

Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes to Improve Student Learning

**A Webinar With
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The Power of Professional Learning Communities

“The most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is building the capacity of school personnel to function as a professional learning community.

The path to change in the classroom lies within and through professional learning communities.”

—Milbrey McLaughlin (1995)

**What is a PLC,
and how is it different
from a traditional school?**

Traditional School Structure

Independent Kingdoms

K	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom
1	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom
2	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom
3	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom
4	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom
5	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom	Individual Kingdom

**Pseudo
PLC Structure**

Individual Kingdoms

organized into isolated groups on an infrequent basis

Kindergarten Group

First Grade Group

Second Grade Group

Third Grade Group

Fourth Grade Group

Fifth Grade Group

Professional Learning Community (PLC) Defined

“Educators are committed to working collaboratively in *ongoing processes* of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve.

“PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous, job-embedded learning for educators.”

The PLC Structure

A cohesive school organized into
Interdependent Collaborative Teams
united by PLC foundation

Kindergarten Team

First Grade Team

Second Grade Team

Third Grade Team

Fourth Grade Team

Fifth Grade Team

Vertical
Dialogue

SHARED PURPOSE:

Ensuring high-levels of
learning for all students

SHARED VISION:

Creating the structures and
culture to ensure all kids learn

COLLECTIVE COMMITMENTS:

Clarifying how each
individual will contribute to
achieving the vision

SHARED GOALS:

Identifying indicators to
monitor our progress

The BIG IDEAS of a PLC

- We accept learning as the fundamental purpose of our school and therefore are willing to examine all practices in light of their impact on learning.
- We are committed to working together to achieve our collective purpose. We cultivate a collaborative culture through development of high-performing teams.
- We assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions. Individuals, teams, and schools seek relevant data and information and use that information to promote continuous improvement.

Necessary Cultural Shifts

In **traditional schools**, each teacher in isolation

- Decides what to teach and when to teach it
- Administers infrequent summative assessments
- Uses assessments to assign grades
- Determines what (if anything) to do when students don't learn

In **professional learning communities**, teams of teachers

- Create a guaranteed curriculum for each unit by building shared knowledge about essential learning and pacing
- Administer frequent common formative assessments.
- Use assessments to inform and improve professional practice and identify students who need additional support
- Use **systems** of intervention that ensure students receive additional time and support

Effective Collaborative Teams

Focus on the Right Work

- Clarify essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
- Develop common pacing guides or curriculum maps.
- Create common **formative** assessments.
- Establish common standard of proficiency.
- Use common assessment data to identify students who need additional time and support and to inform and improve teacher practice.
- **Designate a block of time for intervention and enrichment during the instructional day that does not remove students from new direct instruction.**

Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes

Features 38 schools in nine different districts including:

Boones Mill Elementary School, VA
Highland Elementary School, MD
Lakeridge Junior High School, UT
Whittier Union High School District, CA

**For more information, go to
solution-tree.com**

Boones Mill Elementary School

Boones Mill, Virginia

Hand in Hand, We All Learn

- Pre-K–grade-5 student population **444**
- Free or reduced lunch **28%**
- Special education **13%**
- Limited English **1%**
- **Bottom 10% of the state** in per pupil expenditure

Early Steps on the PLC Journey at Boones Mill Elementary School

- Conducted a series of small group dialogue sessions with all staff to build shared knowledge about current reality and next steps
- Used the existing school improvement team as the guiding coalition to help articulate and monitor the achievement of short- and long-term goals
- Built a parallel block schedule to ensure:
 - Large blocks of protected learning time for students
 - Intervention and enrichment (I/E) time
 - Collaborative time for teams
- Coordinated communication about student learning between classroom teachers, support team, specialists, and parents
- Organized a school support team to work with classroom teachers of each grade level during I/E, providing intensive small-group and individual support, **skill-by-skill**, to flexible clusters of students

The Questions Facing Each Team

1. How will we provide additional support for students who experience initial difficulty in a way that is timely, directive, and systematic?
2. How will we enrich and extend the learning for the students who already know it?
- 3. Who is available to assist our team in responding to our students?**

Resource Specialists and Floating Tutors

- Instruct “flexible groups” of identified students.
- Deliver intervention or enrichment services to **supplement** (not supplant) new, direct classroom instruction.
- **Lead and supervise enrichment activities, allowing classroom teachers to serve as tutors for students identified for intervention.**
- Provide practice and reinforcement in studying, test-taking, critical-thinking, and problem-solving skills.
- Develop lesson plans and activities aligned with essential skills to **coordinate with grade-level teams and guide their work.**

Extra Time and Support for Students

- Coordinate grade-level teachers, resource specialists, and floating tutors to take collective responsibility for student learning during I/E time.
- Organize parent volunteers, business partners, senior citizens, and high school and college interns to serve as mentors and tutors along with the school-based team.
- Design grade-level parent materials for at-home tutorials.
- Develop buddy programs and peer tutoring.
- Implement the Save One Student (SOS) program.
- Redefine focus of the child study (student support) team to plan additional interventions.

Impact on Results

	1999–2000 BMES (STATE)		2000–2001 BMES (STATE)		2007–2008 BMES (STATE)	
English–3	85	61	91	65	97	84
Math–3	87	71	97	77	100	89
Science–3	91	73	92	74	99	88
History–3	79	65	95	72	99	73
English–5	80	68	85	73	92	89
Math–5	82	63	82	67	100	88
Science–5	78	64	94	75	95	88
History–5	NA	NA	72	63	95	90

Advanced Proficient State Assessment Results

Advanced Proficient	2005–2006 BMES (STATE)		2006–2007 BMES (STATE)		2007–2008 BMES (STATE)	
	Grade 3–Eng.	56	39	61	37	62
Grade 3–Math	73	52	60	48	79	51
Grade 3–Sci.	59	40	67	39	77	39
Grade 3–Hist.	64	57	71	64	88	66
Grade 5–Eng.	45	42	40	36	54	42
Grade 5–Math	60	45	70	48	59	53
Grade 5–Sci.	22	23	15	25	22	24
Grade 5–Hist.	32	45	36	39	57	39

State Assessment Results: Grade 4

GRADE 4	2005–2006 BMES (STATE)		2006–2007 BMES (STATE)		2007–2008 BMES (STATE)	
English	94	86	97	87	97	88
Math	95	77	96	81	100	84
Adv. Prof. Eng.	56	42	48	47	65	47
Adv. Prof. Math	58	34	55	37	75	42

Boones Mill Elementary School

Awards and Recognition

- Governor's Award of Excellence: Every year since 2000
- No Child Left Behind (Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Award) 2004

Featured in:

- *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities* (Eaker, DuFour & DuFour, Solution Tree, 2002)
- *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, Solution Tree, 2004)
- *Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning* (Schmoker, ASCD, 2006)
- *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, Solution Tree, 2009)
- *Video Journal of Education* www.teachstream.com
 - "Leadership in the Age of Standards and High Stakes" (2001)
 - "Elementary Principals as Leaders of Learning" (2003)

For more information, go to www.allthingsplc.info and bmill.frco.k12.va.us

Highland Elementary School

Silver Spring, Maryland

Providing Students With the Best Education

- Pre-K–Grade-5 student population **700**
- Free or reduced lunch **73%**
- Special education **13%**
- Limited English **60%**

Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap at Highland Elementary School

- 2005–2006 Montgomery County PLC Project
- Created a guiding coalition to help articulate and monitor the impact of the improvement initiative
- Built a parallel block schedule to ensure:
 - Large blocks of protected learning time for students
 - Intervention and enrichment (I/E) time
 - Collaborative time for teams
- Organized a school support team to descend on each grade level during I/E to work with classroom teachers, providing intensive small-group and individual support, **skill-by-skill**, to flexible clusters of students
- Coordinated communication among classroom teachers and between teachers and support team

State Assessment Results

Highland Elementary School (Maryland)

NOTE: When compared to schools serving similar populations of ELL and high-poverty students, Highland ranked first in the state in both reading and mathematics.

	2004–2005 HES (STATE)		2005–2006 HES (STATE)		2007–2008 HES (STATE)	
GRADE 3						
Reading	47	76	78	78	95	83
Math	69	77	79	79	92	83
GRADE 4						
Reading	76	81	78	82	95	88
Math	74	77	81	82	95	89
GRADE 5						
Reading	56	74	76	77	93	87
Math	57	69	80	73	92	80

Advanced Proficient State Assessment Results

Advanced Proficient	2005–2006 HES/State		2007–2008 HES/State	
	Reading	Math	Reading	Math
Grade 3	3/15	8/25	31/17	24/27
Grade 4	9/23	19/32	44/28	55/42
Grade 5	16/34	9/19	80/51	20/25

Highland Elementary School

Silver Spring, Maryland

Providing Students With the Best Education

Awards and Recognition

- Excellence in Urban Education
- No Child Left Behind (Department of Education's Blue Ribbon Award)
- Featured in *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, Solution Tree, 2009)

For more information, go to

www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/highlandes

Highland Elementary School Stands Out for Two Reasons

“It ranks first among those schools (in Maryland suburbs) in the number of economically disadvantaged students who perform at advanced levels on statewide tests, a measure of its accomplishments. And it ranks second in percentage of students who have limited English proficiency, a measure of its challenges.”

—Daniel de Vise, *Washington Post* (2008, p. B05)

Lakeridge Junior High School

Orem, Utah

*Preparing students to be respectful, responsible,
and productive citizens for today and tomorrow*

● Grades 7–9 student population	1,214
● Free or reduced lunch	29%
● Special education	8%
● Limited English	15%

Utah ranks last among the 50 states in per pupil expenditure.

Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap at Lakeridge Junior High

- Moved from seven-period day to a modified A/B block schedule with FLEX time four days each week
 - Students enroll in four 80-minute periods.
 - 30 minutes carved out every Tuesday–Friday for FLEX time.
 - Failing students report to mandatory tutoring.
 - All others are provided with enrichment options or supervised free time.
- Students with continuing academic difficulty can also be assigned to a double period of language arts or math.
- Implemented “Intersession”

Impact on Results at Lakeridge

English	2002	2004	2007	2008
Overall %	55	81	87	88
Caucasian %	59	82	92	92
Hispanic %	31	49	65	72
ELL %	34	46	68	N/A
Low Income %	46	65	73	78
Special Needs %	37	29	49	N/A

Impact on Results at Lakeridge

Math	2002	2004	2007	2008
Overall %	55	71	82	84
Caucasian %	59	79	85	87
Hispanic %	31	50	58	68
ELL %	31	51	61	65
Low Income %	49	56	68	75
Special Needs %	26	33	45	45
Geometry %	55	69	95	94
Algebra %	51	77	76	80

Lakeridge Junior High School

Orem, Utah

*Preparing students to be respectful, responsible,
and productive citizens for today and tomorrow*

Awards and Recognition

- Best of State Utah 2008 and 2009: Best K–12 School
- Featured in *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, Solution Tree, 2009)

For more information, go to

www.allthingsplc.info and lakeridge.alpinedistrict.org

Lakeridge Junior High

Best of State 2008 and 2009

The state of Utah presents an annual Best of State award “to recognize outstanding individuals, organizations, and businesses and to share examples of success and triumph in worthy endeavors ... so that others might be inspired to reach a little higher, to try a little harder, and to work a little longer for our dreams and goals.”

—Best of State website (2008)

Whittier Union High School District

Whittier, California

Whatever It Takes, Staying the Course

● Student population	14,000
● Free or reduced lunch	72%
● Special education	12%
● Limited English	80%

Whittier Union High School District spends only 75% of the average per pupil expenditure in California.

Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap at Whittier High School

- 2,523 students; 60% poverty
- Mondays: six-period day, 48 minutes per period
- Tuesday–Friday: Modified block schedule
(three classes of 100 minutes for first five weeks)
 - Beginning sixth week, students passing all classes with Cs or better are released after 80 minutes for a break, longer lunch, or early dismissal.
 - Students not passing their classes remain for intensive tutoring and small-group work.

Extra Time and Support for Students at Whittier High School

Additional systems of time and support

- Freshman First Day
- Campus Watch
- Summer Bridge Program
- Freshman Advisory
- Guided Study
- Cycle of Success

—A-I-M (All Students, Intervene, Monitor)

Impact on Results at WHS

- Increased Annual Performance Index (API) in the past four years from 635 to 728 with all five comprehensive high schools gaining from 71 to 104 points
- Closed the achievement gap to no more than 10% between the highest and lowest groups
- Reduced dropout rate to 9% (compared to 28% in L.A. County and 24% in California)
- Maintained over 99% of students passing the California High School Exit Exam required for graduation in the past three years
- Increased percent of students completing requirements for admission to California State University system from 27–40% in the past three years
- Doubled the number of students qualifying for honors programs in ninth grade

Whittier Union High School District

Whittier, California

Whatever It Takes, Staying the Course

Awards and Recognition

- California Distinguished Schools (three times)
- California Distinguished CTE Award
- California Model Continuation High School
- AVID National Demonstration Site School
- Title 1 Academic Achievement Award, 2007
- *Newsweek's* Best High Schools List (since 2005)

Featured in

- *Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap: Whatever It Takes* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Karhanek, Solution Tree, 2009)
- "What's Working at Whittier," *Educational Leadership*, May 2008
- University of Southern California study of high-performing districts

For more information, go to allthingsplc.info
and www.wuhsd.k12.ca.us/whittieruhsd/site/default.asp

University of Southern California Studies WUHSD Success

WUHSD is one of the few districts in the state where *every* school was outperforming similar schools. Researchers attributed success to “the district’s unwavering ‘laser-like’ focus on implementing its ‘Whatever It Takes’ initiative and its tremendous leadership at all levels—from the Board and Superintendent to teachers” and for creating “a culture of success” that demonstrated “demographics do not determine destiny.”

—Kathy Frazier, USC research (2008)

Assess Your School's Response When Kids Don't Learn or Already Know It

- Are our students assured **extra time and support** for learning?
- Is our response **timely**? How quickly are we able to identify the kids who need extra time and support? Does our focus prompt intervention or enrichment rather than sluggish remediation?
- Is our response **directive** rather than invitational? Are kids **invited** to put in extra time or does our system **ensure** they put in extra time?
- Is our response **systematic**? Do kids receive this intervention or enrichment according to a schoolwide plan rather than at the discretion of individual teachers?

Final Cautions

- Don't fall in love with a tree—embrace the forest.
- No system of intervention can compensate for weak and ineffective teaching. **At the same time that a school is working to develop time and support for student learning, it must take steps to create the powerful collaborative teams and common assessments that contribute to adult learning.**

Learning by Doing

“**Capacity building** ... is not just workshops and professional development for all. It is the daily habit of *working together*, and you can't learn this from a workshop or course. You need to learn it by doing it and having mechanisms for getting better at it on purpose.”

—Michael Fullan (2005)

Questions

Where the experts speak to you

Professional Learning Communities at Work™ Summit



Rebecca DuFour



Richard DuFour



Robert Eaker



Thomas Guskey



Thomas Many



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Mike Mattos



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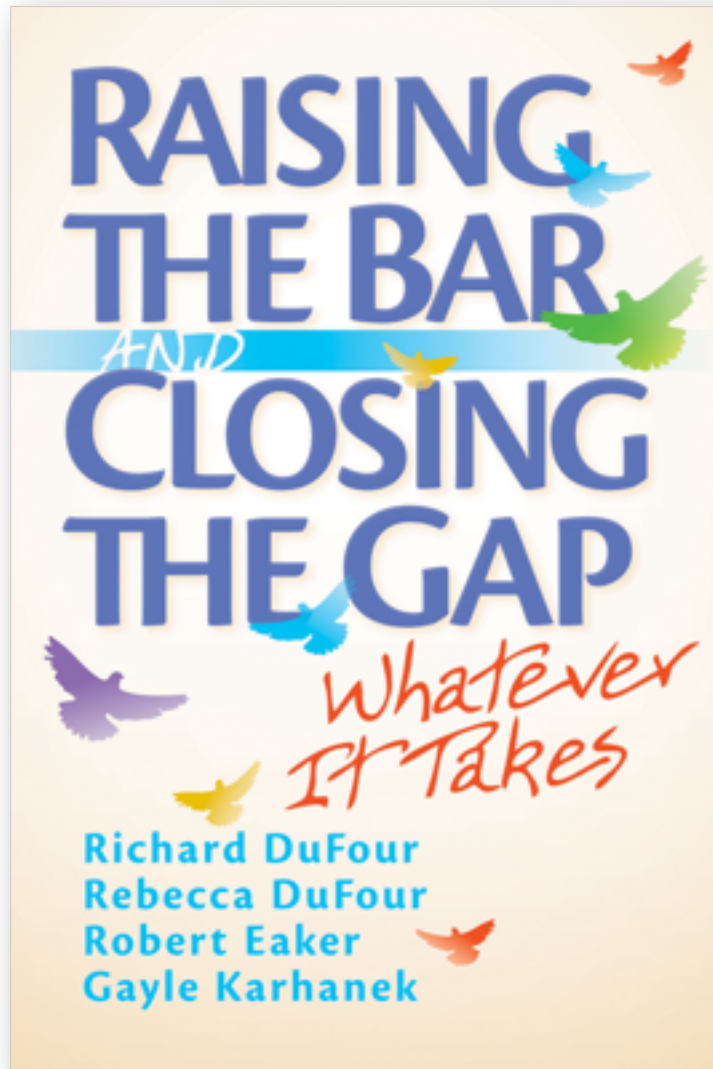
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Rick & Becky DuFour