

Professional Learning Communities and Data Teams arrive in Meriden!

As Meriden prepares to launch their Professional Learning Community (PLC)/Data Team proposal, additional research continues to support teacher collaboration as a measure to improving student performance. In the November 3, 2010, edition of *Education Week*, Richard and Rebecca DuFour highlight the importance of breaking the long standing tradition of teachers working in isolation.

"The big idea here is that when educators work collaboratively rather than in isolation, students learn more. Key elements of collaboration are:

- Committing to implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum;
- Using interim assessments that provide ongoing evidence of each student's learning;
- Collectively analyzing that evidence and using it to inform and improve practice;
- Putting in place a systematic intervention process that provides struggling students with additional time and support"

--Richard and Rebecca DuFour, 2010

In a previous published editorial, Dr. Benigni wrote, "Yet, it is impossible to accomplish our goals if we work in isolation. Teachers must utilize the State frameworks, agree on what students need to learn, and create common formative assessments together. PLCs allow for these important collaborative discussions to occur."

As Principal of Cromwell High School, Dr. Benigni, described the PLC concept and offered his professional endorsement when he stated, "A PLC is a forum that brings teachers together to discuss student achievement data, examine student work, utilize feedback from other teachers, parents, and outside service providers, examine current research, and engage in discussions focused on professional practice. It is widely accepted that the most important factor in a student's academic success is the quality of the teacher. PLCs provide time and opportunities for teachers to work collaboratively, find evidence of student learning, create common assessments and develop action plans for student success."

Meriden Board of Education President Mark Hughes has worked as a school social worker in a school district that has utilized PLC/Data Teams for many years. He states, "PLC/Data teaming gives professionals an opportunity to collaborate for effective school and student improvement. Student performance data is all too often collected and compiled, but education professionals aren't receiving the necessary time to analyze the data that will pinpoint effective strategies for data driven decision making; the only effective way to plan for a district's success in student performance."

Further, he states that PLC/data teams provide professionals the staff development tools that are effective in achieving a shared vision that will promote systemic change by:

- Refreshing teaching professionals
- Creating a satisfying, rewarding, and validating work environment
- Building an atmosphere of shared responsibility for student centered successes
- Increasing the understanding and development of content aimed at meeting State academic standards
- Improving instruction through shared methods of differentiation, and
- Building systems of support to meet specific student needs

Ultimately, PLC/Data Teams create an atmosphere that builds new knowledge of how teachers can teach more efficiently and effectively, while learners learn more productively.”

While we recognize the thirty minute early dismissal on Thursdays may complicate parents' schedules and care for their children, we are confident that this schedule change will have the desired impact of improving teaching and learning for all students. Thanks to the collaborative efforts of our teachers, we are able to increase instructional time (direct contact time between teachers and students) as we carve out time for weekly data teams. We have watched and witnessed other school systems and students benefit from the improved instruction, aligned curriculum, and data driven decisions that come with regularly scheduled data team meetings. We are excited to begin these efforts in Meriden.

The good news is that this can be done without any additional expenses to the school district or municipality. Let us create PLCs and Data Teams in our schools, not because of legislation or fear of sanctions, but simply because it is the right thing to do.

We thank you for your support of our students and staff as they begin this new exciting journey.