

Professional Learning Communities

OVERVIEW

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are an approach to school improvement where groups of teachers work collaboratively at the school level to improve student outcomes.

The quality of teaching is the most powerful lever schools have to increase student learning. Evidence from high-performing school systems around the world shows teaching quality improves when teachers work together.

PLCs provide the culture and structure that teachers need to work together effectively. They judge everything they do on one criteria: Will it increase student learning?

PLC schools realise this vision by creating a school culture characterised by ten principles grounded in a solid base of local and international research:

- School improvement starts with an unwavering focus on student learning.
- For every student to achieve, everyone must be responsible for his or her learning.
- Effective school leaders focus on instruction.
- Teachers make better instructional decisions together.
- Teachers learn best with others—on the job.
- Effective schools provide time and forums for teacher conversations about student learning.
- Effective teams improve through cycles of diagnosing, planning, implementing and evaluating.
- Effective professional learning is driven by evidence and data.
- The most effective school leaders contribute to the success of other schools.
- Improving systems give place-based and joined-up support to schools.

In PLC schools, teachers work in teams to improve each other's practice through recurring cycles of diagnosing student learning needs, and planning and implementing teaching responses to them. Teacher teams evaluate and reflect on these interventions with feedback from peers, expert practitioners and students.

Through the Victorian PLC initiative, the Victorian Government is investing \$32.3 million to foster effective PLCs across the system.

By 2021, more than 800 government schools will have received intensive implementation support that includes a comprehensive program of professional learning and expert advice and guidance from regionally based teams. These teams, made up of experienced educators, including dedicated PLC Regional Managers, will advise, coach and train school and instructional leaders in all aspects of PLC implementation, including:

- budget and resource prioritisation
- meeting facilitation
- inquiry-based improvement
- curriculum and assessment
- data interpretation and analysis.

Victorian PLC schools will have access to a continuous stream of data about the impact of PLC implementation on teacher practice and student perception.

Theory of change – Professional Learning Communities

If teachers collaborate to develop practice, student learning will improve. Effective PLCs can lead to teachers acquiring new skills and mindsets, which includes the skills to conduct inquiry into teaching practices

Then, with these skills, teachers can examine the impact of their practices on student learning and the classroom environment

So that this continuous assessment will lead to improvements in teaching practice, which improves student learning.

KEY LINKS

More information is available via the Department's website at: [Professional Learning Communities](#)

EVIDENCE BASE

Farrar., M. (2015). *Learning together: The power of cluster-based school improvement*, Centre for Strategic Education Paper 246.

Hattie., J. (2015). *What Works Best in Education: The Politics of Collaborative Expertise*, London: Pearson

Stoll, L., Bolam, R., McMahon, A., Wallace, M., and Thomas, S. (2006). 'Professional learning communities: A Review of the Literature', *Journal of Educational Change*, 7, 221-258.

Timperley, H., Wilson, A., Barrar, H., and Fung, I. (2008). *Teacher Professional Learning and Development: A Best Evidence Iteration*.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What is a Professional Learning Community?

Professional Learning Community (PLC) schools start from a simple idea: students learn more when their teachers work together.

Building a PLC is a proven way for schools to increase student learning by creating a culture that is:

- focused on continuous improvement by linking the learning needs of students with the professional learning and practice of teachers
- committed to professionalism
- fuelled by collaborative expertise.

What do teachers working in a PLC do?

Teams of teachers - the building blocks of PLCs - use data-driven cycles of inquiry to improve classroom practice and

student learning outcomes. These teams, often referred to as professional learning teams (PLTs), also use student data to determine differentiated and targeted curriculum and assessment to address the learning needs of all students. They identify evidenced-based instructional practices to deliver curriculum content, observe each other in classes and provide feedback, and tailor the learning and interventions to ensure progress for every student.

What is the Victorian PLC initiative?

The Victorian Professional Learning Community (PLC) initiative supports Victorian government schools to build effective PLCs. Participating schools are at the forefront of working collaboratively to improve student learning outcomes.

Following a successful pilot involving 65 schools the Victorian Government is making a significant investment to scale-up the PLC initiative to more than 800 government schools.

What support is provided to Victorian PLC schools?

Each annual intake of over 200 schools benefits from a comprehensive program of professional learning alongside expert advice and support from regionally based teams. They also receive frequent feedback about the impact of PLC implementation on teacher practice to track progress and identify areas for improvement.

PROGRESS TO DATE

Schools selected for PLC pilot	Jun 2016
Pilot schools completed professional learning	Nov 2016
Pilot schools commenced implementation	Jan 2017
Regional PLC Managers appointed in all regions	Mar 2017
Intake 1 schools commenced professional learning	Jul 2017

Selection process for Intake 2 finalised and schools notified of outcome	Nov 2017
Intake 1 schools completed professional learning	Nov 2017
Intake 1 schools commenced implementation	Jan 2018
Intake 2 schools commence core professional learning	Apr 2018
Link schools established	Aug 2018
Pilot and Intake 1 schools commence one-to-one PLC Coaching	Aug 2018
Delivery of online PLC Practical Guide	Oct 2018
Selection process for Intake 3 finalised and schools notified of outcome	Oct 2018
Intake 2 schools completed core professional learning	Nov 2018
Intake 1 and PLC Link schools complete Collaborative Inquiry professional learning with Prof. Helen Timperley	Nov 2018

UPCOMING ACTIVITIES AND MILESTONES

Intake 2 schools commence implementation	Jan 2019
Pilot and Intake 1 schools complete one-to-one PLC Coaching	Feb 2019
Delivery of online PLC Core Professional Learning Modules 1 and 2	Feb 2019
Delivery of online PLC Core Professional Learning Modules 3 and 4	Mar 2019
Intake 3 schools commence core professional learning	Mar 2019
Link Schools commence one-to-one professional learning with Prof Helen Timperley	Mar 2019
Pilot and Intake 1 schools complete <i>PLC: Using Data for Inquiry Pilot</i>	Apr 2019
PLC Link School networks established	Apr 2019