**

- Daily and unit tests
- Student portfolios
- Checklists
- Running records
- Evaluations of student projects
- Evaluations of student performances
- Examples of student work

**Surveys**

- Student
- Parent
- Community
- Uncertified staff
- Targeted teacher surveys by grade level and content area (program effectiveness, staff development needs, technology, library, paperwork, duty, etc.)

**School Climate**

- Attendance
- Counseling referrals
- Discipline reports (with trend analysis)
- Student comments to counselors and/or teachers

**Schoolwide Assessments**

- School report card
- School Improvement Plan yearly assessments
- Student work
- Schoolwide writing assessments
- Products of accreditation processes
- Reports from school "walk-throughs"

**Other Student Data**

- Course assignments
- College admission data
- Quarterly, interim, and final grades
- Dropout data
- Minutes/records of student support teams
- Special education referrals

**Other Data**

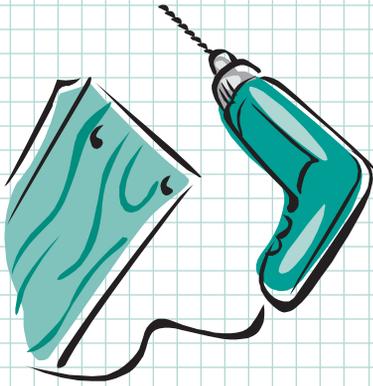
- Student and parent demographic information
- Results of teacher action research
- Reports from teacher book study groups
- Academic lab/library usage
- Faculty turnover rate
- Kindergarten registration data

**Directions:** Use this chart to guide you as you analyze student data by subgroups.

<b>Subgroup</b>					
<b>Subject or area of focus</b>					
<b>Categories within this subgroup</b>					
<b>Percentage of students in this subgroup</b>					
<b>Results/scores/performance</b>					
<b>Change from previous years</b> (Is this a consistent trend?)					
<b>Consistency across grade levels</b> (Is this trend similar in all grades?)					
<b>Consistency across subject areas</b> (Is this trend similar in all subjects?)					
<b>Strengths</b> (What are the strongest areas for this subgroup?)					
<b>Weaknesses</b> (What are the weakest areas for this subgroup?)					
<b>Patterns and trends</b> (What patterns and trends jump out at you?)					
<b>Other data and observations</b>					

## Tool 5.3

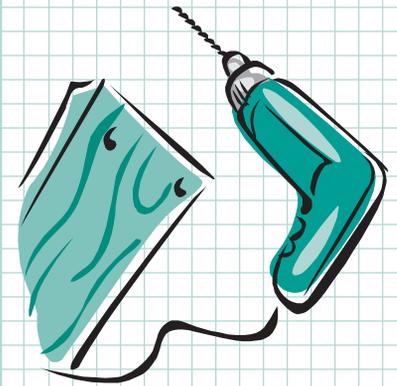
## Reflecting on the Data



**Directions:** Think about what you learned from examining student information and data, and discuss these questions with your team members.

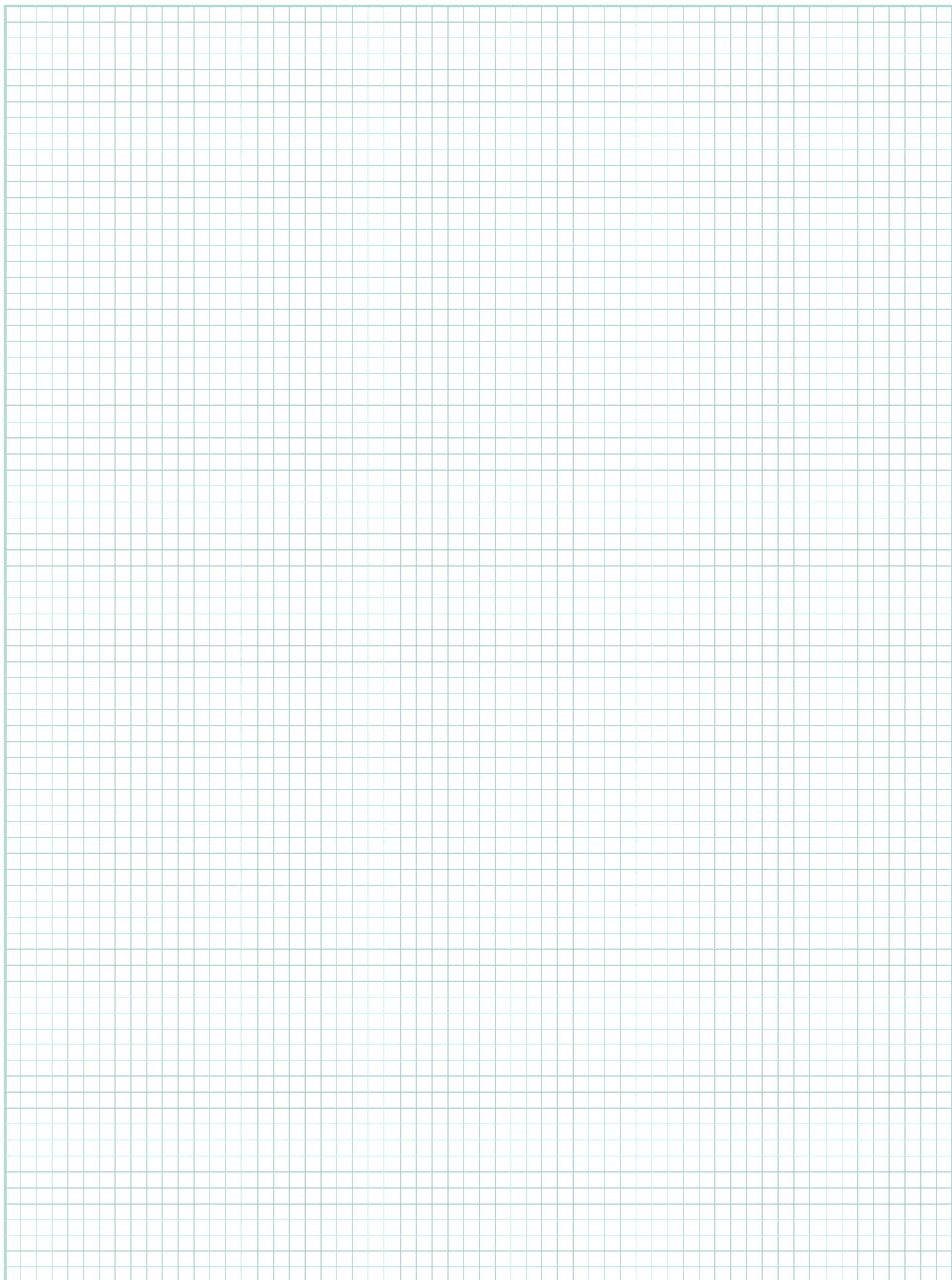
- What sources of data did we examine?
- What parts of these data really caught our attention?
- What differences, if any, are there in grades, attendance, and behavior among our students?
- Do some groups of students achieve at higher levels than others? If so, to what degree?
- What students are not working to potential?
- Which groups need instruction more tailored to their learning styles?
- What parts of these data encourage you the most?
- What parts concern you the most?
- What other questions do these data raise for you?

- What student strengths do these data highlight?
- What student needs do these data highlight?
- What are the implications of these data for your learning team?
- What results do we want by the end of the school year?



**Directions:** What is your team's instructional goal? Discuss and record this information after analyzing and reflecting on student and subgroup data. Keep this goal in your team notebook.

**Our Team Goal/Focus Question**



## Step 6: Plan for Learning and Action

**Special Entry:** When this team kicked off its meetings last November, team members wrote a plan describing what they intended to do. Their plan included splendid goals. After four frustrating meetings, however, they decided that they weren't focusing on the right stuff—the need for their students to be more engaged in learning. So, in early December, the team rewrote its entire plan. Members unanimously decided to research and develop ways to motivate and challenge the high-performing students in their classrooms. They decided that developing successful approaches and experiences for high-performing students would provide them with a toolkit of teaching/learning strategies that would spill over and help all of their students.

— Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

### Background

Once teams establish a clear goal, the next step of the process engages teams in drawing up a plan that will guide them on their journey. Throughout the planning process, keep in mind that Professional Learning Teams address student needs through a focus on *increasing teachers' knowledge and expertise*. For example, suppose a school chooses to focus on increasing student reading comprehension across content areas. Some teams may address this focus by increasing their knowledge and use of research-based teaching strategies to help students understand what they read. Other teams may plan to expand their use of research-based practices in areas such as learning styles or brain-based research and apply this to student reading. Still other teams might address their goal through examining student work together, scrutinizing and developing quality assignments for students, using more appropriate student assessments, or designing new inquiry-based approaches to teaching reading.

The team plan is the projected route that team members will follow throughout the year and adjust whenever needed—the strategy that will keep them on track as they work to reach the team goal. In developing this plan, team members should:



#### This section will help the facilitator:

-  Assist teachers in examining their current beliefs and assumptions.
-  Guide teachers in developing a team plan based on the team goal.



“Collaboration is more than activities; it is about producing results through acting together.”

— Garmston and Wellman, *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups*, 1999, p. xvi

- 🧠 Focus on the team goal.
- 🧠 Examine team members' beliefs and assumptions about their teaching, learning, and students.
- 🧠 Identify teachers' current knowledge and instructional practices.
- 🧠 Specify steps teachers will take to increase their expertise.
- 🧠 Identify resources teachers will need.
- 🧠 Explain evidence the team members will gather to confirm that their efforts are increasing both teacher and student learning.

Everyone has unexamined assumptions about teaching and learning. In fact, teaching is rooted in a long chain of underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs. For example, the practice of tracking students is rooted in the belief that students learn best when they are grouped with students of similar ability. If teachers use just one teaching style, such as a lecture, this projects the belief that all students learn in the same way. Teaching can be unconsciously influenced by assumptions such as, "Some children are unable to learn because of poverty," "Children of some races are smarter," "Intelligence is fixed at birth," or "Not all children can learn at higher levels."

As a first step toward developing a plan, team members need to examine and discuss their underlying assumptions about students, teaching, and learning as they relate to the team's goal. Laying assumptions on the table will help team members understand one another better and can lay the groundwork for more productive team dialogue. As an added benefit, when teachers become aware of the assumptions that drive their own teaching, they are often willing—even eager—to learn new ways of instructing students. Use Tools 6.1 and 6.2 to guide teams through this process.

In the second step of the planning process, teachers take a look at the knowledge and experience they already bring with them to the meetings. Throughout the year, they will have opportunities to share this skill and knowledge with one another. They next examine the gap between their current knowledge and the knowledge they need in order to successfully reach the goal. From this information, they can begin to identify specific areas they will focus on for research and study. "Designing a Plan for Learning and Action" (Tool 6.3) provides a place for teams to think through and record this information.

Now the team can begin establishing priorities and constructing a timeline for the process. What must be accomplished first? What are some likely steps? As they build a timeline, teachers should set short-term goals, or milestones, they can use to measure progress toward their goal. (Limit short-term goals to five or less. Too many interim goals can deflect the focus from the main objective.) Teams should enter all timeline information on the team calendar.

What evidence can teams collect to determine whether they are successfully reaching their goals? Teachers will decide this in the next step of their plan. At a minimum, teams should document changes in the following throughout the year:

- 📍 Student performance (classroom and standardized scores)
- 📍 Student attitudes and motivation
- 📍 Teacher classroom practices
- 📍 Teacher attitudes about working together
- 📍 Team functioning

In practice, teams often have difficulty completing their plans at the beginning of the Professional Learning Team process because they do not yet know enough about their area of focus to make decisions about what they need to learn, how to prioritize tasks and what milestones to establish. In that case, teams should begin by planning ways to expand their own knowledge base. They might decide to do this through reading journal articles and books, observing other teachers, attending workshops, watching videos, and/or inviting an expert in the area to work with them for a time. Initially, teams need not complete all parts of their learning plan, such as the section “Specific Activities and Tasks” (Step 2 of Tool 6.3). As they learn more about their target areas, they can revisit and complete their plans. Frequent revisiting is always a good idea, both to keep teams focused and to refine the plan as knowledge and insight increase.

If a team “stalls” while designing a plan, ask questions to re-ignite members’ thinking. Questions might include these:

- 📍 What do we want students to be able to do by the end of the year?
- 📍 What are some reasons that our students are not achieving in that particular area?
- 📍 How can we use students’ own strengths to help them with weak areas?



Teams should be sure to capitalize on students’ strengths as well as focus on their areas of weakness.

- 🗺️ What information do we need to do this?
- 🗺️ Where can we find research-based teaching strategies?

## A Final Note on Team Plans

Teams should focus on a scope of work that is doable. Teachers' natural enthusiasm for students and their learning may prompt team members to bite off more than they can chew as they plan together. Later, the team may feel overwhelmed and become discouraged.

Teams should continually re-evaluate the direction they are traveling. They must be flexible, willing to reflect on their journey, and willing to change routes. There are many ways to reach a destination. If the original plan team members designed doesn't get them where they want to go, they can alter directions.

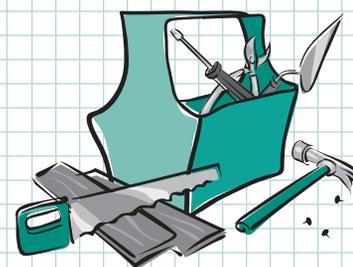
## Step 6 Facilitation Guide

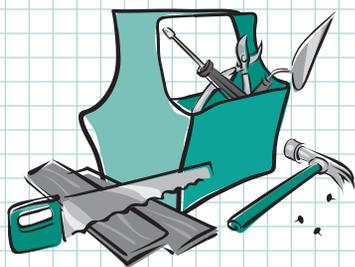
This guide contains an explanation of two Step 6 tools and a suggested method of helping teachers to unpack their assumptions, recognize their knowledge gaps, and develop a team plan. Decide whether you need to use a particular tool based on the current knowledge level of your teachers. Adapt these tools and the suggested procedures as needed for the size of your group and the amount of work space. You can locate information and tools for presenting parts of this step at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php).

### 6.1 Current Beliefs and Assumptions.

This tool can help teachers think through their current teaching practices and examine what these say about their beliefs concerning students, teaching, and learning. Use this as a team activity rather than a whole faculty activity.

- Share the information about assumptions and how teaching practices may reflect assumptions that have been embedded in education for decades. You will find this information in paragraphs three and four in the “Background” section of this step.
- Give each team member a copy of this tool. Provide one extra copy for each team recorder.
- Suggest teachers take five minutes to think about and jot down answers for the questions. Encourage them to look beneath the surface at why they teach as they do.
- Suggest that teachers share their answers with fellow team members using this structured conversation process:
  1. Ask each team member to share answers for question one with teammates. Team members should not discuss or react to other’s answers during this sharing time.
  2. Invite teachers to discuss and reach consensus on information the recorder should include for the team’s answer to question one.
  3. Repeat this process for each question, allowing time for the recorder to document the team’s thinking and responses on the extra copy you provided.





- Ask teachers to think about this question: “What beliefs about your students do you want your teaching to reflect?” Suggest that teachers design a plan that can help them bring their beliefs to life in the classroom.

### 6.2 Design a Plan for Learning and Action.

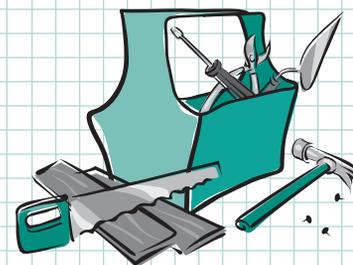
This planning tool provides questions for engaging team members in gathering ideas and planning the direction for their learning team. It also involves them in deciding on some methods of evaluating their progress.

- Distribute this tool and give teachers a choice of how to proceed. These questions may be answered by individual members and then discussed, or the team may brainstorm answers as a group. If team members decide to brainstorm answers, lead them in an effective brainstorming process. You may use the following protocol:

#### Brainstorming Protocol

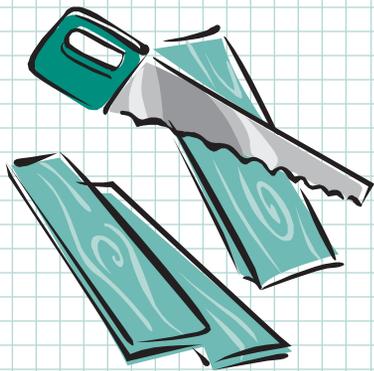
- Begin with the first question and record team members’ knowledge and experience on chart paper.
- Ask teachers to brainstorm answers for the rest of the questions. Explain that brainstorming is designed to generate a collection of ideas quickly.
- Give team members these guidelines:
  - Ideas should be developed as fast as possible.
  - Do not critique or evaluate ideas during the brainstorming period.
  - Everyone on the team should contribute ideas.
- Continue until teachers generate a list of answers for each of the questions.
- Invite team members to explain their ideas or to ask questions about ideas that others suggested.
- With a marker, put a checkmark by “keepers”—those suggestions that all team members agree to include as a part of their team plan.

7. Cross out ideas that team members do not think fit well with their goal.
8. Lead team members to reach consensus on remaining suggestions, and decide whether or not to make them a permanent part of their plan.
  - 🔗 Ask a team member to write the components of the plan in the appropriate spaces on Tool 6.2.
  - 🔗 Invite a team member to read the team's plan aloud, one section at a time, and invite other teachers to put the final touches on the plan. Remind them that this plan can and probably will change as they gain more information about their goal.



## Tool 6.1

## Current Beliefs and Assumptions



**Directions:** Write your responses to the questions. Then discuss this with others on your Professional Learning Team.

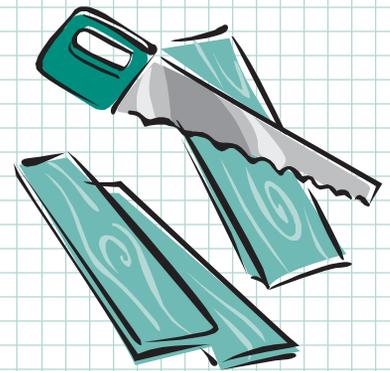
**Team Goal or Focus Question:**

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1. What specific needs do our students have in this area?	
2. What do we believe about accomplished teaching in this area? What does it look like?	
3. What are our current instructional practices in this area?	
4. What assumptions about teaching, learning, and students drive these practices?	
5. Is there a gap between what we believe and what we do? If so, why? What keeps us from changing?	

**Directions:** Write your responses to the questions. Then discuss this with others on your learning team and reach consensus.



**Team Goal or Focus Question:**

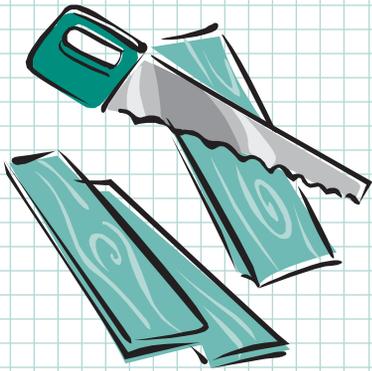
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## Learning Plan

<p>1. What knowledge and experience do we already have in this area?</p>	
<p>2. What do we need to know, explore, learn, and be able to do in order to reach our goal?</p>	
<p>3. How and where will we get this information and skill?</p>	
<p>4. What resources will we need?</p>	



**Directions:** Write your responses to the questions. Then discuss this with others on your learning team and reach consensus.

**Team Goal or Focus Question:**

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## Action Plan

<p>1. What specific tasks do we need to accomplish by the end of the school year? (Keep this doable.)</p>	
<p>2. What are our main tasks for the first month?</p>	
<p>3. What kind of timeline do we propose for the remainder of the tasks? (Put on calendar.)</p>	

# Step 7: Conduct Successful Meetings

**Entry 21:** The countdown is underway! Today I grasped the spiral notebook, which functions as my brain, and headed in the direction of the first learning team meeting. My face registered a smile as I walked briskly down the hallway, but my feelings kept flip-flopping from “Oh, boy!” to “Uh, oh!” How was this going to work?

— Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

## Background

By now Professional Learning Teams have reached consensus on some ground rules, agreed to one or more initial goals, and roughed out a learning plan for the year. At this point, team members should be ready to think more deeply about how they can take maximum advantage of one of their most precious commodities—*meeting time*.

This step introduces several ideas and procedures that set the stage for productive team meetings. These include:

### Keep team meetings high on the priority list.

Professional Learning Teams depend on regular meetings to accomplish ambitious work. If team members fail to make attendance and active involvement a high priority, their paper goals will never come alive for them and their students. Perhaps teachers began this enterprise because they believe that teachers—the people closest to the students—should be the ones solving teaching and learning problems. They are right! But, like every other thing worth doing, they must do it well, and the path to success for learning teams leads directly through the meeting room door.

**Approach learning team meetings as a problem-solving process.** Problems that can seem insurmountable shrink down to life-size when teachers work on them together. Learning team meetings are the places where teachers join forces, target specific student learning needs, and create and apply solutions.

### This section will help the facilitator:

-  Introduce ideas that can help teachers conduct successful team meetings.
-  Ease teams over “bumps” as they begin meeting.
-  Give teachers concrete ideas for how to engage in the real work of the team.

“The way a team plays as a whole determines its success. You may have the greatest bunch of individual stars in the world, but if they don’t play together, the club won’t be worth a dime.”

—Babe Ruth

**Recognize that learning to solve problems together and developing effective ways of interacting with one another will take time.**

Teachers are in this together for the long haul, and they probably won't see results immediately. Team members should expect some conflict and frustration when they begin working together. Most teams go through several stages that Dr. Bruce Tuckman (1965) identifies as "Forming, Storming, Norming, and Performing."

1. In the *Forming* stage, team members often begin with a sense of anticipation and optimism, coupled with some suspicion and anxiety. The team may initially have difficulty getting a clear picture of its direction, and teachers may feel that they accomplish little, if anything, during the initial meetings. This is normal.
2. As teams continue with initial meetings, they enter a difficult stage—*Storming*. They realize this is going to be rigorous work and will take time and effort. Teachers may be impatient, resistant, defensive, and argumentative. They may even question the wisdom of this collaboration. Often team members cling to their current teaching experience and resist going much deeper. This, too, is normal and may last for three or four meetings.

Getting off to a good start can help teams sustain their commitment during these two critical early stages when the work seems to outweigh the benefits. Teams may prepare meeting agendas with the purpose of the meeting and what team members want to accomplish during their time together. Adding the team goal at the bottom of each week's agenda will help everyone stay focused. To help teams stay on track with their ground rules, pull out Tools 4.4 and 4.5 from Step 4. Provide teams with encouragement and resources during these stages, and reassure them that their experience is a common one.

3. When team members begin to better understand their focus and to get concrete steps in place, they enter the *Norming* stage. Enthusiasm returns, and teachers may even get off track because they are tempted to go beyond their original goal. Team members accept ground rules and roles, and a team

spirit emerges. Relationships typically become increasingly harmonious and accepting.

4. In the *Performing* stage, the team establishes trust and accepts each other's strengths and weaknesses. They perform as a cohesive unit rather than as a collection of individuals. Team members engage in joint work and feel a collective sense of responsibility for the success of the whole team. In this stage, teams make concrete steps toward changing teaching practices and exploring more effective ways to instruct students. Students generally begin showing signs of increased motivation and achievement as well.

### **Decide team member roles and responsibilities.**

Team members need to rotate roles and responsibilities during the year. They might set up a rotation schedule. Who will be leader, and for how long? What will the leader's responsibilities involve? Who will record meeting information? (A laptop computer might be helpful.) Who will gather materials or information needed for the next team meeting? Roles and tasks may vary from meeting to meeting, depending on what directions the team takes. Take a minute or two at the end of each meeting for individual members to summarize their upcoming responsibilities. "I'll be the recorder next week. That means I will...."

**Maintain detailed records of each learning team meeting.** Teams must not skip this step, tempting though it may be! Logs allow team members to review past strategies and directions and to track their effectiveness. Logs also supply evidence that teachers are regularly engaging in professional development. They provide vehicles through which teams can channel ideas and practices to others and serve as idea maps for future teams. Logs also become a critical data source when evaluating the whole learning team process. Sample learning log forms and related information are in Tools 7.3, 7.4, and 7.5.

**Establish a team portfolio to document the team's progress over time.** Portfolios can be valuable supplements to logs. The portfolio might contain lessons teachers develop, notes on the success of these lessons, and copies of revised plans. Portfolios might document specific strategies teachers use and contain copies of research and information teachers gather. Samples of student work, teacher assignments, and



According to researcher Robert Gable, evidence shows that teams benefit from maintaining a cumulative written "memory" of their discussions and work. Murphy and Lick strongly recommend completing a log—a brief, written summary of each meeting—during or immediately after each meeting as a way of keeping a history of the group's work.

- Gable ( ) p.
- Murphy & Lick, *Whole-Faculty Study Groups*, 1997, p. 53

## STEP 7

## Conduct Successful Meetings



“A school must become a place where teachers are involved in a community of learning, caring, and inquiring.”

— Hord, *Professional Learning Communities*, 1997, p. 58

team reflections could also go into the portfolio. Both logs and portfolios create portraits of progress over time and engage teachers in systematically examining and documenting their practice.

**Begin an inquiry-action cycle.** Successful learning team members are willing (and often eager) to experiment, think, and teach in new ways. Wald and Castleberry (2000) describe five stages of work for teams during a collaborative learning cycle. They’ve labeled these stages: “Define, Explore, Experiment, Reflect, and Share.” These labels also describe the Professional Learning Team well, along with an additional stage: “Assess.”

1. **Define what the team is going to learn and work on together.** Teams have already completed this step if they have developed team plans in Step 6.
2. **Identify current practices, explore new research-based practices, and revise the team plan as needed.** Team members begin to research and gain new information. Teachers might observe other teachers who are accomplished at using a particular strategy, seek out experts for advice, look at journal articles and research, watch videos that provide needed information, and use other ways of gaining knowledge. They can compare their current instructional practices with what research says they need to be doing to help their students and add activities to their team plan to fill in the gaps.
3. **Design actions and experiment with new instructional strategies, practices, ideas, and theories.** In this part of the cycle, team members zero in on approaches they believe may increase their teaching effectiveness and look for opportunities to apply these in their classrooms. Team meetings might become a time to design lessons, tools, materials, and assessments around new teaching methods. Team members may then visit each other’s classes when colleagues are experimenting with these new strategies. If the school schedule makes it difficult for teachers to observe one another teaching, they might videotape teaching sessions and share the videotapes during team meetings. Tool 7.2 offers a protocol for analyzing a live observation or a videotaped session.

4. **Reflect on the results individually and collectively.** Individual team members might keep personal journals where they record their thoughts and insights. As they reflect, team members should think deeply about their shared work.
5. **Thoughtfully assess results.** Team members should keep track of how students respond as they try different ways of teaching. Collectively studying samples of student work—including the work of struggling students—often provides new insight into problems. Often, teams will compare teacher assignments and student work products for “disconnects.” Teachers continually refine tools, approaches, and strategies based on their discussions and observations.
6. **Share regularly with other teams, teachers, students, administrators, community leaders, and other interested people.** Murphy and Lick (1999) emphasize the importance of teams’ communicating information about what they are doing and learning. They suggest many ways to do this—newsletters, videos, bulletin boards, shared logs, snapshots, slideshows, workshops, discussion groups, poster displays, and samples of activities and work designed and refined by learning teams. Teams could also invite people to their meetings and post a weekly “Best Idea” in the school newsletter or parent bulletin.

Teams will not address every step in the learning cycle during every learning team meeting. In some meetings, the team may address only a single event in this cycle, such as developing new materials or exploring a research-based teaching strategy.

#### **Reflect on what your team meeting accomplished.**

At the conclusion of each team meeting, take a few minutes to reflect on what happened during your time together. This should be a rapid-fire conversation that gives team members information for making adjustments to their next meeting. The conversation guide “Reflecting on the Meeting” in Tool 7.2 contains some good summary questions.

To help team members stay focused and on track during the meetings, conversation guides are a useful tool. The Conversation Guide tools in this step were created using a four-stage process



“We encourage members of the group to gather ongoing data that answer a simple question: ‘What is happening?’”

— Wald and Castleberry,  
*Educators as Learners*, 2000,  
p. 53

described on page 18 of *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace* (Stanfield, ed., 2000). (Apologies to the editor for the times when I misapplied this process!) Briefly outlined, the focused conversation process involves asking questions at four levels:

1. **Objective questions**—questions about facts
2. **Reflective questions**—questions that elicit personal reactions and feelings
3. **Interpretive questions**—questions that draw out meanings, values, and implications
4. **Decisional questions**—questions that lead to resolution and a decision about the topic

Other tools in this step include sample log forms and self-checks to help teachers keep track of their teams' progress.

## Step 7 Facilitation Guide

For Step 7, you will find five tools designed to engage teachers in conducting successful team meetings. These tools include posters, conversation guides, and methods for documenting team discussions and activities. Prepare sets of these tools for all teams so that they will have them when needed. This guide contains an explanation of each tool and a suggested method for teachers to use that tool. You can find additional tools and information related to this step at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php).

### Tool 7.1 The Inquiry-Action Cycle.

This table-top display can serve as a reference throughout the year to help teams stay on track with their discussions and activities.

- Prepare the display by making a copy of this page on heavy paper and folding along the center line to form a table tent. If you laminate the table-top display, cut apart along the center line and tape the halves together to form a table tent.
- Give each team a copy of this display. Ask teams to place it on their meeting table or in a visible location in their team meeting room and refer to it to keep them focused during their Professional Learning Team meetings.

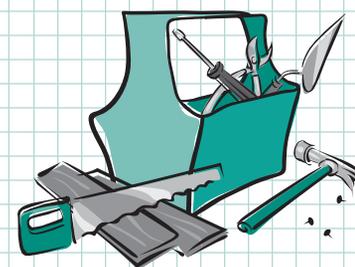
### Tool 7.2 Conversation Guides.

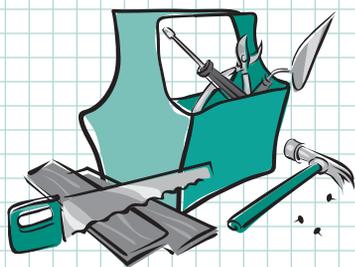
Give this tool to teachers to use as a reference throughout the year to help them stay on track with their discussions and activities.

- Give each team a copy of the conversation guides. Some teams may wish to retype the guides so that each one is on a separate sheet of paper.
- Explain that when a team has an important matter to discuss, a conversation guide can lead to a productive conversation and a decision.
- Provide time for team members to look through the conversation guides. Suggest they use the conversation guide, “Plan for the Next Meeting” to think through their next Professional Learning Team meeting.

### Tool 7.3 Team Log Information.

This tool provides teams with an explanation of information they might include in their learning logs.





- Distribute copies of this tool to all team members. Ask them to scan the handout silently.
- Explain that names, dates, and times should be included in every log, along with a summary of the team discussion.
- Clarify that other items may or may not be included at any given meeting, depending on whether they are appropriate for that team meeting.
- Ask teachers if they have questions or suggestions for other items to include on the form.

### Tool 7.4 Team Log Form.

This form contains items of information that the team recorder may need to include, depending on the meeting activities.

- Make multiple copies of these log forms for each team.
- Explain that teams may use this form to write information on, or they may prefer to type information into a computer during the meeting.
- Ask teams to keep a copy of their logs in their team notebooks. Depending on how you will work with teams, you may want the teams to give you a copy of the log and/or to send one to the principal.
- Place the team notebook in a central location, such as a library resource center, where others can read what the team is doing and offer feedback.

### Tool 7.5 Team Log Self-Assessment.

As facilitator, you need to keep your finger on the pulse of team meetings. The team logs provide one way for you to do this and to give meaningful feedback to teams. This tool can help teams evaluate and improve the usefulness of their logs. Ask teams to take this self-assessment when they complete their first four logs. Then use it once every four to six meetings to help teams remain on track.

- Make multiple copies of these log forms for each team.
- Explain that the purpose of this self-assessment is to invite teams to examine their logs and determine the usefulness of the information they provide to their team, to the facilitator, to the faculty, and to others.
- Suggest that teams do this self-assessment every four to six weeks, looking only at the logs for that period of

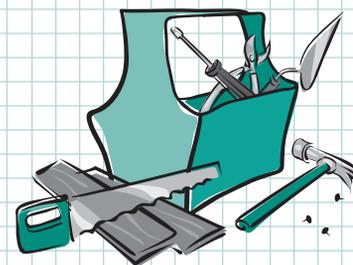
time. Ask them to consider all logs for the four-to-six-week period when making a decision on how to rate a category. Remind them that they will not (and should not) include every category in every log.

- Remind teams that their focus is on the information contained in the log and not on the grammar and punctuation.
- Call attention to the reflection questions at the bottom of the page. Ask teachers to discuss these questions after each self-assessment and make plans for any needed adjustments to the logs.
- Ask teams to keep copies of their log self-assessment in their team notebooks.

### **Tool 7.6 Team Progress Self-Assessment.**

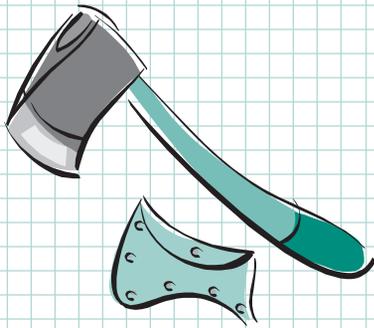
This tool can help teams evaluate the quality of their meetings.

- Give all teachers a copy of this tool and suggest that teams use this tool once every four or five meetings to determine whether team members feel the team is operating well.
- Explain that each team member should respond as an individual to these descriptors by placing an “X” along each line to indicate where he or she thinks the team scores.
- Ask team members to then discuss their responses and fill out one chart as a team.
- Suggest that team members use the information to determine what areas of their team meetings are strongest and which ones need improvement.



## Tool 7.1

## The Inquiry-Action Cycle



**Directions:** Place this table-top display in a visible location during team meetings.

**SHARE:** Share progress and effective practices in a variety of ways with the faculty, administrators, and others.

**ASSESS:** Monitor, observe, gather evidence, analyze, document, and evaluate the effectiveness of approaches.

**REFLECT:** Engage in rigorous reflection and dialogue about these practices.

**EXPERIMENT:** Plan, develop, and try new strategies and joint teaching approaches.

**EXPLORE:** Gather and share research-based information from a variety of sources.

**DEFINE:** Identify your overall purpose and long-term and short-term goals.

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**EXPLORE:** Gather and share research-based information from a variety of sources.

**EXPERIMENT:** Plan, develop, and try new strategies and joint teaching approaches.

**REFLECT:** Engage in rigorous reflection and dialogue about these practices.

**ASSESS:** Monitor, observe, gather evidence, analyze, document, and evaluate the effectiveness of approaches.

**SHARE:** Share progress and effective practices in a variety of ways with the faculty, administrators, and others.

*These steps were adapted from Wald and Castleberry. (2000). Educators as Learners: Creating a Professional Learning Community in Your School. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, p. 46.*

## Review and Share Books or Articles

**Directions:** When team members are ready to share information about a book or article, use this discussion starter to keep the discussion focused and productive. Keep the conversation focused and brisk.

1. What part of the book/article really caught our attention?
2. What can we learn from this book/article that would help us in our team efforts?
3. What would we like to know that is not included in this book/article?
4. What actions or activities (if any) do we want to plan based on this book/article?
5. What challenges would we face in taking these actions?
6. What specific activities do we want to plan today?

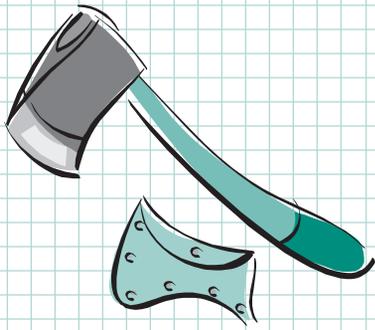
## Discuss a Video

**Directions:** The leader for this meeting can use these questions to guide the discussion. The recorder should jot down responses to put in the team's log.

1. What scenes from the video caught our attention?
2. What were some of the key points the video made?
3. What ideas impressed us as most important?
4. What was missing in this video that we'd like to know more about?
5. How, specifically, can this video be useful to our team?
6. What actions (if any) do we want to take based on this video?
7. What specific action steps do we want to plan today?



**Directions:** Use these Conversation Guides to engage in productive learning team discussions. These were developed or adapted using a process described in Brian Stanfield's *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace*.



## Develop a Teaching Activity

**Directions:** When team members want to try a particular teaching strategy, use this guide to keep your planning on target.

1. What do we want this activity to accomplish?
2. What are some things about this activity that might work well with our students?
3. What are some things that might not work well?
4. What adjustments do we need to make to this activity?
5. When will team members use this activity?
6. What student information will we collect during or following this activity?

## Discuss a Colleague Observation

**Directions:** When team members observe a colleague trying a particular teaching strategy, use this guide to keep your observation and discussion focused, productive, and on track.

1. What did we want this activity to accomplish?
2. What teaching strategies did our colleague use?
3. What worked well with this activity?
4. What did not work well?
5. How did the students respond to the activity?
6. Was there evidence of student learning?
7. Do we think this activity is a “keeper”?
8. If it is a “keeper,” what modifications does this activity need?
9. What are our plans for trying the activity again?

## Discuss the Results of a Teaching Activity

**Directions:** When team members have tried a particular teaching strategy, use this guide to keep your discussion of this activity focused, productive, and on track.

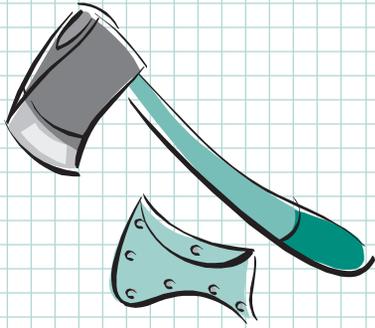
1. What teaching method/strategy are we currently working on?
2. What do we want this strategy to accomplish?
3. What worked well with this activity?
4. What frustrations are we experiencing?
5. What surprised us about the way students responded to the activity?
6. Is this activity a “keeper”?
7. If it is a “keeper,” what modifications does this activity need?
8. What are our plans for using the activity again?

## Examine Student Responses

**Directions:** When team members plan and/or develop a specific strategy or activity for classroom use, use this guide to debrief team members on how it worked.

1. What did students say about this activity?
2. What are your (the teacher’s) personal impressions of the activity?
3. What did students learn from the activity?
4. What did they not learn that you expected them to learn?
5. What data (information from student work) do you have related to this activity?
6. What conclusions can we draw about this activity?
7. What are our next steps?





## Plan for the Next Meeting

**Directions:** At the conclusion of the meeting, take time to look ahead to the next meeting. Use this guide to help plan team member tasks and responsibilities.

1. What do we want to accomplish at the next meeting?
2. What are the major tasks that need to be done before the next meeting?
3. Who will be responsible for each task?
4. Who will be the team leader for the next meeting?
5. Who will be the recorder for the next meeting?

## Assess Team Progress

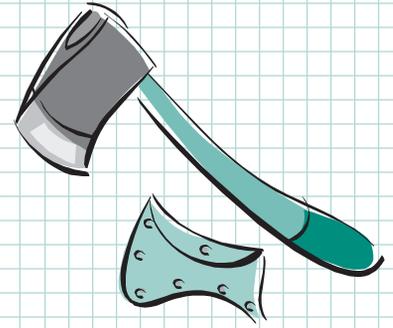
**Directions:** Revisit the actions and activities listed in the team plan. Use this checklist to clarify team priorities and to set realistic timelines.

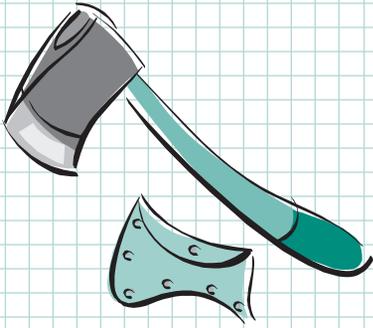
1. What tasks did we plan to accomplish by this time?
2. Which of these tasks remain to be accomplished?
3. Which remaining tasks are important to accomplish?
4. What skills and resources do we have that could help us accomplish each task?
5. What skills and resources do we lack?
6. What possible barriers need to be resolved?
7. What are the main tasks to accomplish during this month? Next month? (Continue until the tasks are appropriately spaced for the remainder of the school year.)
8. What are our next steps?

## Reflect on the Meeting

**Directions:** *At the conclusion of a team meeting, take two or three minutes to reflect on what happened. This conversation needs to move quickly.*

1. What did we accomplish today?
2. What was the high point of our team's work today (or this week)?
3. What was the low point?
4. What did we learn today?
5. What is a key insight from the day?
6. What unfinished business do we need to continue at the next meeting?



**Documentation:**

Keep written records (logs) of all team meetings. These include summaries of conversations and activities during the meeting. Team meetings may involve the following activities, and these should be reflected in the team logs.

**Reflect:** Do you have additional suggestions for categories to include in your team logs from time to time?



Logs **must** contain the following information:

- Team name
- Log number
- Date and time of meeting
- Length of meeting
- Members present

Logs **may** contain some or all of the following information, depending on what the team does during the meeting:

1. Main meeting activities
2. Team discussions
3. New ideas and information
4. Joint work team members are doing
5. What we're doing differently in our classrooms
6. Evidence of progress
7. Reflections
8. Challenges and recommendations
9. Decisions
10. Activities before the next meeting
11. How we are sharing our work with parents, students, other faculty
12. Today's best idea!

**Directions:** Fill in all of the information pertaining to the team and the attendees. Include other information as needed to give a clear picture of your meeting activities. (See Tool 7.3 for appropriate categories to include.) Or, make a computer template and type information under appropriate categories during or after meetings.

**Team:**

**Log #:**

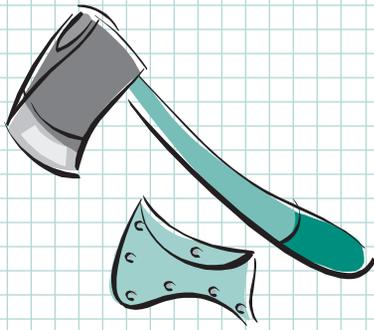
**Date:**

**Time:**

to

**Team members present:**

**Meeting Activities and Decisions:**



**Directions:** Each four to six weeks, examine your logs for that period to see how they measure up. Your logs will not and should not include all of these categories at each meeting.

**Reflect:** In what areas are your logs the strongest?



### Log number, date, time of meeting, and people present

- We always give all of this information.
- We always give some of this information.

### Main meeting activities

- We clearly describe our meeting activities on each log.
- We list meeting activities but give few specifics on what happens.
- We list meeting activities but do not describe them.
- We do not list any activities.

### Summary of the team discussions

- We give details about our discussions.
- We make a few notes about discussions.
- We list words or phrases with no elaboration.
- We do not include this.

### New ideas and information

- We give details about new ideas and information we learn.
- We make a few notes about new ideas and information.
- We list ideas with no elaboration.
- We do not include this.

### Joint work team members are doing

- We describe common materials or activities we are designing.
- We mention but give few specifics on what we are doing together.
- We share only what we are doing as individuals in our classroom.
- We do not include this.

### What we're doing differently in our classrooms

- We list all differences in instruction resulting from our learning team work.
- We list some of the things we are doing differently.
- We are not doing things differently at this point.
- We do not include this.

### Evidence of progress

- We clearly explain how we are making a difference for students.
- We list some evidence but do not explain it.

- We do not clearly identify ways we are making a difference.
- We do not include this.

### Reflections

- We give examples and some details of our thinking and deliberations.
- We list the issues or questions we think through but give few details.
- We list our issues or questions but give no details of our thinking.
- We do not include this.

### Challenges and recommendations

- We explain specific challenges and recommendations that arise.
- We list these but do not explain them fully.
- We make occasional comments here.
- We do not include this.

### Decisions

- We clearly describe the decisions we make during meetings.
- We list most of the decisions we make.
- We seldom record decisions our team makes.
- We do not include this.

### Activities before the next meeting

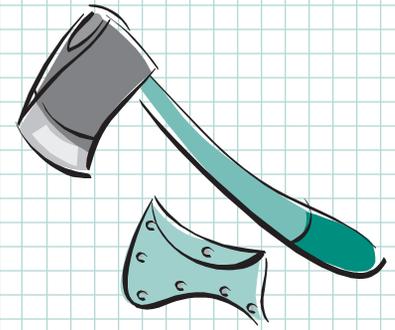
- Our logs give specific details about our plans.
- We make occasional notes about our plans.
- We list words or phrases with no elaboration.
- We do not include this.

### This week's best practice or idea

- We always include an idea to be shared with other teams.
- We usually include an idea to be shared with other teams.
- We seldom include an idea to be shared with other teams.
- We do not include an idea to be shared with other teams.

### Log usefulness

- Our logs give a clear and complete history of the way our team progressed.
- Our logs give a partial record of our struggles and successes.
- Our logs don't give much information about what we actually accomplished.
- Our logs are sketchy and not especially informative.



#### Reflect:

What could someone outside your team learn from your logs?



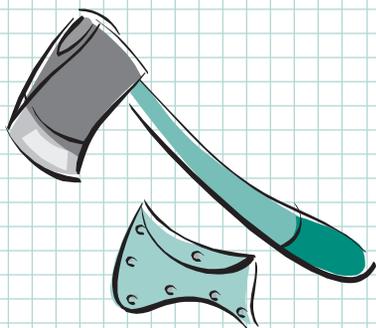
#### Reflect:

What changes will you make in your logs?



## Tool 7.6

## Team Progress Self-Assessment



**Directions:** First, respond as individuals to these descriptors by circling how you think your team ranks for each descriptor. Then, discuss responses, and fill out the chart as a team. **Cold** indicates you do not think the phrase describes your team at all. **Hot** means you think the team is doing great!

With regard to our learning team:

Cold--Cool--Lukewarm--Warm--Hot

We have a sense of accomplishment.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
Our team is supportive and collegial.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We trust one another.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We enjoy working together.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
Everyone feels accepted.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
Diverse ideas are respected.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We are solving some problems.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We actively listen to each other.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We stick with our team norms.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We have a high energy level.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We are curious and inquisitive.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We know where we are going.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We are organized.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We are learning more about teaching.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
Our meetings are productive.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We spend more time talking about instruction.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We share what we are learning with other teachers and teams.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We hold ourselves more accountable for student learning.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We have a feeling of shared responsibility for student learning.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--
We are becoming stronger teachers.	--/-----/-----/-----/-----/--

## Step 8

# Maintain the Momentum

**Entry 43:** As I've been working with this project, one thing is becoming increasingly clear—teachers need some sort of recognition and payback for the extra time and energy this requires, no matter how worthy the effort. Intrinsic motivation and altruism are already stressed to the max in the teaching profession. Today the central office gave official permission for the teachers engaged in this process at both schools to get credit toward recertification. Yes! In addition, teachers at school #2 will get time off from scheduled teacher workdays as compensation for the extra time they put into the learning teams. (They meet before school and after school because they do not share common planning times.)

My next goal is to get the principals to look at some creative ways of providing teachers with more time. As teachers engage in this intensive professional development process, what responsibilities might be removed from them during the school day? Lunch duty? Responsibility for some administrative paperwork? Freedom from supervising school events such as pep rallies? Just what would a school culture look like that really places student learning and opportunities for teacher growth ahead of everything else?

— Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

## Background

Getting one or more Professional Learning Teams off the ground may seem like a Herculean task, but the most critical phase of the process is still ahead—building and sustaining momentum. Teachers are typically energized by workshops and other opportunities to gather for a professional purpose. They enjoy planning, preparing, and brainstorming together, especially when they're exploring new ideas they believe can help their students. Given this admirable teacher trait, the learning teams will probably get off to a great start. But once teachers return to the day-to-day demands of school life, including some unanticipated demands on their time, their good intentions may take a back seat to the crisis of the moment.

When teachers agree to join a Professional Learning Team, they're making a major commitment of time and energy. School leaders who



### This section will help the facilitator:

-  Support teams as they begin and continue their team work.
-  Arrange for effective team communication.
-  Make a variety of resources available.



Successful change of individuals' knowledge and practices in classrooms and schools appears to be accompanied by ongoing support and assistance to them as they are implementing the changes.

— Hord, *Facilitative Leadership: The Imperative for Change*, 1992

create incentives and provide resources for these professionals will be recognizing and honoring teachers' commitments, underscoring the importance of their work to the entire school's success, and ensuring that teams have the encouragement they need to be successful.

It generally takes three to five years before a significant new process becomes part of the standard practice in a school. How will school leaders nurture and sustain interest over that length of time? What incentives and conditions can they provide? What likely obstacles can they remove? Some of the issues here need to be addressed by school leaders looking for ways to support learning teams.

## Provide Supportive School Conditions

 **Examine the environment in which teachers meet and collaborate.** Do school policies and procedures promote teacher inquiry and collaboration? Does the school culture and climate reflect the belief that teachers are professionals and that instruction is teachers' most important job? Keep a close eye on teacher work loads and be sure that what teachers are being asked to do on a day-to-day basis relates to instruction. When teachers remain “catch-alls” for clerical, bookkeeping, and managerial tasks, keeping an instructional focus during the day (and during learning team meetings) becomes an unattainable goal.

Teachers' physical environment also affects learning team effectiveness. A professional meeting room with good lighting, pleasant surroundings, and easy access to materials can promote team focus. A poorly-lighted area with makeshift chairs and a mildewed carpet can drain energy. Teachers need comfortable places to meet that are free from interruption and distractions.

 **Give team members permission to take risks.** Experimenting with new ways of teaching can be uncomfortable if teachers lack the support of school leaders. Teachers must be willing to take risks with new instructional strategies and to know that they have permission from school leaders to do this. Tool 8.1 can ease risk-taking anxiety by giving teachers permission to try new things, even if they are not immediately successful.

 **Build Professional Learning Team meetings into the school day.** Perhaps the most daunting challenge teachers face is the need for more time, especially time to work together to improve their teaching. If school leaders define “teacher work” only as time when teachers are actively engaged with students, either instructing or supervising, then job-embedded professional development cannot be successful. Rethink teachers’ workday. Look again at Tools 3.2 and 3.3, and decide how to create blocks of time for professional development.

 **Build the Professional Learning Team process into the school improvement plan and into individual teacher professional growth plans.** Provide connections between Professional Learning Team activities, school goals, and daily practice. Give high visibility to learning teams’ goals, as well as the school’s improvement plan, mission, and vision. Make learning teams a central, ingrained part of the school’s commitment to improved teaching and learning.

 **Celebrate Professional Learning Team activities and successes.** Spotlight teacher and student activities that are outgrowths of Professional Learning Team work. Post announcements in the teacher workroom, in school newspapers, and in office areas where parents can see the progress. Schedule a time for learning teams to share their successes during faculty meetings. Occasionally, provide refreshments for team meetings. Provide surprise baskets for each team with a combination of office supplies and food items. Ask teachers to provide you with other ideas for how they would like to celebrate their learning team adventure.

Arrange for groups outside the school to provide recognition for learning teams. Your local paper might print an article about this initiative. School adopters may wish to recognize your faculty and may be able to provide assistance and materials to teams. Be sure to provide all teams with public recognition during the school year. Find some effective ways to keep telling the stories of the school’s Professional Learning Teams.

 **Conduct periodic team tune-ups.** Even the most enthusiastic teams need a periodic “tune-up” to ensure they



Plan special celebrations, fun times for groups to do creative things to excite others about the status of learning in the school.

—Murphy and Lick, *Whole-Faculty Study Groups*, Corwin Press, 1998

are operating efficiently, remaining purposeful, and moving steadily toward their objective. To help them with this task, members may need to revisit the team goals and learning plan, rethink their norms, and possibly engage in some troubleshooting. Step 7 provides some tools to engage teams in self-reflection. (See Tool 7.5 and 7.6.)

## Communicate Regularly

 **Read and respond in writing (or via e-mail) to team logs.** Documentation is the “homework” of the team. Regularly gather logs and keep track of team progress. These team logs provide one of your most important opportunities for supporting teams. Your timely feedback on their logs can encourage them and keep them focused on their purpose. Include constructive comments and suggestions and praise for work well done. Tool 8.3 provides an example of a way to provide quick feedback.

In using the logs as a way of following-up and supporting teams, e-mail is especially efficient and effective. The team recorder may e-mail team logs to you and other team members. You can respond to each person on the team. Consider this example of a good use of e-mail in schools in the Edenton-Chowan Public Schools in North Carolina. After the first year of working in Professional Learning Teams, teachers developed a sense of trust and interest in what other teams were doing. Now the teams in these schools e-mail their logs to everyone on the school staff and even to administrators in the central office! In replying to team logs in a situation such as this, find out if teams want you to send your responses to their logs to the individual teams or to the entire staff.

 **Give learning teams opportunities to share what they are doing.** Faculty meetings can be great environments for sharing, provided those meetings are not filled with general announcements, school management issues, and negativity. Sharing by one or more learning teams should be the first thing on the faculty meeting agenda. This arrangement not only makes conversation more meaningful but also puts instructional issues in their proper place at the top of the agenda in terms of importance. What an excellent message for school leaders to model!

 **Arrange for teams to use technology to communicate information to each other, administrators, and interested community members.** E-mail messages, electronic logs, and web-based newsletters can spread the word as well as promote the potential of technology to support professional development in general. A technology coordinator might set up an area on the school website where teams can engage in discussions and post announcements and best ideas and practices. This is an ideal forum for best ideas from team logs.

 **Use bulletin boards or other areas in the school office and the faculty workroom to post team schedules and announcements.** One way to support Professional Learning Team meetings is to emphasize the importance of this dedicated work time for teachers. Office personnel, other teachers, and students should honor each team's meeting time and avoid interruptions. (See Tool 8.4.)

When learning teams send messages, these messages should be colorful, attractive, and unique. Include graphics when possible. Teams might all agree on a Professional Learning Team logo and memo format. Be sure that learning team communiqués look different from the standard memos and reminders teachers usually find in their boxes. The message should be clear: There's nothing ordinary about learning teams!

 **Make the work of the Professional Learning Teams public.** For example, invite a team to explain at PTA meetings what teachers are accomplishing through Professional Learning Teams. Parents may be a valuable source of assistance for this process, both in acquiring resources for learning teams and in supervising students while teams meet. Keep the central office in the loop by inviting them to faculty meetings when learning teams are presenting their work.

## Help Teams Find Resources

How will teachers acquire current research and information to help them learn about new teaching practices and grow professionally? Teachers at some schools that use Professional Learning Teams for professional development have acquired resources in these ways:

-  Principals provided teachers with copies of a current book related to the learning team focus area.
-  Teachers obtained articles from a university on topics related to their learning teams' goals. These articles came from a variety of teacher magazines and journals. A facilitator or team member organized the articles in three-ring binders and placed them in a learning team resource area in the school library. In some instances, teachers were able to access an online professional library catalog at the university to ferret out appropriate articles. In the absence of a facilitator, a university graduate assistant might agree to locate and copy these articles for a school.
-  Teachers brought in their own resource materials. Members of one learning team brought in books and magazines with relevant articles from home. They also brought in workshop materials they had collected on their focus topic. During several learning team meetings, they reviewed these materials and began compiling a team archive of effective teaching strategies for use in their classrooms.
-  The school librarian ordered videos and books related to the learning team goals. The principal also ordered materials. Teams also put out a general call for materials on a particular subject by distributing a notice to the entire school faculty.
-  The school librarian joined several national organizations known for their best-practice periodicals and publications (e.g., National Staff Development Council, Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, grade-level associations, subject-area associations).
-  The SERVE Regional Educational Laboratory provided copies of relevant publications free of charge or at minimal cost. Each school in the U.S. is served by a Regional Educational Laboratory (REL), and these RELs also maintain extensive downloadable resources at their websites. To locate the REL serving your state, go to [www.ed.gov/prog\\_info/Labs](http://www.ed.gov/prog_info/Labs).
-  Some teachers attended workshops. Upon returning to the school, they shared new information, handouts, and other materials with their team colleagues.

- In one school, teachers developed a form that they posted when they needed help from fellow faculty members with expertise in a particular strategy. (See Tool 8.5.)
- Facilitators gathered a list of needed resources and assistance from teams—see Tool 8.6—and searched for web-based journal articles on specific topics that would help teachers in their team work.
- Through a faculty survey—see Tool 8.7—members discovered, often for the first time, a wealth of skills and knowledge within their own faculty and began using one another as resources and peer coaches.
- District-level instructional supervisors and college professors in the community were often able to lend a hand to learning team members. Many of these educators enjoyed working with groups of energetic teachers, and both groups benefited.
- The World Wide Web proved to be a rich source of lesson plans and teaching strategies on almost every topic. The Gateway to Educational Materials (GEMs) site at [www.thegateway.org](http://www.thegateway.org) provides one reliable website that provides an organized portal to many excellent lesson plan sites. This site is a service of the U.S. Department of Education, and its lesson plan sites have been screened for quality.
- A faculty survey of favorite websites for lesson planning provided teachers with a ready-made list of Internet sites to visit and analyze for research-based lessons. (See Tool 8.8.)
- Online collaboration helped some team members stay in touch between meetings and proved invaluable in helping off-site facilitators support teams. Listservs allow members to send e-mail messages to a single address and have them distributed to all of the list's subscribers. Team members might approach the district technology coordinator to help create a private listserv for Professional Learning Teams. Or, they can create such a list themselves by taking advantage of one of the many free online listserv services. See, for example, [www.epals.com/chat](http://www.epals.com/chat).
- Large-scale education listservs provided a rich source of ideas and information for one group of middle school teachers looking for ideas on teaching reading in the content

areas. Many grade-level and subject-area associations sponsor Internet conversations among their members and other interested teachers. Teachers who regularly participated in these “virtual professional communities” enjoyed sharing successful strategies and supporting one another in trying out new ideas.

- 🌐 Students in one school were an unexpected source of help in locating compelling lesson plans and teaching strategies. A teacher from one school located an intriguing student assignment on the Internet that related to her learning team’s focus on inquiry-based teaching. The day after giving students the assignment, one student announced he had located the website where she found it. He gave her two more related lesson plans he found online that he thought looked interesting! Other students then took part in an online search for student activities related to inquiry-based learning. When team members used these student-researched teaching strategies, students’ buy-in was automatic.

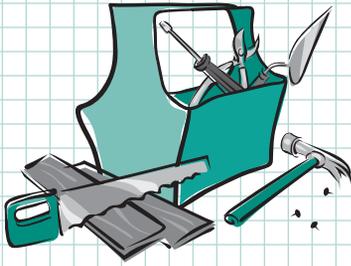
## Provide Other Incentives to Move Teams Forward

- 🌐 **Set up a Professional Learning Team resource center in the school library.** Include space to put copies of team notebooks, logs, resources, and materials. Logs and team information may also be placed in a designated area in the teacher workroom. Faculty members can use feedback forms (Tool 8.3) to comment on log entries and offer ideas, tips, and encouragement to teams. The feedback, of course, should be helpful and non-evaluative.
- 🌐 **Provide learning team members with professional development credit.** These meetings might count toward recertification, and this can usually be arranged through your local school or your central office. Learning teams can easily provide documentation of their professional development activities through meeting logs, team plans, and portfolios that contain evidence of their work.
- 🌐 **Involve the school principal as a key figure in the learning team process.** Leadership, encouragement, and involvement from the school principal are essential.

The principal might meet briefly with each learning team periodically to emphasize the value of the process. He or she might also read and respond to team logs and take the lead in publicizing the work of the team.

- 🌟 **Reward team members by sending them to meetings and conferences that support their work in Professional Learning Teams.** This spotlights the importance of what teams are doing by placing a high priority on special professional development needs growing out of their work.
- 🌟 **Provide support and troubleshooting help for individual teams or individual team members.** Help team members clarify instructional issues and problems.

Throughout the year, be on the lookout for ways to provide teachers with incentives as a way of saying “thank you” for putting extra time and effort into upgrading skills, changing teaching practice, increasing knowledge, and better preparing students.



## Step 8 Facilitation Guide

The Step 8 tools provide facilitators with assistance in keeping Professional Learning Teams motivated and moving. Each tool contains an explanation and a suggested method of using that tool with groups of teachers. Decide whether you need to use a particular tool based on the needs of teachers you work with. You may adapt any tool or suggested procedure as needed to meet your needs and the needs of your teachers. You can locate information and tools for this step at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php). You may also find additional tools and information for this step at that site.

### Tool 8.1 It's Okay!

Use this tool to give teachers permission to take a risk, fail, and try again.

- Copy and cut apart the tickets. Give each team member a ticket.
- Explain that changing the way we teach is difficult and requires some trial and error. Although teachers will be using research-based strategies, instruction will not always go smoothly. You want teachers to feel free to take a risk. This ticket gives them permission to try a new strategy, fail, and try again in a “safe” environment. It also entitles them to support from you and their colleagues as they do so.

### Tool 8.2 Are We on Target?

This poster can help teachers focus on what they should be accomplishing through their team meetings.

- Prepare a copy of the poster for each team. You may make this larger and more attractive using a word-processing program and larger paper. Laminate it if possible.
- Give each team a copy of the poster.
- Ask teams to place the poster in their meeting area. Ask them to place a checkmark in the correct box for each descriptor after every third meeting. If the poster is laminated, suggest they use a water-based marker that they can wash off. If the poster is not laminated, make multiple copies for each team.
- Explain that if they are not “Doing great!” in an area, they should check the left-hand box. Explain that

“Doing great!” means that all members are doing this regularly, and this is now a normal part of the way the team does business.

### Tool 8.3 Feedback Form for Team Logs.

This tool provides a memo for teachers, facilitators, principals, or other individuals to use to give teams feedback on logs.

- Make multiple copies of the form for anyone who will be providing feedback to teams on their logs, and cut these apart. Include enough feedback forms to place in the teacher workroom if teams will leave their logs there for other teams to read.
- Explain to the persons using the log feedback form that their responses should be constructive and encouraging.
- Instruct responders to be sure the feedback form gets to the correct team.

### Tool 8.4 Protect These Teams!

This poster can help teams protect their meeting times from outside interruptions.

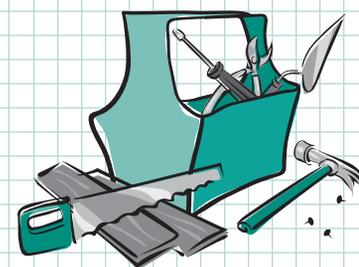
- Prepare a copy of the poster for each team; or, you may prefer to make this poster larger and laminate it.
- Tell each team to write its meeting day and time on its individual poster and to place this on the office bulletin board or in another designated area.
- If you made one large poster and laminated it, place water-based or dry-erase markers near the poster and ask teams to write their meeting times on the poster. Post this in a prominent place where office staff, students, and other teachers will see it.
- Copies of this poster can also be placed near team meeting areas as a reminder that, during this time, teachers are focusing on instruction and must not be interrupted.

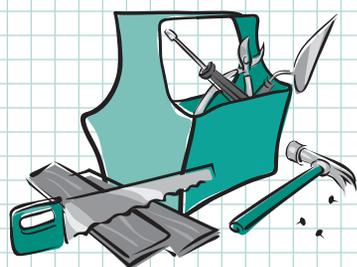
### Tool 8.5 Teacher to Teacher.

This tool can be used by teams to request that a particular faculty member share specific knowledge and skills with them.

Make several copies of this tool for each team.

- Explain that as teams look for resources and information on specific topics and instructional strategies, they may





wish to put out an “all call” for faculty help. These forms can help them locate people within the faculty willing to provide assistance.

- 🛠️ Suggest they fill in the appropriate information, duplicate the form, and place the forms in teachers’ boxes or in the teacher workroom.
- 🛠️ Recommend that if a faculty member volunteers assistance, the team provide a special thank-you card or other gesture of appreciation.

### Tool 8.6 What Do You Need?

This tool serves a dual purpose. It is part of a strategy to regularly communicate with teams, and it also provides a way for teams to obtain resources and assistance. This tool can keep teams alert to the fact that they need to continually search for new resources to help them grow and learn.

- 🛠️ Provide copies of this form to teams on a regular basis. If teams meet weekly, use this form once a month.
- 🛠️ Ask teachers to think carefully about resources that could help them, list these on the form, and return this form to you.

### Tool 8.7 Database of Teacher Talent.

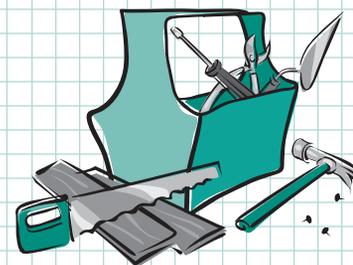
This tool offers a method for gathering information about the talents and skills of teachers in a school (or throughout a district). Use this information to determine what information and skills your faculty can share with one another.

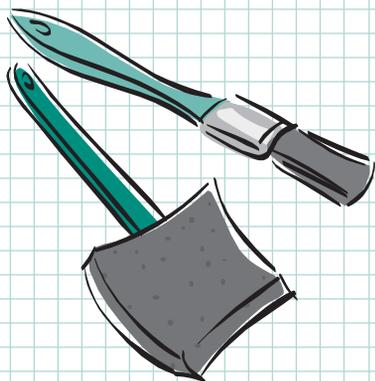
- 🛠️ Provide a copy of this tool to every teacher.
- 🛠️ Ask teachers to fill out the requested information. Explain that this is not a competition and you are not going to compare teachers with one another. You will use this information to identify specific faculty expertise, teaching strategies, and interests. In this way, faculty members will know whom to call on if they need a consultant or peer coach in a particular area.
- 🛠️ Collect this information. If the technology capability exists in your school, ask a volunteer to use it to build a Web database or to organize the information so it’s easily accessible by everyone.

**Tool 8.8 Share a Site.**

This tool provides a vehicle for teachers to identify and share their favorite education websites.

- Provide a copy of this tool to every teacher.
- Ask teachers to list sites directly related to topics that Professional Learning Teams in the school are addressing; or they may list websites that display lesson plans and other relevant online resources.
- Arrange for teachers to return this form to you at a designated time.
- If the technology capability exists in your school, ask a designated person to use this information to build a database of online resources for your faculty.





**Directions:** Cut the cards apart, and give one to each teacher.

## It's OKAY!

I used a new teaching strategy, and it did not work as well as I'd hoped. This ticket entitles me to continue trying new ideas to help my students be more successful and to have support from my colleagues while I do so.

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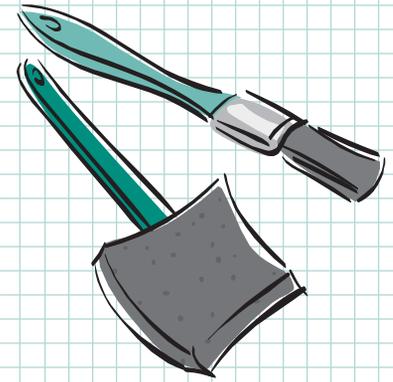
## It's OKAY!

I used a new teaching strategy, and it did not work as well as I'd hoped. This ticket entitles me to continue trying new ideas to help my students be more successful and to have support from my colleagues while I do so.

## Are We on Target?

## Tool 8.2

**Directions:** Place this poster in a prominent place in the team meeting area.



Not there yet	Are We on Target?	Doing great
<input type="checkbox"/>	Working together smoothly as a team	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintaining a regular meeting schedule	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Reading and sharing current research	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Using new teaching strategies in the classroom	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Maintaining a focus on our goal	<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Seeing changes in student performance	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Directions:** Cut the cards apart, and distribute them to person(s) who will provide feedback on the Professional Learning Team logs.

**Feedback for Team**

I read your learning team log, and here are my thoughts:

**Feedback for Team**

I read your learning team log, and here are my thoughts:

**Feedback for Team**

I read your learning team log, and here are my thoughts:

**Feedback for Team**

I read your learning team log, and here are my thoughts:

# Protect These Teams!

The following is a list of the days and times that different learning teams meet. Please help these teams guard against interruptions during this important meeting time!

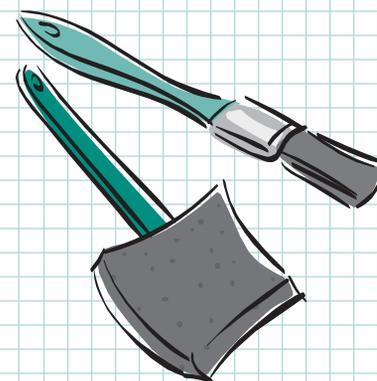
**Monday**

**Tuesday**

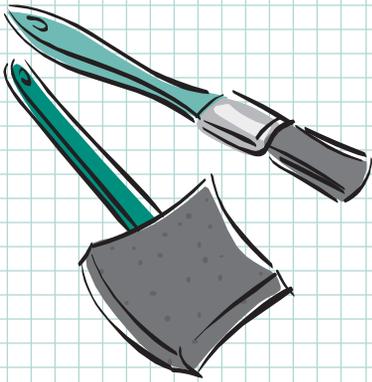
**Wednesday**

**Thursday**

**Friday**



**Directions:** Place this poster in a prominent place in the office or other designated area.



**Directions:** Use this form to identify teachers who can assist teams with specific topics.

**Our learning team is working on this topic:**

**We are looking for fresh ideas and expertise in this area:**

**Would you please contact me or write your name below if you are willing to talk with us or act as a resource for us?**

Thanks!

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Contact person)

Now that learning teams have been underway for awhile, your team probably needs further information and resources to help with research and information. Please list any additional resources and assistance you need in the space below. Thanks!

### Team:

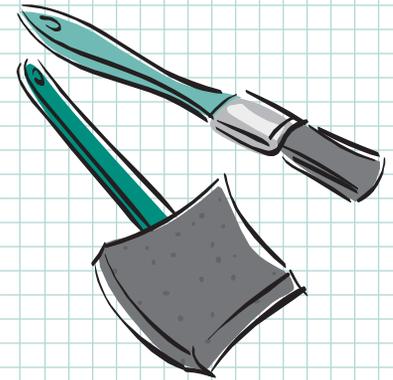
Books on...

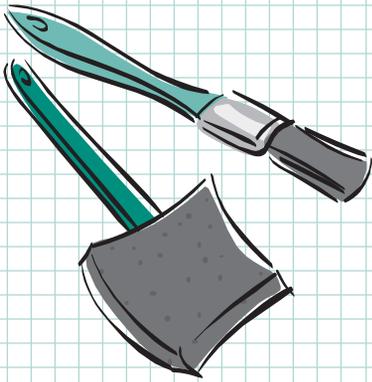
People who can...

Research articles on...

Workshops to help with...

Other...





**Directions:**

Please give us some information on your professional skills and interests. No modesty allowed!

**Name:**

Effective teaching strategies you use

Workshops you've attended

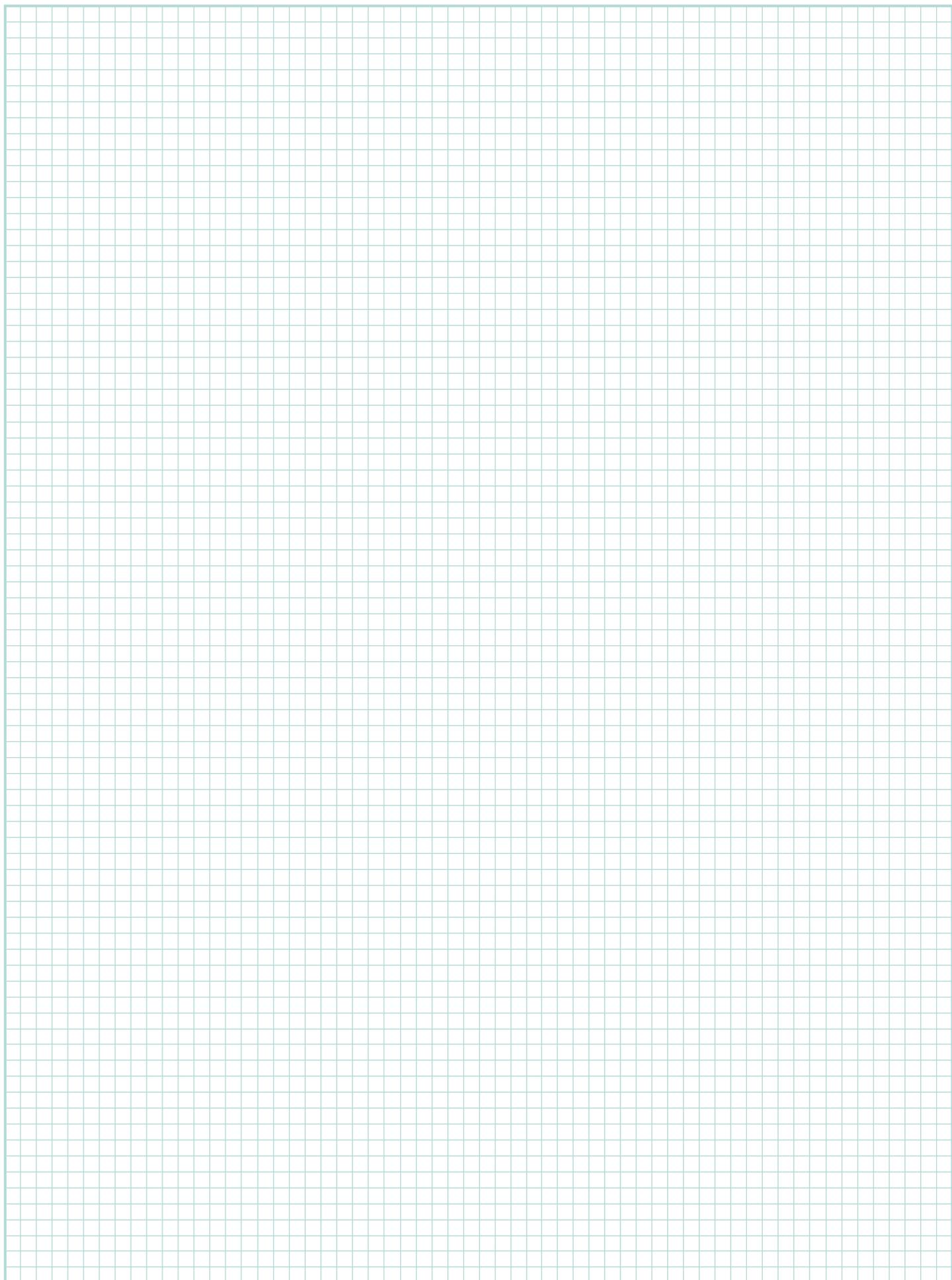
Presentations you have made

Other professional interests

Additional information about you

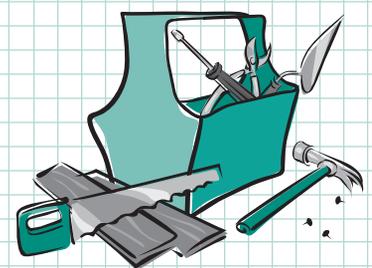
**Directions:** List your favorite education websites, and give some information about them.

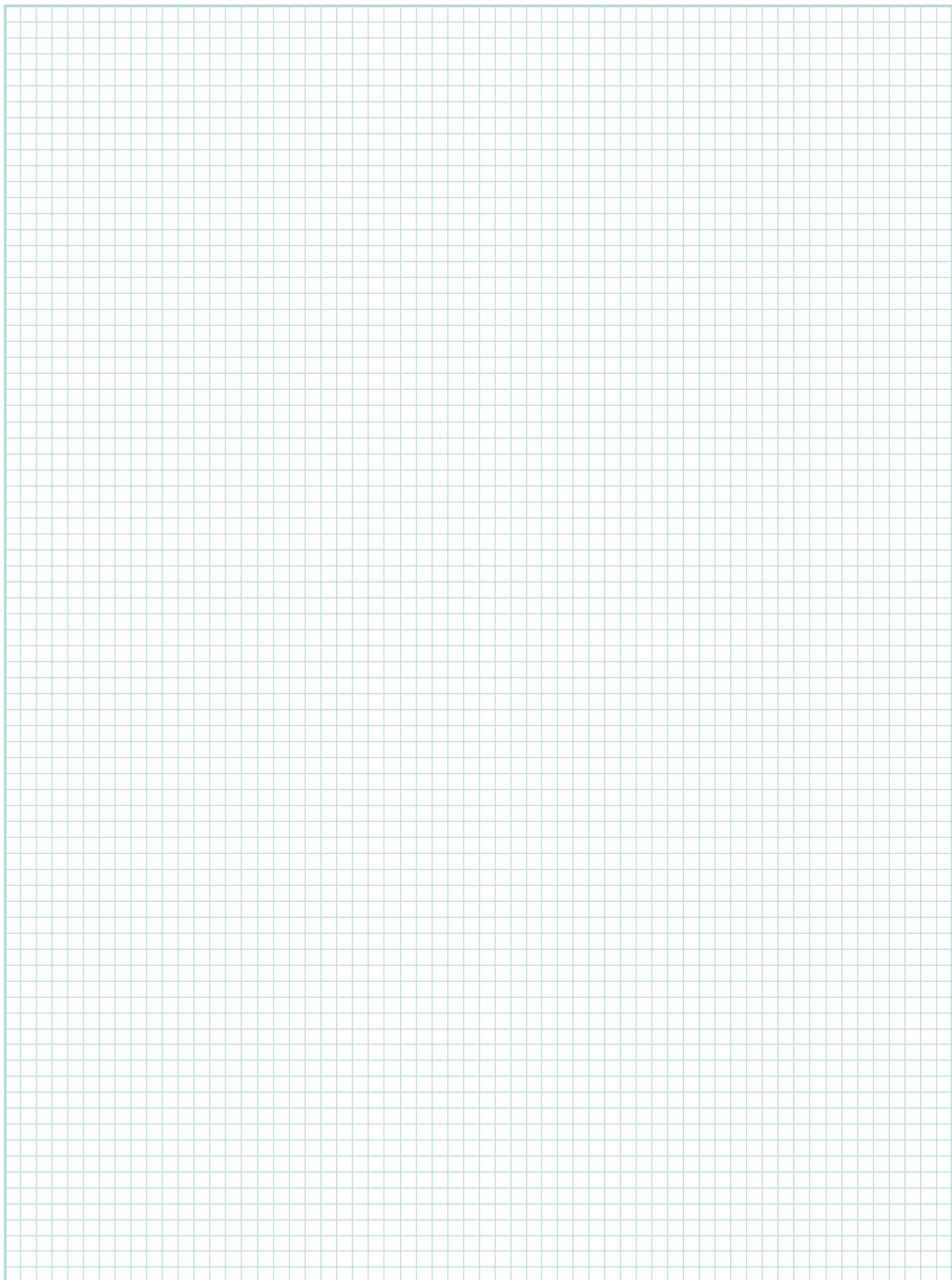
<b>Website name and address</b>	<b>What's it about?</b>	<b>Why do you like it?</b>



# Examine Results

Step 9: Assess Team Progress .....9-1





## Step 9: Assess Team Progress

**Entry 41:** I dragged two padded chairs with arms from the teacher workroom into my small office area. Deftly, I arranged the folders I'd prepared containing teachers' names, schedules, and room numbers. I rescued two clipboards from a box beneath my desk where I'd stuffed as much of the office clutter as possible, squeezed a stack of evaluation forms under each clip, and placed them with the folders. By that time, Barbara and Pam from SERVE in North Carolina had arrived to begin conducting a two-day evaluation of the learning team project. I heaved a sigh of relief and gratitude. I need some frank feedback from these professionals outside the project—someone to bounce around ideas with.

—Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

### Background

Collaborative learning teams are designed to improve results for students, teachers, and the school as an organization. Consequently, evaluating the effectiveness of this process solely on the basis of teacher satisfaction would be an inadequate approach. Your assessment strategy must measure changes in teaching practice and the impact of the process on student learning. Evaluation must assess results.

Begin planning the learning team project evaluation early. Think about what should happen through the collaborative efforts of the learning team. Teachers should grow, develop, learn from experience, become more knowledgeable, and become more effective at their work. Team members should also grow in their ability to work together to improve teaching. Students should become more knowledgeable and perform better. You might reasonably expect the school culture to change. Develop or locate a variety of instruments to evaluate some or all of these factors.

### Gather the Right Data

Before introducing Professional Learning Teams to teachers, decide what kinds of information you will gather to determine the effectiveness of the initiative. To help you think through kinds of information you need to collect, look at “Types of Data to Gather” (Tool 9.2). Donald



#### This section will help the facilitator:

-  Assess the impact of Professional Learning Teams on teacher growth and development.
-  Determine if the process is changing classroom instruction.
-  Gather data for making decisions about next steps for Professional Learning Teams.

## STEP 9

## Assess Team Progress



“An infertile environment can block the success of even the most skilled and motivated individuals.”

— Allison Rossett, *First Things Fast*, 1999, p. 41

Kirkpatrick describes four stages of evaluation in his book *Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels*. Applying Kirkpatrick’s process to the learning team evaluation, you need to consider (1) how teachers reacted to the initial training, (2) what knowledge and skills teachers gained through working in learning teams, (3) whether teachers applied what they learned in the classroom, and (4) whether that application achieved results for students.

In assessing your school’s readiness for this new initiative, note that several things need to be in place to enable this new learning team effort to grow and flourish. Allison Rossett, in her book *First Things Fast*, refers to these as *drivers*. She mentions four drivers specifically, and these have been adapted for the Professional Learning Team process. To determine the probability of success with implementing a Professional Learning Team, look at (1) teacher skills and knowledge about collaboration, (2) teacher motivation, (3) the school environment in which teachers will be working, and (4) incentives that are in place to help sustain teachers’ efforts. Determine which ones are in place and which ones you need to address to set the stage for successful learning teams.

You can get some of this information using the Pre/Post Survey instrument (Tool 9.3). Also collect up-front information on teacher expectations and beliefs. How much experience have teachers had with collaborative teamwork and learning? How often do they currently call on fellow teachers for help with teaching ideas and strategies? How important is it to teachers to work together? What benefits do teachers expect from this process? What disadvantages do they perceive?

If possible, collect information on current classroom instructional practices, especially in the areas learning teams are addressing. In one school implementing Professional Learning Teams, the facilitator conducted forty 10-minute classroom observations to get a “school snapshot” of instructional strategies. No records were kept of what strategies particular teachers used, and this was not used as a teacher evaluation instrument. The faculty agreed with this approach of gathering baseline data on current instructional practices. Late in the school year, another set of school snapshots was taken and the results were compared to determine if and how schoolwide instructional practices had changed.

## Other Assessment Strategies

**Include benchmarks for team members that can help them judge their own progress along the way.** These may include looking at their personal growth by examining their engagement in study and research, use of new instructional strategies, changes in teaching practices among team members, frequency of team meetings, and so on. The benchmarks would indicate teachers' personal and collective growth and would provide teams with concrete goals and feedback on their progress. (See Tool 9.4.) Additional sources of information for project evaluation can include samples of student work, norm- and criterion-referenced tests, and measures of student engagement. You may want to provide some documentation through pictures and photographs as well.

**If possible, arrange for an outside evaluation midway through the year and at the end of the year.** Evaluators could be consultants, college professors, or business people who know about teamwork, education, and learning organizations. Ask evaluators to conduct structured focus groups with teachers to determine what changes are occurring as a result of the learning team process and to collect teacher reflections on the process. Use this information to rethink the project direction and facilitation as needed.

**Keep a variety of documentation throughout the course of the project.** Retain copies of items such as faculty meeting agendas that might reflect changes growing out of the learning team process. At one school, the faculty meeting time targeted to instructional issues was near zero in September. The amount of faculty meeting time devoted to instructional issues rose steadily through January, until items such as teachers demonstrating new teaching practices and discussing learning team progress occupied most of the faculty meeting time, with administrative matters at the bottom of the list. This trend continued the rest of the year.

**Plan to conduct individual debriefing sessions with learning teams once per quarter.** You can examine the sample questions provided here (Tool 9.6), but rely on your own awareness of group challenges and successes in your school as a guideline for deciding what information you need from debriefing sessions. Remember that assessment and evaluation data will provide a basis for making adjustments in the learning team process to ensure continuing progress.

STEP 9

Assess Team Progress

**Assess group development and collaboration.** Garmston and Wellman's *The Adaptive School: A Sourcebook for Developing Collaborative Groups* provides samples of assessments and evaluations that address collaborative norms and group development. A sample evaluation that SERVE developed for use with Professional Learning Teams is included in this step (Tool 9.7).

# Step 9 Facilitation Guide

The Step 9 tools are designed to be used by facilitators. These include copies of data-collection tools that facilitators may use throughout the project to collect evidence on the effectiveness of Professional Learning Teams in producing results. Each tool contains an explanation and a suggested method of using that tool. You may also find additional tools and information for this step at the Professional Learning Teams area at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php).

## Tool 9.1 School Readiness Indicators.

This tool can help you do a quick up-front analysis of school factors that can affect the success of an initiative such as Professional Learning Teams.

- Make a copy of this tool to use as a survey instrument, or use these questions to design your own survey form.
- Survey all participating teachers and administrators, or collect this information from interviews with randomly selected teachers and administrators within the school.

## Tool 9.2 Types of Data to Gather.

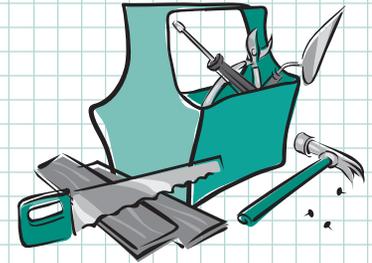
This tool focuses on different types of data you should gather about the Professional Learning Team initiative.

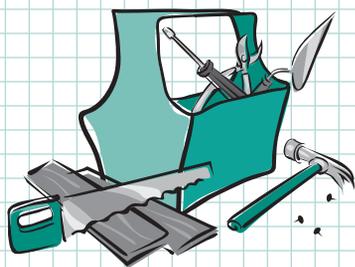
- Use this tool as a checklist to help you plan assessments and evaluations. Be sure you plan to gather some evidence from each level.

## Tool 9.3 Pre/Post Survey.

This tool provides an instrument for collecting information from teachers who will be participating in the learning team process. It can help you determine where the training and support should focus.

- Make a copy of this anonymous survey for each participating faculty member.
- Distribute the survey to teachers before they begin the Professional Learning Team process and at the end of the first school year of implementation. You may give this survey at intervals throughout the process.
- Compare responses to determine what changes are occurring in teachers' thinking and feelings concerning Professional Learning Teams.





- Also consider putting this survey online in an easy-to-use format through a free online survey service. (Type “online surveys” into an Internet search engine to locate free online survey services.)

### **Tool 9.4 Team Self-Assessment.**

This tool provides a reflective questionnaire that can encourage teams to assess their progress and pinpoint areas for improvement.

- Make a copy of the tool for each team member.
- Suggest that members reflect and write answers for each question individually. Ask them to take no more than five minutes for this.
- Ask team members to share and discuss their responses for each question.
- Ask teams to summarize the main points of their discussion for each question and keep a copy in the team notebook for reference. Ask them to give you a copy of their responses if they feel comfortable doing so. Explain that you will use this as information for providing guidance and assistance as needed and for insight into the teams’ collective thinking.
- Give teams this questionnaire at intervals during the year. Suggest they compare each set of responses with their responses from previous questionnaires.

### **Tool 9.5 Evidence from Logs.**

Use this tool to help you examine and analyze team logs over time.

- Make a copy of this tool for each team.
- Use this tool at regular intervals, perhaps once per quarter, to help you productively glean information about the team’s functioning from the logs.
- Share this information with teams if the results of your work can help and encourage them.
- Keep track of the amount of time individual teams spend in learning team meetings. This gives you useful data for comparative purposes. It also allows you to provide members with certificates specifying the amount of time they spent in this professional development initiative.

**Tool 9.6 Learning Team Debriefing Questions.**

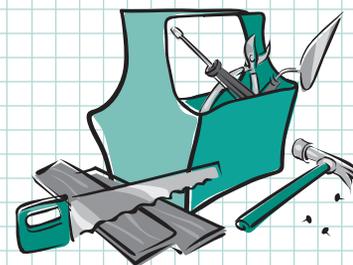
Use this tool at the end of the Professional Learning Team process for the school year to gather information from teams or individual team members.

- Meet with each team, or with a representative sample of learning team participants from the faculty.
- Explain that you need honest feedback on these questions in order to make adjustments and improvements in the Professional Learning Team process.
- Ask team members the questions and record their responses. Do not comment except for clarification. Remind team members to follow their team norms for responding, with no one person dominating and with everyone participating.
- As an alternative way of debriefing teams, you could make a copy of this form, distribute the questions to teams, and ask teams to respond in writing.

**Tool 9.7 Professional Learning Team Survey.**

This survey gathers a variety of information on Professional Learning Teams and teachers' perceptions of them.

- Make a copy of this survey for each Professional Learning Team participant.
- Administer this survey to individual team members at the end of the year.
- When tallying results, disaggregate information carefully in order to draw accurate conclusions about learning teams' values.
- This survey may be easier to manage if the questions are administered through an online survey that automatically tallies teachers' responses as they complete the survey.





**Directions:** Use this tool to gather information from school leaders and teachers. Once you have this information, plan for addressing areas of need.

### Teacher knowledge, skills, and information

*Does the faculty know...*

- How to collaborate with other adults?
- Why they are using Professional Learning Teams?
- How learning teams are structured?
- What to do in a learning team meeting?
- What they need to learn?
- How they can acquire needed information, resources, and assistance?

### Teacher motivation (persistence of effort)

*Does the faculty...*

- See learning teams as relevant?
- Value the opportunity to work collaboratively?
- Feel confident they can succeed?
- Exhibit enthusiasm?
- Think this effort will help their students?

### School environment and processes

*How will learning teams be affected by...*

- Policies and procedures at your school?
- Your school culture and organization?
- Availability of resources?
- Non-instructional responsibilities and other time-robbbers?

### Incentives

*How will the school encourage learning team participation?*

- Exchanges
- Recognitions
- Frequent feedback
- Support and appreciation
- Student successes
- Intrinsic rewards

*Adapted from a process described by Allison Rossett in First Things Fast: A Handbook for Performance Analysis.*

**Gather Data to Measure...****Teachers' reactions to Professional Learning Team training**

- Collect information on how teachers reacted to initial learning team training. Were they confused? Was information missing? Were teachers engaged? Did they see new possibilities for improving their teaching?
- Give teachers a questionnaire at the end of the training that measures their satisfaction with the training and asks them to evaluate different parts of the training. If their feelings about the initial training are good, they will be more supportive of the process in the important early stages.

**Learning resulting from the Professional Learning Team process**

- Measure the extent to which teachers increased their knowledge, developed new skills, and changed their thinking as a result of working in learning teams.
- Pre-test and post-test measures work well here. Data might also be reflected in team logs and team portfolios.

**Changes in the way teachers do business**

- Look for changes in teacher interactions. Are teachers meeting regularly in teams, becoming more interdependent as team members, looking at research on teaching and learning, observing other teachers, developing new instructional materials, and so on?
- Team logs, focus groups, retrospective surveys, samples of newly developed materials, and observation are good ways to locate this evidence.

**Learning applications in the classroom**

- Gather evidence of teachers transferring knowledge and skills from Professional Learning Teams to actual classroom practice.
- Collect data via team learning logs, classroom observation, team portfolios, focus groups, and/or retrospective surveys.

**Results**

- Look for evidence of changes in teacher performance and student achievement.
- When you look at student test scores, be careful about attributing increases in test scores to the impact of the learning team process. To do this, you will need a strong research design that controls for other variables that might also affect these scores.



**Directions:** Use this tool in planning what data to gather to assess Professional Learning Team effectiveness. Be sure to gather evidence from each level.

*Adapted with permission of the publisher from a process described in Evaluating Training Programs: The Four Levels (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.) by Donald Kirkpatrick, 1998, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, CA. All rights reserved*



**Directions:** Please use the following scale to rate each statement in terms of how well you think it describes your knowledge and feelings about teacher collaboration.

4	Strongly Agree
3	Agree
2	Disagree
1	Strongly Disagree

	1. I am familiar with the concept of teachers collaborating on classroom instruction.
	2. I know the basic procedures that make up structured learning team meetings.
	3. I feel that meeting regularly in teams to focus on increasing teachers' knowledge and expertise would be a valuable activity.
	4. I prefer to work alone to learn and to increase my teaching expertise.
	5. I prefer to participate in regular meetings with colleagues to learn and increase my teaching expertise.
	6. When we work together on committees at this school, the atmosphere is collegial.
	7. When teachers at my school work in groups, all members participate and share responsibilities.
	8. I regularly read professional journals and current research on teaching and learning.
	9. I regularly look for different teaching strategies and adjust or change my teaching practices throughout the year.
	10. I want to change the way I teach.

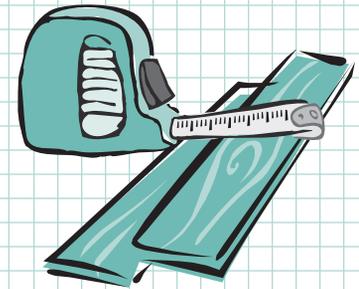
Thanks for your time and participation!

### Team Logs

1. What do our logs indicate about our team progress?
2. What happens in our teams that does not make its way into our logs? (Consider things that would inform an outside reader.)
3. How can we change the logs to make them a better source of information about our progress?

### Team Progress

4. What are some things that indicate our team is making progress?
5. What new information are we learning that will improve our instruction?
6. What new teaching methods are we trying in our classrooms?
7. What evidence do we have that these methods are/are not working?
8. Do you think this time in learning teams has been time well-spent? Why or why not?
9. What would make this learning team experience more valuable?
10. What, if anything, is happening that would NOT be happening if not for learning teams?
11. Where do you want your team to be at the end of the school year?



**Directions:** Answer these questions as a team. Make a copy of your answers for the facilitator.

## Tool 9.5

## Evidence From Logs



**Directions:** Use these questions to help you analyze team logs over time.

**To what extent are team members engaging in regular, focused team meetings?**

Total number of meetings	
Total number of hours	
Participant attendance	

**How is the nature of team meetings changing over time?**

Working relationships	
Realizations and understandings	
Moral support	
Teacher learning	
Enthusiasm	
Productivity	

**How are team members interacting and working together?**

**What evidence of progress is apparent?**

### Regarding the Professional Learning Team process...

What part of the process do you feel has been most successful? Why?

What part of the process do you feel has been least successful? Why?

What part of the learning team procedure needs to be adjusted? How?

What additional support would you like to have?

What would make learning teams more valuable for teachers?

What changes have occurred as a result of working together in learning teams (individual, team, classroom, students, school)?

What would you like to see happen in Professional Learning Teams in the future?

What other comments would you like to make?



**Directions:** Use this tool to debrief teams at the conclusion of the first Professional Learning Team year. You may debrief each team, or you may debrief a representative sample of participating teachers. Change, omit, or add questions as needed.

## Tool 9.7

## Professional Learning Team Survey

School: \_\_\_\_\_ Subject/Grade Level: \_\_\_\_\_

- How many times have you met with your learning team?  1-6  7-12  12+  Have not met
- How many people are in your learning team?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- On a scale of 1-10 (with 10 being the most positive), what rating best describes your feelings about these meetings?

Most Negative (-)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Most Positive (+)
Unproductive											Productive
Not task oriented											Task oriented
Not well facilitated											Well facilitated
Incompatible group members											Compatible group members
Less than honest communications											Honest communications

- What, if any, are the positive impacts of these meetings on you personally? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What, if any, negative impacts or concerns have you had with the learning team meetings? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- Rate the extent you feel you have benefited by participating on a learning team.  
Rating scale: 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal)

To what extent have you gained . . .	(Circle choice)
New knowledge about teaching and learning?	1 2 3 4 5
New insights about how to reach certain students?	1 2 3 4 5
New ideas about how to improve the way you teach?	1 2 3 4 5
New perspectives on your strengths and weaknesses in teaching?	1 2 3 4 5
A new outlet for expressing and sharing frustrations, concerns, and problems with teaching?	1 2 3 4 5
Greater confidence in using a wider range of instructional and assessment methods?	1 2 3 4 5
A stronger sense of connection or support from other teachers?	1 2 3 4 5
A greater sense of yourself as a professional?	1 2 3 4 5

- With regard to your selected team focus, how successful has your group been with each activity listed below?  
Rating scale: 1 (not at all successful) to 5 (extremely successful)

How successful has your learning team been with . . .	(Circle choice)
Analyzing and discussing student needs?	1 2 3 4 5
Reading research about and studying successful strategies for addressing student needs, and discussing applications of what we have read/studied?	1 2 3 4 5
Discussing similarities and differences in teachers' approaches and beliefs about teaching?	1 2 3 4 5
Investigating programs, strategies, and materials that might help students?	1 2 3 4 5

How successful has your learning team been with . . .	(Circle choice)
Designing new materials, lessons, or assessments for students?	1 2 3 4 5
Trying out new techniques, materials, and approaches in teaching and assessing students?	1 2 3 4 5
Sharing successful strategies you currently use?	1 2 3 4 5
Assessing and sharing results of new approaches to teaching with the learning team?	1 2 3 4 5

- Of the teachers on your learning team, how many do you think believe the learning team approach has significant potential to help teachers improve students' motivation and performance? \_\_\_\_\_ (give number)
- Below is a list of activities that support teacher growth and development. Try to assess the activities in terms of whether they were practiced effectively at the school before starting the learning teams. Rate each item from 1 (not very effectively practiced) to 5 (very effectively practiced) before the start-up of the learning teams.

	(Circle choice)
Teachers talked to each other about how they teach and the results they got.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers learned from each other by watching each other teach.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers designed lessons, assessments, or units together.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers critiqued lessons, assessments, or units for each other.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers reviewed the curriculum across grade levels in a particular subject.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers developed strategies to address different learning styles.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers shared articles and other professional resources and read and discussed books.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers asked each other for advice and help with particular students or topics.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers visited other schools to examine instructional approaches in other settings.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers worked together to examine student classroom tests and other student work samples to better understand student strengths and weaknesses.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers provided moral support and encouragement to each other in trying new ideas.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers helped each other implement ideas from workshops attended.	1 2 3 4 5

- In your opinion, what percentage of the students whom you teach have benefited from your learning team participation?  
 less than 25%     26–50%     51–75%     76%+
- Based on your experiences so far with the learning team, rate the following item.  
 Rating scale: 1 (not at all) to 5 (a great deal)

I think my participation on the learning team will . . .	(Circle choice)
Improve my overall teaching effectiveness.	1 2 3 4 5
Improve my skills in helping students learn.	1 2 3 4 5
Change my perceptions about some students' learning abilities.	1 2 3 4 5
Increase my understanding of how to motivate students to work harder.	1 2 3 4 5

<b>I think my participation on the learning team will . . .</b>	<b>(Circle choice)</b>
Significantly change how I teach.	1 2 3 4 5
Significantly change how I work with other teachers.	1 2 3 4 5

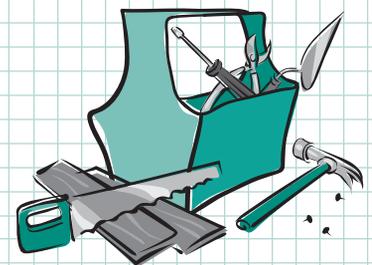
12. Rate the extent you agree or disagree with each of the following statements.  
 Rating scale: 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree)

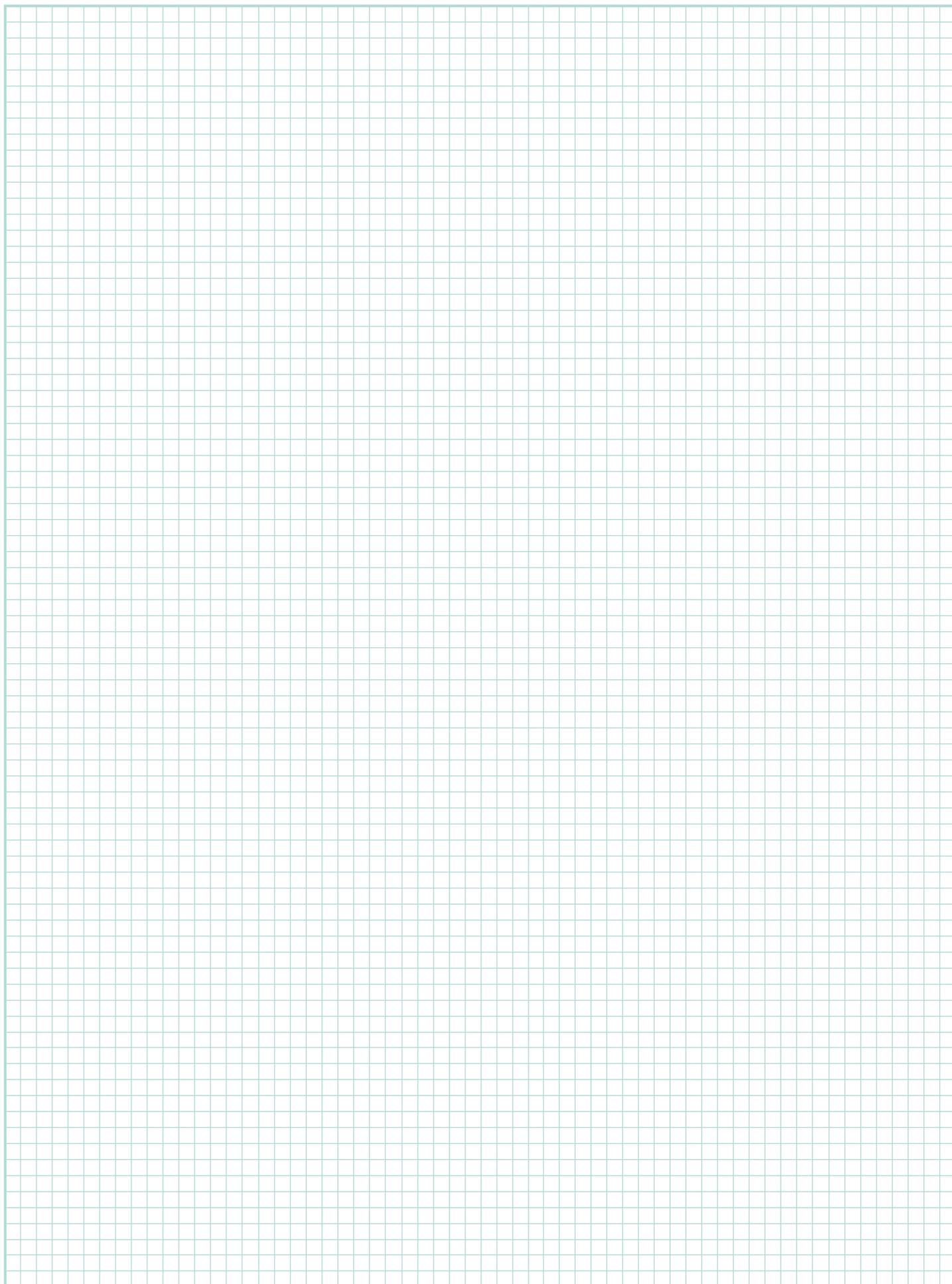
	<b>(Circle choice)</b>
I am enthusiastic about my participation on a learning team.	1 2 3 4 5
I feel a lot of stress during the workday.	1 2 3 4 5
I need more time for learning team participation.	1 2 3 4 5
I am satisfied with my work environment here.	1 2 3 4 5
I am excited by my students' accomplishments this year.	1 2 3 4 5
Student achievement is a major problem here.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers here tend to do their own thing in the classroom with little coordination.	1 2 3 4 5
I often feel unsure of my teaching.	1 2 3 4 5
Teachers here get along well.	1 2 3 4 5

*Survey prepared by Pam Finney at SERVE.*

# Sustain the Teams

Step 10: Facilitation 101 ..... 10-1





## Step 10: Facilitation 101

**Entry 36:** The project is in place and regular learning team meetings are underway. None of this guarantees the project will be successful. I thought about how to spur the growth process and decided to begin by improving communications among groups. So far, the following items adorn my to-do list. (1) Distribute a newsletter every week to spotlight learning team activities. (2) Put copies of teams' weekly logs, along with feedback forms, in the teacher workroom. (3) Meet weekly, and briefly, with each learning team. (4) Contact teachers regularly through e-mail to keep them thinking about the process. (5) Arrange for some faculty meetings to be devoted to group sharing. (6) Arrange for occasional departmental meetings so subject area teachers can exchange ideas.

— Anne Jolly: *An Action Research Diary*

### Background

The word *facilitate* means *to make easy*. Your job as a facilitator is to make the Professional Learning Team process as smooth and productive for teachers as possible. The teachers you are working with are already shouldering increasing responsibilities, workloads, and expectations. Assist them with logistics. Help them acquire resources. Be their advocate, and run interference. Protect their meeting times from outside interruptions. Foster the attitude throughout the school that student success may hinge on the learning and development process that goes on in these team meetings. Here are some tips for helping the process move smoothly.

-  **Be an encourager.** Keep your attitude upbeat, friendly, and encouraging. Expect that daily distractions will make it difficult for even the most motivated teams to protect regular meeting times. Gently nudge teams who seem to be returning to their “old” ways of doing things. Provide frequent feedback, and show interest in what teams are accomplishing. Share success stories with the entire faculty to help them see that learning teams can make a difference for their students.
-  **Keep teams focused.** Help the teams maintain a focus on teacher learning as the means to higher student achievement. In the normal course of events, teachers focus on student learning. However, successful classroom teaching unlocks the door to successful



### This section will help the facilitator:

-  Learn some characteristics of good facilitators.
-  Consider organization and presentation ideas.
-  Gain ideas for ways to encourage and support teams.

student learning, and Professional Learning Teams provide a way for teachers to accomplish that.

-  **Be resilient and flexible.** Keep a sense of humor during the ups and downs you will encounter and remain objective. Never take teacher frustrations with the learning team process personally. Rather, focus on ways to help teams deal with frustrations and bolster their morale. You and the team members are all learners together in this process.
-  **Stay informed.** Throughout your role as a facilitator, read and reflect! Acquire a good working knowledge of the role professional learning communities can play in improving teacher expertise and student learning. Read current research and information on teacher collaboration. Look for information and evidence you can share with the faculty to confirm this effort will be worth their time.
-  **Gather evidence of results.** As you facilitate the teams, regularly gather data (team logs, observed changes in classroom practices, surveys, etc.) to keep track of and document progress. Keep an eye out for results. What good things are happening as a result of this process? What evidence do you have? What is not happening that needs to? Share evidence and data regularly with teams and others who are interested.

Some facilitators may also find themselves in a training role, helping team members learn how to become successful collaborators. In this guidebook, we've tried to distill some of the best current thinking about collaboration, but you will want to look beyond these pages. The "Resources" section points to books and articles that can deepen your thinking.

As facilitator, your role may also include that of "public relations officer" for the learning team process. You may want to inform and involve people outside the school, including parents, central office administrators, local newspaper and television journalists, and other key players in the education community.

Tool 10.1 can provide you with a checklist of ideas for encouraging, supporting, and smoothing the path for Professional Learning Teams.

## Get Organized!

Your first order of business as a facilitator is to get organized. Keeping careful documentation and a history of each learning team's progress is crucial. This information will help you replicate good results, eliminate faulty procedures and wasted efforts, and make a case for continuing the learning teams. Keep a copy, literally, of everything you prepare, send out, or hand out about the learning team process, and keep a record of everything that comes to you.

You'll have your own ideas about getting organized. Here's one way to proceed, based on my own trials and errors and mid-course corrections:

- 📁 Buy two or three 6-inch binders and several sets of tabs. As materials come in, hole-punch them and place them behind an appropriate tab in the first binder. As that binder fills up, move materials into the second binder and keep adding. The tab names may correspond to the steps in this book, or you may have a different way of organizing. The important thing is to keep everything organized from the first day.

You'll change the names of the tabs and shift items around from time to time, but you might start with a checklist like this:

- Teams:** Names of team members on each team, information about each one (subject taught, special skills and training, etc.) and contact information.
- Learning Team Communiqués:** Keep a copy of all learning team communications—information you send to teams and information teams send to you and others.
- Reports and Memos:** When you make a report on the project's progress or send memos to the principal or other stakeholders, file copies behind this tab.
- Resources:** Copies of materials (research articles, books, videos, etc.) you pull together to assist teachers in their task. Also keep a record of all resources provided to learning teams.
- School Data:** This isn't just your typical school data, but rather anything that can help you document the impact of the learning team process. For example,

agendas from faculty meetings may change over the year as instructional issues gain higher priority. You may see changes in teacher classroom practices and in student engagement and success. Are there any signs that teacher collaboration across the school is increasing thanks to the work being done by learning teams?

- ❑ **Assessments and Evaluations:** Include pre-assessments, mid-year evaluations, and end of the year evaluations, plus any other teacher input you get for formative purposes.
- ❑ **Tools and Tips:** Add ideas you find for helping the Professional Learning Team process work in your school. Anytime you do something that works, document it! If it doesn't work, keep a record of that as well. As the project progresses, this may become your most frequently used tab!

Keep a journal of your activities and reflections. Use one of those big spiral notebooks for this. Log in your activities and reflections each day. Soon you'll have an understandable history of the project and a source of invaluable information for later use. This will seem like a nuisance at first, but it's a great way to document the project's evolution. Your daily reflections will also spur valuable personal insights and help you steer your future course.

### Get Off to a Good Start

At the beginning of the learning team process, *let teachers know exactly what you will be doing with and for learning teams*. The Step 10 Facilitation Guide includes a sample of a handout for participants (Tool 10.2) explaining what you, as a facilitator, will do. You may use this one or prepare one tailored to your specific responsibilities. After teachers understand the purpose and procedures of learning teams, *put agreed-upon decisions and responsibilities in writing*. Distribute copies to learning teams to make these decisions more concrete.

### Fine-Tune Your Presentation Skills

When you are making a presentation on the learning team process to teachers, choose the time and place carefully. If you introduce this idea to teachers during an after-school faculty meeting, keep in mind the typical energy levels at the end of a school day. Put the learning



“Remember... The brain can absorb what the seat can endure.”

— Karen Kalish, *How to Give a Terrific Presentation*, p. 121

team introduction first on the agenda, or better yet, make it the only thing on the agenda.

- Keep your introduction short, up beat, and to the point. If you use an overhead projector, make your transparencies interesting by including graphics and using a large font that's easy to read from the back of the room. Overheads can be confusing when they contain too much information. Use only keywords and phrases from the text.
- During and after the presentation, give faculty members time to question, reflect, and discuss. Interact with participants as a mentor, friend, and guide, not as a lecturer.

A great resource for being an effective presenter is *How to Give a Terrific Presentation*, a short, peppy book by Karen Kalish. Another is *The Presenter's Fieldbook: A Practical Guide* by Robert Garmston. You'll find both of these listed in the "Resources" section of this book.

### Expect Resistance

Resistance to change seems to be a built-in characteristic of schools and school systems. Monica Janas (1998) describes resistance as "the sleeping dragon of the change process" that "thwarts goals, disrupts action plans, and undermines progress." Don't be surprised or disconcerted when this sleeping dragon rears its head.

One of the most formidable opponents you will face is the status quo. Teachers are part of that status quo. When you feel discouraged, remember change of any kind is complex and difficult. Your decision to undertake this project may have been accompanied initially by a glow of rosy optimism. However, as in any change process, predictable conflicts and difficulties inevitably occur as the project progresses. Expect these, and deal with them objectively. Document the pitfalls as well as the successes, and learn from both.

**A word of advice:** Do not try to persuade teachers to participate in learning teams by assuring them change will be easy. Principals and teachers should acknowledge from the outset that changing their teaching practice will be difficult, regardless of how carefully they plan and how skillfully they manage the process.

When teachers become complacent or unenthusiastic, help them focus clearly on the purpose of their collaboration and the results it should produce. Try to reestablish a sense of purpose. Document the

effectiveness of the learning team process. Create short-term wins for teachers by celebrating successes and benchmarks achieved. Above all, remember each learning team is unique and each school situation is unique. Groups mature at different rates, and some will perform better than others.

You are undertaking a rewarding experience as you begin to help build a school culture that is seriously committed to high levels of learning for students and faculty members alike. As you go through the process of facilitating, you will experience “ahas” and insights, and you will create your own tools for assisting teams. Share your tools and your findings with others who are engaged in this same adventure. Your experiences with Professional Learning Teams can provide additional insights about effective teacher collaboration and add to the growing body of knowledge about ways to revolutionize teaching and learning.

# Step 10 Facilitation Guide

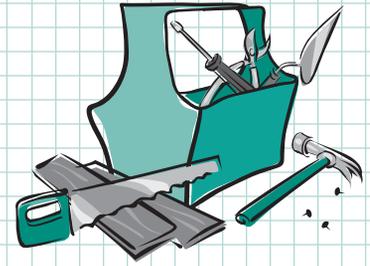
These tools are suitable for individuals in a variety of roles. You will find these tools useful whether you are a teacher, facilitator, school leader, principal, or a staff developer. If the suggestions for using each tool are not appropriate for your purposes, adapt the suggestions as needed. Select those tools that are most suited to your needs and purposes. You may also find additional tools and information for this step at the Professional Learning Teams support site at [www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php](http://www.serve.org/EdQuality/ProfLearnCom/Tools.php).

## 10.1 Tips for Supporting Professional Learning Teams.

Use this list of ideas to motivate learning teams and create circumstances that can help them be successful. This can be used as a checklist and a plan of action for facilitators.

## 10.2 Learning Team Agreement.

This tool provides a model for drawing up an agreement between the facilitator and members of learning teams. Work with participating teachers to decide jointly on facilitator and team member responsibilities.



## Tool 10.1

## Tips for Supporting Professional Learning Teams

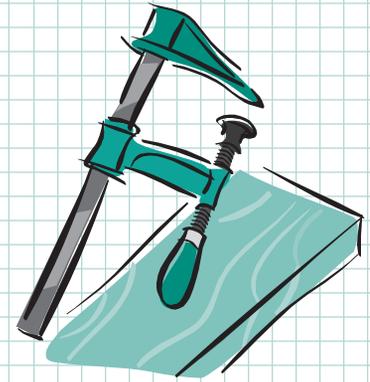


**Directions:** Use these ideas to encourage and sustain successful learning teams. Add other ideas to this list throughout the year as you discover new ways to facilitate teams and maintain their motivation and momentum.

- Build good relationships with teams.** Talk with the teachers in your school, listen to teachers, and look for opportunities to help individual teachers as well as teams. Look for areas of strength in the teams and teachers you work with, and focus on these as you help them learn and grow.
- Spend time in team members' individual classrooms.** Gain insight into teaching styles and innovative strategies. Reference these in learning team meetings. Watch for growth and document it in your personal journal.
- Use faculty meetings as a time for teams to share their best ideas and give others a sense of what they're accomplishing.** If you are the principal, you can obviously make this decision yourself. If you are not the principal, approach the principal about this idea. A word of caution: do not use this as an "add-on" that lengthens faculty meetings. Don't make this valuable sharing time a punishment rather than a learning experience. Redesign faculty meetings so that they are used for professional growth and team building.
- Develop a newsletter to publish good things teams do, including their "This Week's Best Ideas."** Distribute this to the entire faculty, and include this in the school's parent/community newsletter. This keeps the learning team process highly visible at all times.
- Take pictures of teachers meeting together, of team members trying out new strategies in their classrooms, and of other learning team events.** Make these available for school newsletters and local newspaper articles. Post these around the school in appropriate locations (office, team workroom, library, and so on).
- Take pictures of each team member's students.** Give these to team members for the team notebook. When teachers become discouraged or lose sight of their goal, looking at pictures of their students can be a terrific motivator that keeps them on task.
- Set up a location in the library where teachers can meet in learning teams.** This location can be a central

resource area for learning team articles and information and a center for sharing materials. A library location has an added advantage of making learning team meetings public so that students (and other faculty) can see teachers engaged in learning and planning.

- ❑ **Provide learning team materials and resources.** Set aside an area in your library for learning team resources. Add research articles and materials to this section regularly, and begin building an archive of materials from which teachers can draw ideas, strategies, and information about good, field-tested practices.
- ❑ **Create surprise baskets for learning teams.** From time to time, place a small container of “goodies” in the learning team meeting areas. These may include snacks and treats, as well as items such as colorful sticky notes, page flags, binder clips, and other items teams may need.
- ❑ **Establish online communication within and among learning team members.** Set up an electronic folder for each team containing e-mail addresses for team members. Make these folders available to all teams, and invite idea sharing. If you’re an off-campus facilitator, invite teams to send you copies of their logs electronically and respond via e-mail.
- ❑ **Engage team members in using online resources.** From time to time, send team members articles and information electronically. Connect them to good education websites, and involve them in exploring the world of resources that exists beyond the school site.
- ❑ **Arrange opportunities for team members to attend conferences and professional development events related to their learning team goals.** Like their students, teachers learn and grow in many ways. Keep looking for opportunities to promote their growth!
- ❑ **Be an advocate for changes in school organization and culture that will promote and support teacher collaboration.** Champion the idea that teachers should spend more time on instructional responsibilities and less time on clerical and managerial duties.





**Directions:** Use this as a model for an agreement that you draw up between yourself and your learning teams. Work with Professional Learning Team members to develop this agreement.

## Learning team purpose

To prepare students to achieve at higher levels, teachers will work together weekly throughout the school year to increase their knowledge and teaching expertise. The school administration will actively encourage and support this process by providing resources, time, and support.

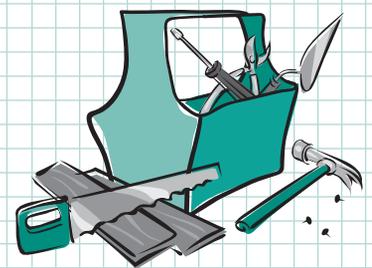
With the agreement of the teachers and administration, the facilitator will

1. Introduce teachers to the Professional Learning Team process.
2. Collect data and information about the initiative during the year.
3. Provide ongoing guidance for the learning team process and oversee the implementation of the process at the school.
4. Monitor and assist the learning teams regularly and provide feedback.
5. Assist with spotlighting the work of the teams among the administration and the community.
6. Provide teams with resources for research and professional development.

## Learning team members will

1. Participate actively in the learning team process throughout the school year.
2. Keep a team log of activities, discussions, and reflections.
3. Share information about learning team activities and practices.
4. Provide feedback and recommendations regarding the learning team process.

# Resources





## Resources

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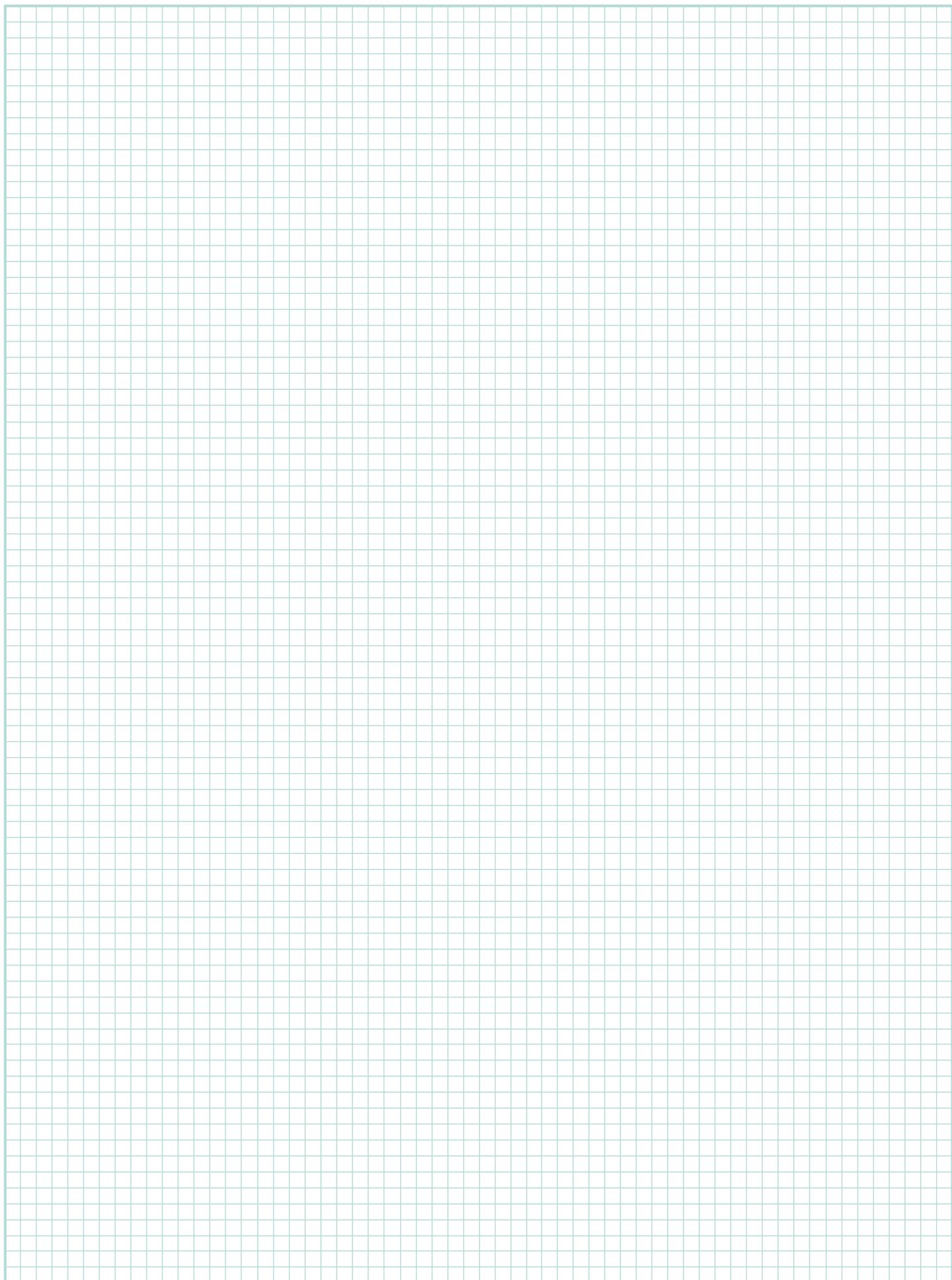
## Resources

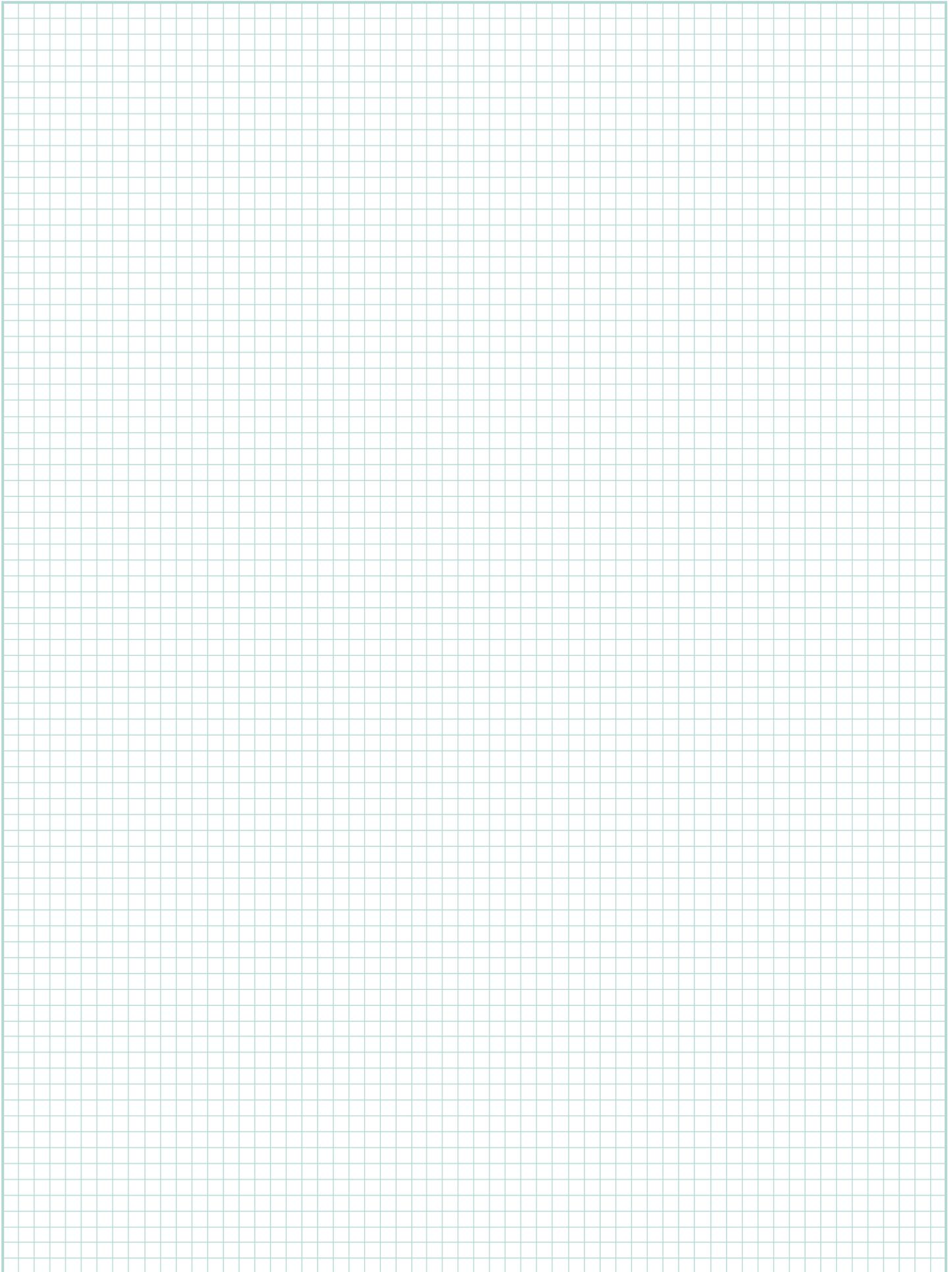


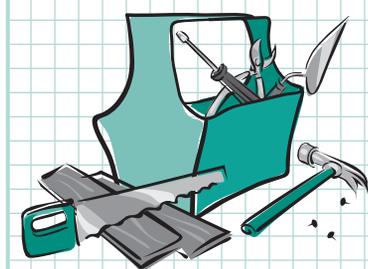
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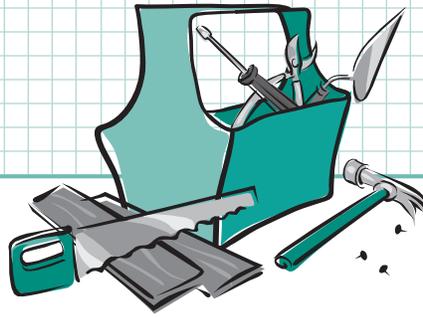
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# A Facilitator's Guide to Professional Learning Teams

*Creating on-the-job opportunities for teachers to learn and grow*

Professional development research suggests that teachers learn best from and with each other in ongoing, job-embedded activities. *A Facilitator's Guide to Professional Learning Teams* provides a way of engaging school faculties in sustained, onsite professional development that builds capacity and collegiality, improves teaching quality, and focuses on student achievement. This practical “how-to” guide will provide facilitators with field-tested tools and procedures for establishing and maintaining professional learning teams in schools.

Among the suggestions and resources you will find are ideas and activities for organizing Professional Learning Teams, analyzing data, setting goals, guiding teams through successful meetings, sustaining team momentum, and monitoring team progress and effectiveness.

*I am impressed with the thoroughness and comprehensiveness of this guide. The steps are very clear, concrete, and extensive and provide a splendid, formalized method to create the building blocks of professional learning among communities of practitioners. I believe that this product is an excellent addition to what we have available, and I can see myself using it.*

— Shirley M. Hord, Ph.D., Scholar Emerita  
Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Texas