

Components of Professional Learning Communities (Hord & Sommers, 2008)*

*The learning community in the South Dakota Incentives+ project is defined as the instructional staff within a school (the principal, the teachers and the paraprofessionals).

1) **Shared beliefs, values and vision: The focus is ALWAYS on students and learning.**

- All staff understand and commit to the mission (purpose) and goals of the school.
- Each person understands their role in achieving the school's purpose.
- They "see" what their school looks like at its best.
- They "see" how they will work productively together.

Specifics:

- Student work is displayed prominently in the school
- Descriptions and examples of high-quality achievement and learning are shared in the school newsletter, in the newspaper, on banners, bumper stickers, and on the school's external marquee or website.
- The common good of the school and its students is as important as individuals' personal ambitions.

2) **Shared and supportive Leadership: Administrators and faculty share power and authority for making decisions.**

- The principal shares power, authority and decision making and encourages teachers to demonstrate leadership.
- A culture of competition among individuals is replaced with a culture of collaboration.
- Administrators and teachers learn together.
 - They talk to one another about teaching and leading.
 - They share their craft knowledge.
 - They observe one another on the job.
 - They root for one another's success.
- Principals model collegiality with their teachers and with other principals.

3) **Collective learning and its application: The learning community determines what and how they will learn in order to address students' learning needs.**

- All administrators and teachers from all grade levels and subjects meet regularly to study together and work collaboratively.

- Learning happens through data analysis, conversation and problem solving.
- Learning is continuous and always focused on more effective teaching and learning: new instructional strategies, new curriculum, revising regulations and policies to better serve students, etc.
- Teachers incorporate new learning into lesson plans and activities.
- After implementation, teachers debrief together and revise strategies as needed.

4) Supportive conditions: Structural factors provide the physical requirements--time, place to meet for community work, resources and policies, etc. to support collaboration. Relational factors support the community's human and interpersonal development, openness, truth telling, and focusing on attitudes of respect and caring among the members.

- Frequent, regular meetings are scheduled with enough time set aside for substantive work.
- Schedules and structures reduce teacher isolation.
- Policies are in place to provide greater autonomy to teachers, to foster collaboration, to provide effective communication, and to provide resources for staff development.
- Staff engage in trust-building activities.
- Staff engage in social activities that allow them to get to know each other on a personal level.
- Principals create a caring environment (ie. sub for a teacher who must take an ailing parent to the doctor).

5) Shared personal practice: Community members give and receive feedback that supports their individual improvement and that of the organization.

- Teachers peer review each other's practice and instructional behaviors
 - Teachers visit each other's classrooms on a regular basis to observe, take notes, and discuss their observations with the teacher they have visited.
 - Teachers support the implementation of new practices through peer coaching and feedback.
- The principal creates culture of thinking and learning, collaborative problem solving and demonstrating leadership
- The principal models and builds warm, trusting relationships among staff.

- Teachers are comfortable sharing both their successes and their failures.
- Teachers praise and recognize one another's triumphs, and offer empathy and support for each other's troubles.