



Lexington Public Schools

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"Our Schools" Professional Learning Communities

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In the Lexington Public Schools, our educators seek not only to teach, but also to actively ensure learning. A process called "Professional Learning Communities" links teaching and learning together holistically to forward our children's academic success.

On November 28, Dr. Richard DuFour, a nationally renowned expert on Professional Learning Communities, will be the keynote speaker at the annual Professional Development Day for all Lexington Public Schools teachers. Thanks to the generosity of a Lexington Education Foundation grant, we are able to invite Dr. DuFour to Lexington to talk about the importance of Professional Learning Communities and how focused teacher collaboration leads to significant academic gains for all students.

According to Dr. DuFour, a Professional Learning Community is defined as "educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve." In Professional Learning Communities, educators focus on student learning and use student data to plan appropriate classroom interventions that promote student academic success. When teachers work interdependently, analyze student work, problem-solve, and share best practices, all students perform better. Establishing true Professional Learning Communities in each school is not a program. Rather, it is a process by which teachers are committed to continuous improvement and high academic standards.

Effective Professional Learning Communities are based on three big ideas.

Big Idea #1: We accept high levels of learning for all students as the fundamental purpose of our schools and therefore are willing to examine all practices in light of their impact on learning. Failure is not an option for any student in the Professional Learning Community philosophy. At its core, the central focus is on student learning for each and every one of our students.

Big Idea #2: We can achieve our fundamental purpose of high levels of learning for all students only if we work together. We cultivate a collaborative culture through the development of high-performing teams.

Bid Idea #3: We assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. In Professional Learning Communities, individuals, teams, and schools seek relevant data and information to promote continuous improvement. We cannot only ask, “Was the lesson taught?” We must also ask, “Did students learn what was taught?” This is an important shift in focus for future professional development.

In school districts where teachers work collaboratively, focused on student work, “there are gains in student achievement, higher quality solutions to problems, increased confidence among all staff, more support for new ideas, and an expanded pool of ideas, materials, and methods” (Researcher Judith Warren Little).

Kindergarten through eighth-grade teachers will examine their own assessments of student work, discuss possible interventions in the classroom, implement instructional strategies, and monitor and document student learning success. Our goal is to shift focus from teaching to learning and from teacher intention to student results, in order to ensure that every student's individual learning needs are addressed in a timely and targeted way. High school teachers will work in collaborative teams as the school prepares for the spring visit by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges.

The Lexington Public School system is committed to three essential and enduring core purposes: Academic excellence; respectful and caring relationships; and a culture of reflection, conversation, collaboration, and commitment to continuous improvement. Our core purposes are reflected in each of the district's goals from year to year, as well as in the individual school improvement plans. By working toward creating Professional Learning Communities in the Lexington Public Schools, we expect to increase the capacity of the entire school district and to advance the achievement level of all students.

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