



Lexington Public Schools

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Our Schools

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WHY CREATE A LEARNING SCHOOL SYSTEM?

We know that an outstanding teacher is the most important school-related factor influencing student achievement. If our mission is to provide high achievement for ALL students, then principals must first hire well-educated teachers who have a passion for teaching and a thirst for continuous improvement. These teachers must remain steadfast in their commitment to examine student work and apply that knowledge to improve both teaching and learning. However, independent thoroughbreds that may be running in different directions will not lead to high achievement for all students in a school.

During the past ten years, educational practice has moved away from teachers who viewed their work as independent "subcontractors" within a school and toward teams of teachers working together to provide the best possible learning. When I went to school in the 50s and 60s, my education each year was solely dependent on who I got as a teacher. If there were outstanding teachers down the hallway, they would most likely have no impact on my experience that year. Each teacher worked independently from one another.

More recently, educators have begun to break down the walls of teacher isolation and form teams that meet regularly to share best practices and curriculum materials. One well-respected model of collaborative, interdependent teacher teams is known as Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs. In the PLC model, a group of teachers meet at least once a week to discuss ways they can improve learning for their students. Ideally, these teachers are examining student work against expected goals and modifying future instruction based on frequent formative assessments.

Extending the PLC model to an entire school is the goal of educators who want to create "learning schools." According to Joellen Killian and Patricia Roy, authors of *Becoming a Learning School*, "When schools become 'learning schools,' every student benefits from every educator's expertise, and every educator grows professionally with the support of his or her colleagues. Collaborative professional learning is a powerful way to ensure great teaching for every student." In a learning school, the entire faculty is responsible for the education of its students, and is further responsible for making instructional adjustments based on student performance throughout the school year.

Numerous authors have focused on the attributes of an effective school, including creating professional learning communities (PLCs). Within PLCs, groups of teachers work as a team to achieve their mutual educational goals. However, the effectiveness of PLCs, or even a learning school, is limited due to its isolation from other schools in the district and support from the central office. Schools that are generally independent from other district schools and the central office are limited by their internal capacity to promote teacher professional development. However, in a K-12 learning school system, all schools work as a team to align curriculum, share best instructional practices, and develop needed instructional programs. In addition, the central office is able to bring external resources to individual teachers, departments, and schools, including district-wide professional development that supports school and departmental goals.

Lexington administrators and teachers believe a K-12 learning school system is more effective than any individual teacher or school working alone. Through intra-district collaboration, educators work to create one learning organization that supports each school's efforts to improve learning for all students. We can no longer allow the quality of a child's education to be dependent on the random chance the student is assigned an excellent teacher.

As we enter a new world, rapidly changed by globalization and technology, we cannot work alone; instead, we must work together to learn, lead, and inspire as we ensure equity and excellence for all students.