

Richard P. DuFour, Ed.D.

Author & Educational Consultant

Nominated by

Thomas W. Many

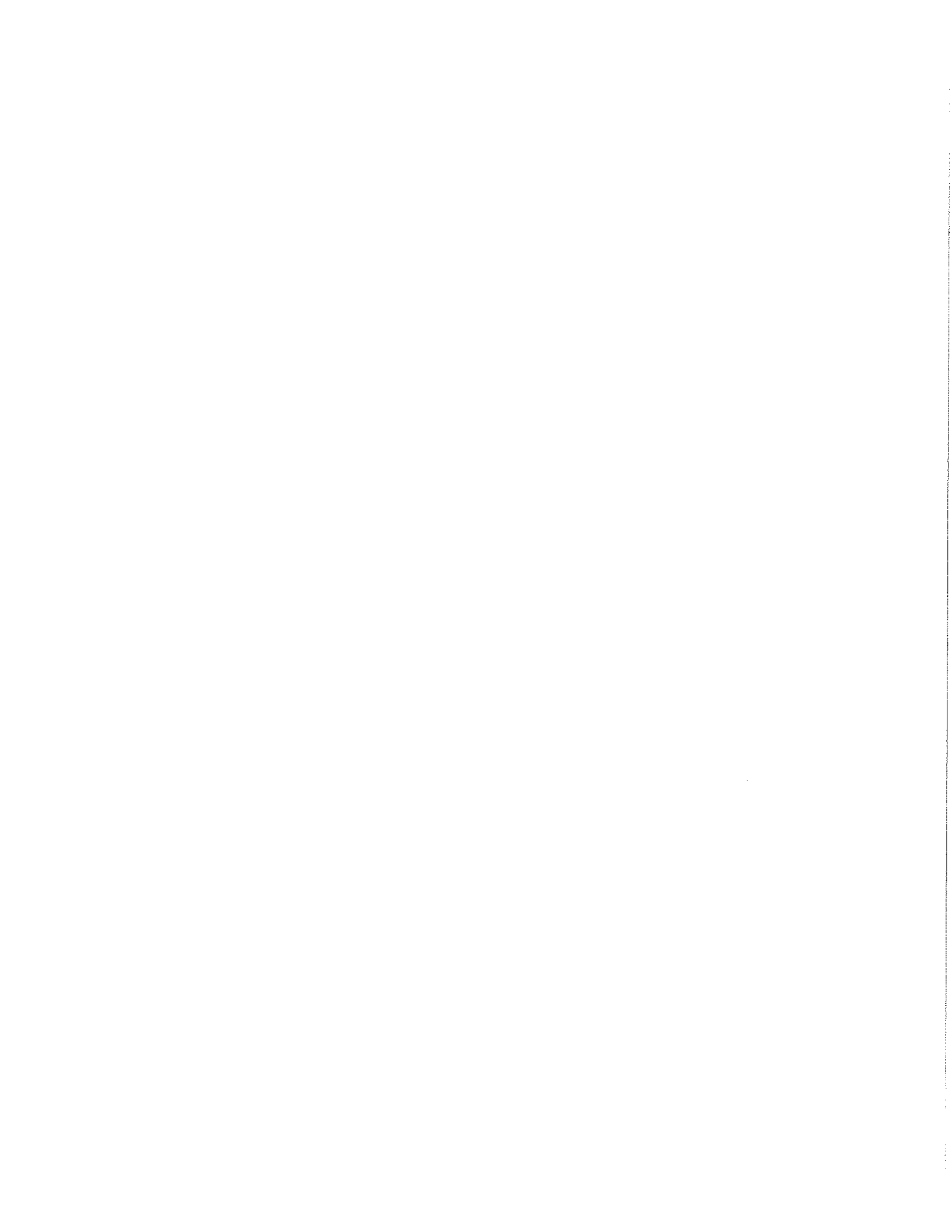
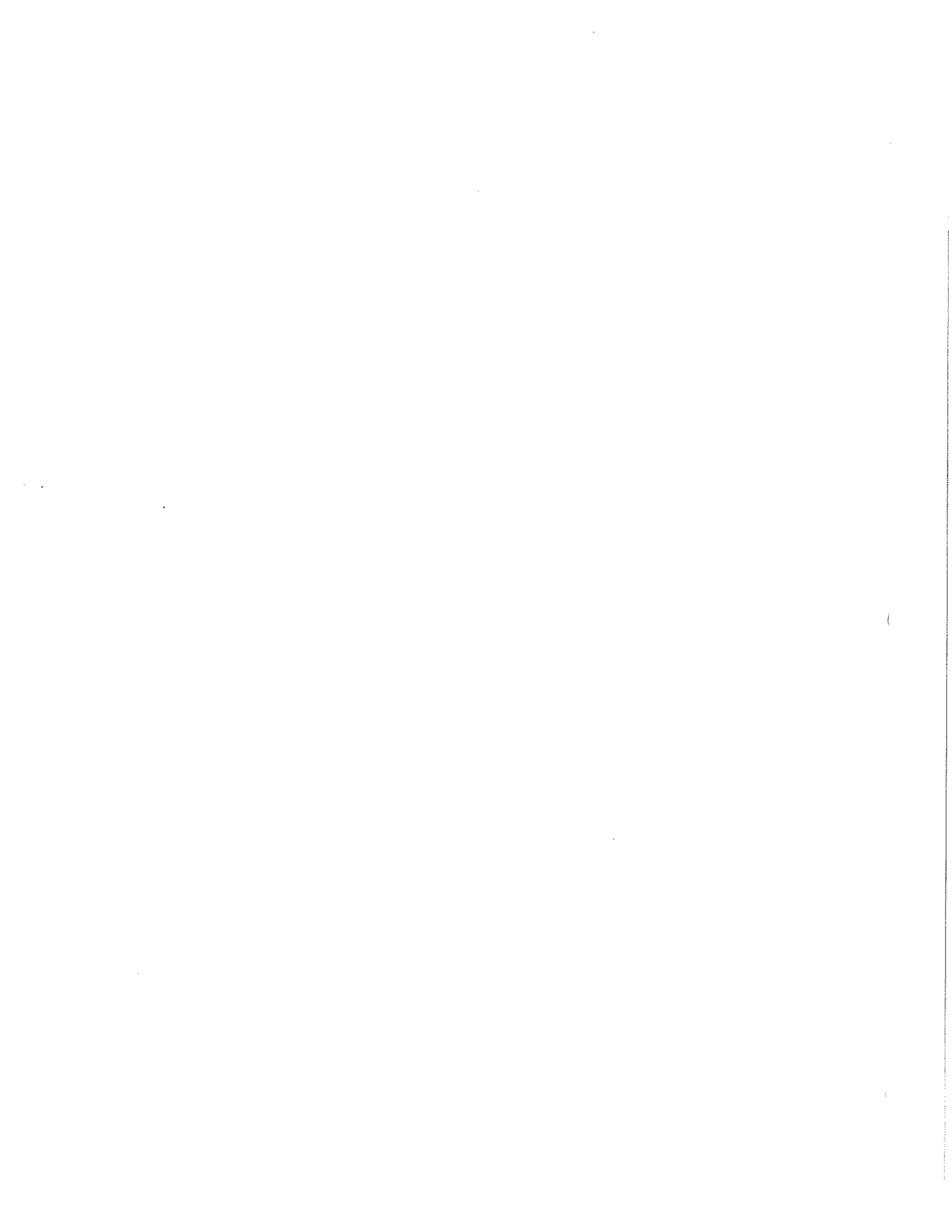


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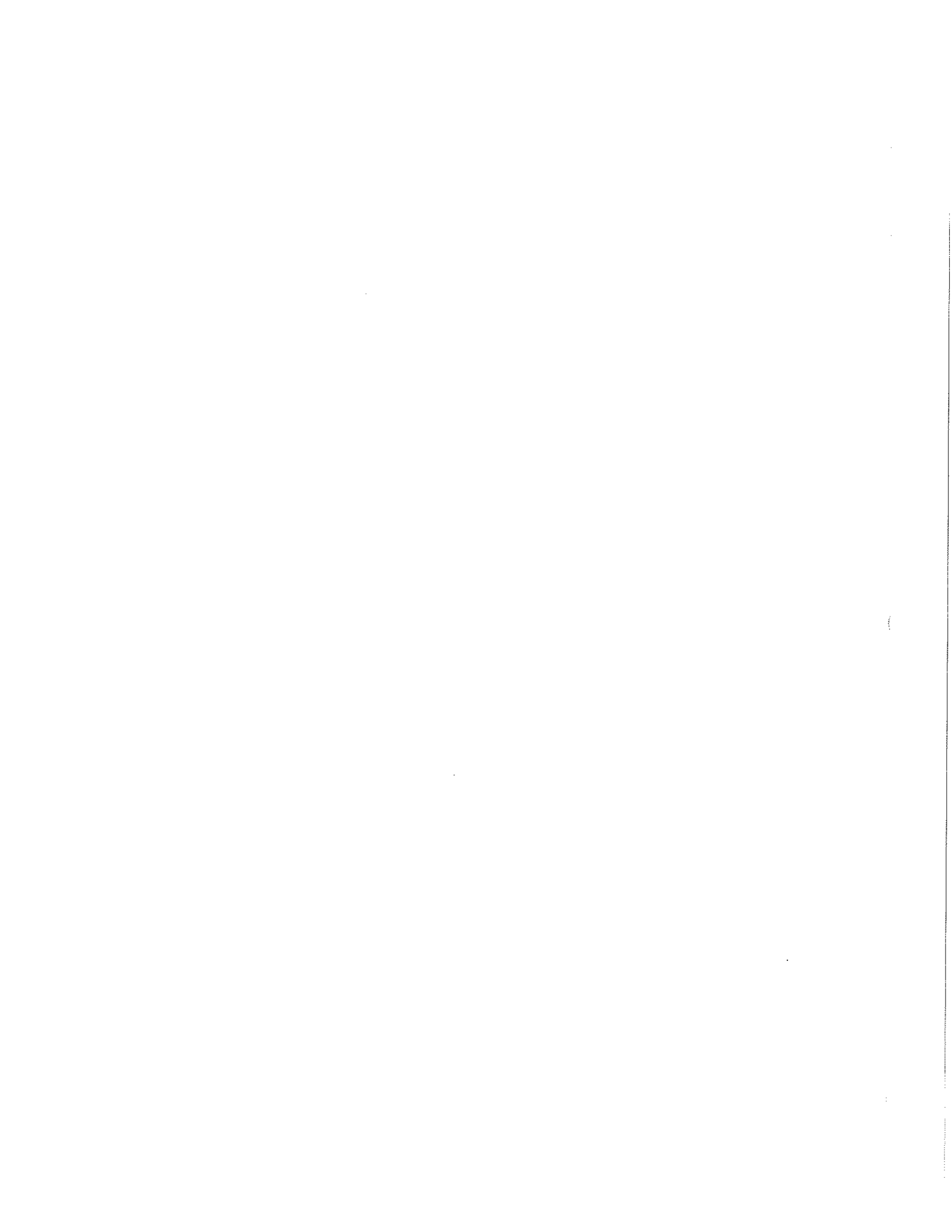
Richard DuFour, Ed.D. Bio

Richard DuFour, Ed.D., was a public school educator for 34 years, serving as a teacher, principal, and superintendent. He was principal of Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, from 1983 to 1991 and superintendent of the district from 1991 to 2002. During his tenure, Stevenson became what the United States Department of Education (USDE) has described as "the most recognized and celebrated school in America." It is one of only three schools in the nation to win the USDE Blue Ribbon Award on four occasions, and one of the first comprehensive schools the USDE designated as a New America High School, a model of successful school reform. Stevenson has been repeatedly cited in the popular press as one of America's best schools and referenced in professional literature as an exemplar of best practices in education.

Dr. DuFour's work in the development of the Professional Learning Community model has transformed education in the school organizations that have adopted the model or characteristics of the model. Shifting the focus and emphasis from teaching to student learning has had a profound impact on improving the educational systems that have incorporated Dr. DuFour's Professional Learning Community approach.

Dr. DuFour is the author of eight books and more than 50 professional articles. He wrote a quarterly column for the *Journal of Staff Development* for almost a decade. He was the lead consultant and author for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's seven-part video series on the principalship and is the author of two other videos: *How to Develop a Professional Learning Community: Passions and Persistence* (2002) and *Through New Eyes: Examining the Culture of Your School* (2003).

He has received his state's highest award as both a principal and superintendent. He was named one of the top 100 school administrators in North America by *Executive Educator* magazine, was presented the Distinguished Scholar Practitioner Award from the University of Illinois, and was the 2004 recipient of the National Staff Development Council's Distinguished Service Award. He consults with school districts, state departments of education, and professional organizations throughout North America on strategies for improving schools.



August 4, 2008

Trent E. Gabert, Ph.D.
Associate Dean
College of Liberal Studies
The University of Oklahoma
1610 Asp Avenue, Suite 108
Norman, Oklahoma 73072-6405

Dear Dr. Gabert:

I am honored to nominate Richard DuFour, Ed.D., for the 2009 Brock International Prize in Education. Dr. DuFour is an accomplished educator, author, and the primary architect of the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) initiative. That initiative, along with the concepts Rick has passionately promoted over the last two decades, has been instrumental in improving student learning across North America.

Dr. DuFour was a public school educator for thirty-four years, serving as a teacher, principal, and superintendent. He was principal of Adlai E. Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, from 1983 to 1991 and superintendent of the district from 1991 to 2002. During his tenure, Stevenson High School became what the United States Department of Education (USDE) described as "the most recognized and celebrated school in America." It was one of only a handful of schools in the nation to win the USDE Blue Ribbon Award of Excellence on four occasions and one of the first comprehensive schools the USDE designated as a "new American high school, a model of success for school reform." Stevenson High School has repeatedly been cited in the popular press as one of America's best schools and referenced in professional literature as an example of best practices in education.

There are many worthy nominees for this year's Brock International Prize in Education, but the criteria state the award is intended to recognize an individual who has made a "contribution to the science and art of education, resulting in a *significant impact* on the practice or understanding of the field of education." [Emphasis added] If we are true to the criteria of the Brock Award, then Rick DuFour must be the nominee for 2009.

Dr. DuFour is praised for the impact of his work by the brightest and most innovative thinkers of our times. (See Appendix E) John Saphier writes, "Strong professional learning communities produce schools that are engines of hope and achievement for students. . . ." Mike Schmoker adds that the successful implementation of PLCs "could represent the most dramatic shift in the history of educational practice...." And Michael Fullan makes a resounding statement when he writes, "breakthrough forces for educational change (PLCs) now seem to be in our midst." Fullan continues, "The work of DuFour and his colleagues is especially powerful. Having led the development of PLCs in both elementary and secondary schools, and now being associated with pockets of successful examples all across all levels, they essentially take all excuses off the table for policy makers and practitioners alike."

Indeed, DuFour's work has also been cited by some of the most recent recipients of the Brock Award. Doug Reeves, the 2007 Brock Award recipient, has acknowledged Rick's contribution to education in his letter of support (enclosed). Bob Marzano, the 2008 recipient of the Brock Award, stated that Rick's work in PLCs has ignited "one of the most substantial reform models in the last decade, if not the most substantial." DuFour is one of those exceptional people, Van Langston writes, "who created a theory of change and action, practiced it, and fine tuned it during a lifetime of service." It is clear that the impact of DuFour's passionate advocacy for PLCs has been recognized by some of the true champions of our times.

The criteria for the Brock Award also state that the award is presented to someone whose work "must have the potential to provide *long-term* benefit in the field of education." [Emphasis added] Long-term benefit can manifest itself as a new teaching technique, a new learning process, or new ways to organize a school or school system. The process of teaching and learning is incredibly complex. It has been said that making everyday things complicated is

commonplace, but making complicated things simple is genius. Dr. DuFour reflects this genius by clearly articulating those factors that schools and school districts can implement to impact and improve student achievement. As Langston said, DuFour's "effectiveness as a communicator has made it possible for hundreds of school districts to successfully implement his ideas."

Improvement of my own district, Kildeer Countryside CCSD 96, is an excellent example of the impact and influence of Dr. DuFour and his work. Prior to implementing the PLC model, District 96 was a good school district with 75 percent to 80 percent of students meeting or exceeding state standards. After implementing the PLC model, 96 percent of all students now meet or exceed state standards. It is significant that the number of students meeting state standards among special education and second language learners is nearly 80 percent. By organizing our schools around the important concepts of PLCs, students in District 96 schools have experienced ten years of steady and remarkable growth. This kind of lasting impact on schools across North America makes it clear that, by providing educators with a way to organize their schools around learning rather than teaching, Dr. DuFour assuredly meets the criteria for the Brock Award.

Perhaps the most important criterion to be considered is the extent to which the nominee's ideas are actually being implemented in schools. I would submit that Rick DuFour's impact on school practice far exceeds that of anyone in North America today. In just the last two years, Rick DuFour personally has provided intensive multi-day training in the PLC concept to over 100,000 educators representing schools from every state in the nation and every province of Canada, as well as foreign countries. The demand for training in his approach to PLCs continues to grow so significantly, he has created a cadre of over seventy (70) associates to provide more than 1,500 days of onsite professional development for schools across North America in the past year. I respectfully submit that the extent of his influence today surpasses that of any other current leader in education.

While Dr. DuFour has been recognized by state and national organizations for his impact on student achievement, it is the depth and breadth of his impact on education that are truly impressive. DuFour consults with small, medium, and large urban, suburban, and rural school districts and state departments of education. He is accessible to virtually anyone truly interested in improving student achievement; as you will see, letters of support (enclosed) come from educators representing elementary and secondary education and higher education as well as public and private education consultants working in the field of education. The letters reporting personal experience with positive outcomes are authored by educators from rural, suburban, and urban school districts in states across America and the provinces of Canada and represent every racial and ethnic demographic group, including student populations from high wealth to extreme poverty. The letters are substantial evidence of the profound impact of Dr. DuFour's work.

Throughout his long and distinguished career as an educator, author, and the primary architect of the Professional Learning Center (PLC) initiative, Rick DuFour has distinguished himself through his tireless efforts to promote high levels of learning for all students. He has worked passionately on behalf of students across North America and continues to have a significant effect on the practice and understanding of the field of education. Dr. Richard DuFour is making a profound and enduring impact on education and deserves to be the recipient of the 2009 Brock International Award in Education. As you read this nomination packet, I am confident you will agree.

Sincerely,



Thomas W. Many, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools

Richard P. DuFour, Ed.D.

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Professional Preparation

- Ed.D. Administration, Department of Leadership and Educational Policy Studies
Northern Illinois University, 1981
- C.A.S. Administration, Department of Leadership and Educational Policy Studies
Northern Illinois University, 1975
- M.A. History, Northern Illinois University, 1972
- B.S. History, Illinois State University, 1969

Professional Experience

- Author and Educational Consultant, 1985-present
- Superintendent
Adlai E. Stevenson High School District 125, Lincolnshire, Illinois,
1991 – 2002
- Assistant Superintendent/Principal
Adlai E. Stevenson High School, Lincolnshire, Illinois, 1983 - 1991
- Assistant Professor, Department of Educational Administration

Roosevelt University, 1989 - 1991
National College of Education, 1987 - 1989
Northern Illinois University, 1981 - 1984

Taught graduate courses in school finance, the principalship, curriculum planning and staff development, organizational theory, and critical issues in American education.

Appendix A

Testimonials in Recognition of Richard DuFour's Leadership in Bringing PLC Concepts to Life

Perhaps no one has studied the problem of school reform more carefully in the past quarter century than Michael Fullan. In *The New Meaning of Educational Change*, fourth edition (2007), he states, "I believe we are closer than ever to knowing what must be done to engage all classrooms and schools in continuous reform" and "breakthrough forces for educational change now seem in our midst." Fullan attributes his optimism, in part, to the fact that "PLCs are becoming more prominent and more sharply defined." As he writes, "Fortunately the press for PLCs and the resources to aid and abet them are becoming increasingly explicit. The work by DuFour and his colleagues is especially powerful. Having led the development of PLCs in both elementary and secondary schools, and now being associated with pockets of successful examples across all levels, they essentially 'take all excuses off the table' for policymakers and practitioners alike."

In the November 2006 issue of the *School Administrator*, Fullan writes, "The gold standard for fostering the development of PLCs comes from the activist work of Rick DuFour and his colleagues."

In 2004 the National Staff Development Council presented its Distinguished Service award to Dr. Richard DuFour for his contribution to quality professional development in North America.

In 2002 the University of Illinois presented Dr. Richard DuFour with its scholar-practitioner award for his "outstanding contributions to and leadership in the field of education."

In 2000 the Illinois State Board of Education presented Dr. Richard DuFour with its first "Break the Mold Award" for his successful implementation of innovative school improvement strategies.

In 1989 Illinois State University presented Dr. Richard DuFour with its Distinguished Alumnus Award.

"In an educational world swamped with slogans, brand names, and passing fads, it is a rare pleasure to see the impact of a powerful idea, such as professional learning communities. While many scholars contributed to the creative vision behind the concept of professional learning communities, the work that has best transformed that vision into action is the work of Rick DuFour and his colleagues. With a mountain of evidence and a wealth of experience, Rick is transforming PLCs from the ambiguous concept practiced in many schools into a practical reality. I know the words, 'you changed my life' are meaningful and a welcome antidote to the inevitable criticism that comes with public life. But as I reflect on Rick DuFour's work, I realize there is a better accolade in the field of education – 'you changed my system'."

Doug Reeves, Chairman, Center for Performance Assessment

"For the last decade, Rick DuFour and his colleagues have been developing a body of work that can and is transforming schools across the country. Like other greats who influence a generation, his books form a logical chain, each section adding to the integrity of the whole."

Jonathan Saphier, President of Research for Better Teaching

"Rick DuFour and his colleagues continue to push us to new levels of understanding of how professional learning communities work. They then invite us to join them in developing unique frameworks that can be used in our own schools to create cultures of time, feeling, focus and persistence aimed at ensuring that every child will succeed."

Thomas Sergiovanni, Lillian Radford Professor of Education, Trinity University

For additional testimonials regarding the impact that Dr. DuFour is having on education across North America, read the words of the superintendents, principals and teachers who have described his impact on their schools and districts. Those letters are included as an addendum to your packet of materials.

Appendix B

FINDING COMMON GROUND IN EDUCATION REFORM Professional Learning Community Advocates— A Presentation of the Research

What would it take to persuade educators that successfully implementing professional learning community practices is the most promising path for sustained and substantive improvement of our schools and districts? The research is clear: Many esteemed experts and respected professional organizations in education endorse and advocate the development of PLCs. For those who find research persuasive, we submit the following information.

Expert Endorsements of Professional Learning Communities

“The most successful corporation of the future will be a learning organization.” (Senge, 1990, p. 4)

“Every enterprise has to become a learning institution [and] a teaching institution. Organizations that build in continuous learning in jobs will dominate the twenty-first century.” (Drucker, 1992, p. 108)

“Preferred organizations will be learning organizations. . . . It has been said that people who stop learning stop living. This is also true of organizations.” (Handy, 1995, p. 55)

“Only the organizations that have a passion for learning will have an enduring influence.” (Covey, Merrill, & Merrill, 1996, p. 149)

“The new problem of change . . . is what would it take to make the educational system a learning organization—expert at dealing with change as a normal part of its work, not just in relation to the latest policy, but as a way of life.” (Fullan, 1993, p. 4)

“We have come to realize over the years that the development of a learning community of educators is itself a major cultural change that will spawn many others.” (Joyce & Showers, 1995, p. 3)

“If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff.” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 37)

"[We recommend that] schools be restructured to become genuine learning organizations for both students and teachers; organizations that respect learning, honor teaching, and teach for understanding." (Darling-Hammond, 1996, p. 198)

"We argue, however, that when schools attempt significant reform, efforts to form a schoolwide professional community are critical." (Louis, Kruse, & Raywid, 1996, p. 13)

Louis and Marks (1998) found that when a school is organized into a professional community, the following occurs:

1. Teachers set higher expectations for student achievement.
2. Students can count on the help of their teachers and peers in achieving ambitious learning goals.
3. The quality of classroom pedagogy is considerably higher.
4. Achievement levels are significantly higher.

"We support and encourage the use of professional learning communities (PLCs) as a central element for effective professional development and a comprehensive reform initiative. In our experience, PLCs have the potential to enhance the professional culture within a school district." (Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p. 3)

"The framework of a professional learning community is inextricably linked to the effective integration of standards, assessment, and accountability . . . the leaders of professional learning communities balance the desire for professional autonomy with the fundamental principles and values that drive collaboration and mutual accountability." (Reeves, 2005, pp. 47–48)

"Well-implemented professional learning communities are a powerful means of seamlessly blending teaching and professional learning in ways that produce complex, intelligent behavior in all teachers." (Sparks, 2005, p. 156)

"Strong professional learning communities produce schools that are engines of hope and achievement for students. . . . There is nothing more important for education in the decades ahead than educating and supporting leaders in the commitments, understandings, and skills necessary to grow such schools where a focus on effort-based ability is the norm." (Saphier, 2005, p. 111)

“[In the most successful schools] leadership ensures there are integrated communities of professional practice in the service of student academic and social learning. There is a healthy school environment in which student learning is the central focus. . . . Research has demonstrated that schools organized as communities, rather than bureaucracies, are more likely to exhibit academic success.” (Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007)

“Outcomes for both staff and students have been improved by organizing professional learning communities. For staff, the results include:

- Reduction of isolation of teachers
- Increased commitment to the mission and
- Goals of the school and increased vigor in working to strengthen the mission
- Shared responsibility for the total development of students and collective responsibility for students’ success
- Powerful learning that defines good teaching and classroom practice, that creates new knowledge and beliefs about teaching and learners
- Increased meaning and understanding of the content that teachers teach and the roles that they play in helping all students achieve expectations
- Higher likelihood that teachers will be well-informed, professionally renewed, and inspired to inspire students
- More satisfaction and higher morale, and lower rates of absenteeism
- Significant advances into making teaching adaptations for students, and changes for learners made more quickly than in traditional schools
- Commitment to making significant and lasting changes
- Higher likelihood of undertaking fundamental, systemic change

For students, the results include:

- Decreased dropout rate and fewer classes ‘cut’
- Lower rates of absenteeism
- Increased learning that is distributed more equitably in the smaller high schools
- Larger academic gains in math, science, history, and reading than in traditional schools
- Smaller achievement gaps between students from different backgrounds” (Hord, 1997)

“A school-based professional community can offer support and motivation to teachers as they work to overcome the tight resources, isolation, time constraints and other obstacles they commonly encounter. . . . In schools where professional community is strong, teachers work together more effectively, and put more effort into creating and sustaining opportunities for student learning.” (Kruse, Seashore Louis, & Bryk, 1994, p. 4)

“Such a tipping point—from reform to true collaboration—could represent the most dramatic shift in the history of educational practice. . . . We will know we have succeeded when the absence of a ‘strong professional learning community’ in a school is an embarrassment.” (Schmoker, 2004, p. 431)

Organizations That Endorse Professional Learning Communities

The fundamental premise of the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future (NCTAF) is that school reform cannot succeed without creating conditions in which teachers teach well. The Commission has identified the creation of “Strong Learning Communities” as one of its three core strategies for improving both teaching and schools:

“Quality teaching requires strong, professional learning communities. Collegial interchange, not isolation, must become the norm for teachers. Communities of learning can no longer be considered utopian; they must become the building blocks that establish a new foundation for America’s schools.” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003, p. 17)

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS) was formed to advance the quality of teaching and learning by developing professional standards for accomplished teaching. Its position statement includes the following:

“Five Core Propositions form the foundation and frame the rich amalgam of knowledge, skills, dispositions and beliefs that characterize National Board Certified Teachers (NBCTs). The fifth proposition calls upon teachers to be members of learning communities . . . to collaborate with others to improve student learning . . . to work with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development.” (National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, 2007a)

The Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC) was created by the Council of Chief State School Officers to develop a common core of teaching knowledge that would clarify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions all teachers should demonstrate to be considered “professional.” The standards included the following statements:

“Professional teachers assume roles that extend beyond the classroom and include responsibilities for developing the school as a learning organization. . . . Professional teachers are

responsible for planning and pursuing their ongoing learning, for reflecting with colleagues on their practice, and for contributing to the profession's knowledge base." (Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, 1992, p. 13)

The National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) called upon math leaders to do the following:

1. "Ensure teachers work interdependently as a professional learning community to guarantee continuous improvement and gains in student achievement."
2. "Create the support and structures necessary to implement a professional learning community."
3. "Ensure a systemic implementation of a professional learning community throughout all aspects of the mathematics curriculum, instruction and assessment at the school, district, or regional level." (National Council of Teachers of Mathematics, in press)

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) has created the Professional Learning Communities at Work Series—a topical resource kit to help teachers work as PLCs as they focus on key issues such as adolescent literacy, secondary writing, and teaching English language learners. An NCTE position paper argued that PLCs make teaching more rewarding and combat the problem of educators leaving the profession:

"Effective professional development fosters collegial relationships, creating professional communities where teachers share knowledge and treat each other with respect. Within such communities teacher inquiry and reflection can flourish, and research shows that teachers who engage in collaborative professional development feel confident and well prepared to meet the demands of teaching." (National Council of Teachers of English, 2006, p. 10)

The National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) issued a position paper (2006) in which it asserted that a key component of high-quality staff development would "facilitate the development of professional learning communities."

The Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL), particularly its professor emerita Shirley Hord, has been engaged in the ongoing exploration of the potential of PLCs. As SEDL reported in one of its publications on the topic:

"Professional learning communities offer an infrastructure to create the supportive cultures and conditions necessary for achieving significant gains in teaching and learning. Professional learning communities provide opportunities for professional staff to look deeply into the teaching and learning process and

to learn how to become more effective in their work with students.” (Morrissey, 2000)

The National Education Association (NEA), America’s largest teaching organization with over 2.7 million members, is committed to making teaching more rewarding and satisfying. In pursuit of its long-term vision of “a great public school for every student,” the NEA has created its own recommended school improvement model: The Keys to Excellence. The model is intended to help educators with school improvement plans and to help them meet the challenges of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Although the model never uses the term professional learning community, its six keys to a quality school are consistent with PLC principles. The NEA keys and examples of some of the specific indicators the organization has identified for each follow:

1. Shared understanding and commitment to high goals
 - “The staff has a collective commitment to and takes responsibility for implementing high standards for all students.”
 - “The school operates under the assumption that all students can learn.”
2. Open communication and collaborative problem solving
 - “Teachers and staff collaborate to remove barriers to student learning.”
 - “Teachers communicate regularly with each other about effective teaching and learning strategies.”
3. Continuous assessment for teaching and learning
 - “Student assessment is used for decision making to improve learning.”
 - “A variety of assessment techniques are used.”
4. Personal and professional learning
 - “Teachers have regularly scheduled time to learn from one another.”
 - “Professional development has a direct, positive effect on teaching.”
5. Resources to support teaching and learning
 - “Computer hardware and software supplies are adequate for students and teachers.”
 - “Support services are adequate.”
6. Curriculum and instruction
 - “Instruction includes interventions for students who are not succeeding.”
 - “Teachers are open to new learnings and rethink their approaches to teaching and assessment practices based on teacher-directed action research and other classroom based inquiries.” (National Education Association, 2003)

The president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), an organization representing 1.4 million members, called for those interested in improving schools to “make schools learning communities for teachers as well as students. Provide for master teachers, teacher centers, real professional development in the schools—with time for teachers to work with one another to overcome children’s learning problems as they come up” (Feldman, 1998).

The National Middle School Association (NMSA) issued a position paper titled *This We Believe*, outlining its recommended strategies for improving schools. NMSA called for the following:

“Building a learning community that involves all teachers and places top priority on the education and healthy development of every student, teacher, and staff member . . . professional development should be integrated into the daily life of the school and directly linked to the school’s goals for student and teacher success and growth. To meet these goals, people work together in study groups, focus on learning results, analyze student work, and carry out action research.” (2003, p. 11)

Principals have also been urged by their professional organizations to focus their efforts on developing their schools as professional learning communities.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) (2001) has clarified the essential responsibilities of principals in its publication *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do* in which it states:

“If adults don’t learn then students won’t learn either. . . . The school operates as a learning community that uses its own experience and knowledge, and that of others, to improve the performance of students and teachers alike. . . . They must be a place where learning isn’t isolated, where adults demonstrate they care about kids but also about each other. In such places, learning takes place in groups. A culture of shared responsibility is established, and everybody learns from one another.” (p. 5)

The National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP) calls upon high schools to engage in an improvement process that will ensure success for every high school student. In *Breaking Ranks II* (2004), the NASSP urges principals to focus on the development of a professional learning community within each school as a primary improvement strategy. In *Breaking Ranks in the Middle* (2006), the NASSP organizes 30 recommendations for improving middle schools into three general areas, the first of which calls for “collaborative leadership and professional learning communities” (p. 23). Pages 1–8 reprinted with permission from pages 67–78 of *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

In citing its recommendations for effective professional development, the National Staff Development Council (2007) contends, "Effective staff development that improves the learning of all students organizes adults into learning communities whose goals are aligned with those of the school and district."

The North Central Association Commission on Accreditation and School Improvement (NCA) is responsible for the accreditation of more than 8,500 schools in 19 states. Concluding that its process works "hand in hand" with the PLC concept, the NCA reported:

"Working at complementary levels—the school and classroom—the NCA school improvement and PLC processes reinforce and strengthen one another. They are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually supportive. If we want to ensure that no child is left behind, we must understand the important relationship between the NCA school improvement process and PLC. . . . The use of PLC at the classroom level has dramatically increased teachers' ability to implement a guaranteed and viable curriculum, monitor student progress with colleagues on school improvement goals and curriculum objectives, and improve the teaching and learning process. The strong link between school improvement goals and PLC at the classroom level allows all children to be successful." (Colliton, 2005, pp. 1–2)

Studies That Support Professional Learning Communities

The Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools conducted a 5-year study that included analysis of data from more than 1,500 elementary, middle, and high schools throughout the United States. The Center also conducted field research in 44 schools in 16 states. Schools that were successful in linking their improvement initiatives with improved student learning were characterized by the following traits (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995):

1. A focus on an agreed-upon vision of what students should learn
2. Teaching that requires students to think, to develop in-depth understanding, and to apply academic learning to important, realistic problems
3. Schools that function as professional learning communities in which teachers . . .
 - Are guided by a clear shared purpose for student learning
 - Feel a sense of collective responsibility for student learning
 - Collaborate with one another to promote student learning
 - Enjoy increased autonomy at the school site

Another analysis of the data collected by the Center on Organization and Restructuring of Schools agreed that development of professional learning communities was critical to
Pages 1–8 reprinted with permission from pages 67–78 of *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

improving schools and elaborated on the conditions leading to successful PLCs. Kruse, Seashore Louis, and Bryck (1994) argue that in a PLC, teachers are committed to the following:

1. Reflective dialogue based on a shared set of norms, beliefs, and values that allow them to critique their individual and collective performance
2. De-privatization of practice that requires teachers to share, observe, and discuss each other's methods and philosophies
3. Collective focus on student learning fueled by the belief that all students can learn and that staff members have a mutual obligation to see to it that students learn
4. Collaboration that moves beyond dialogue about students to producing materials that improve instruction, curriculum, and assessment for students
5. Shared norms and values that affirm common ground on critical educational issues and a collective focus on student learning

The study also reported that these five factors are supported by structural conditions such as time to meet during the school day, teachers organized into collaborative teams that work together interdependently to achieve common goals, open communication within and across teams, and teacher autonomy guided by a shared sense of purpose, priorities, and norms. Social resources that support the PLCs include commitment to continuous improvement, high levels of trust and respect, sharing of effective teaching practices, supportive leadership, and focused orientation for those new to the school.

WestEd, a research and development agency focusing on how to improve schools, explored the question, "What does it take to translate teacher professional development into impressive learning gains for students?" The agency's report concluded, "Our key finding—the central importance of a professional community to adult and student learning—will be no surprise to those familiar with other educational research." (WestEd, 2000, p. 11)

Research That Supports the Three Big Ideas of a Professional Learning Community

Another approach to presenting the research in support of PLCs is to break the concept down into the three big ideas explained in *Learning by Doing* (2006)—a focus on learning, a culture of collaboration, and a focus on results—and share the research or each idea. For example, the following research highlights the importance of a collaborative culture:

"The single most important factor for successful school restructuring and the first order of business for those interested in increasing the capacity of their schools is building a

Pages 1–8 reprinted with permission from pages 67–78 of *Revisiting Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2008). Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.

collaborative internal environment that fosters cooperative problem-solving and conflict resolution.” (Eastwood & Seashore Louis, 1992, p. 215)

“The ability to collaborate—on both a small and large scale—is becoming one of the core requisites of postmodern society. . . . In short, without collaborative skills and relationships it is not possible to learn and to continue to learn as much as you need in order to be an agent for social improvement.” (Fullan, 1993, pp. 17–18)

“An interdependent work structure strengthens professional community. When teachers work in groups that require coordination, this, by definition, requires collaboration. When groups, rather than individuals, are seen as the main units for implementing curriculum, instruction, and assessment, they facilitate development of shared purpose for student learning and collective responsibility to achieve it.” (Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, pp. 37–38)

“The key to ensuring that every child has a quality teacher is finding a way for school systems to organize the work of qualified teachers so they can collaborate with their colleagues in developing strong learning communities that will sustain them as they become more accomplished teachers.” (National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future, 2003, p. 7)

“Collaboration and the ability to engage in collaborative action are becoming increasingly important to the survival of the public schools. Indeed, without the ability to collaborate with others the prospect of truly repositioning schools in the constellation of community forces is not likely.” (Schlechty, 2005, p. 22)

“A precondition for doing *anything* to strengthen our practice and improve a school is the existence of a collegial culture in which professionals talk about practice, share their craft knowledge, and observe and root for the success of one another. Without these in place, no meaningful improvement—no staff or curriculum development, no teacher leadership, no student appraisal, no team teaching, no parent involvement, and no sustained change—is possible.” (Barth, 2006, p. 13)

Professional organizations for educators have also endorsed the premise that educators should work together collaboratively. Consider the conclusions of the following organizations:

“Some of the most important forms of professional learning and problem solving occur in group settings within schools and school districts. Organized groups provide the social interaction that often deepens learning and the interpersonal support and synergy necessary for creatively solving the complex problems of teaching and learning. And because many of the recommendations contained in these standards advocate for increased teamwork among teachers and administrators in designing lessons, critiquing student work, and analyzing various types of data, among other tasks, it is imperative that professional learning be directed at improving the quality of collaborative work.” (National Staff Development Council, 2007)

“High performing schools tend to promote collaborative cultures, support professional communities and exchanges among all staff and cultivate strong ties among the school, parents, and community. . . . Teachers and staff collaborate to remove barriers to student learning. . . . Teachers communicate regularly with each other about effective teaching and learning strategies.” (National Education Association, 2006)

“It is time to end the practice of solo teaching in isolated classrooms. Teacher induction and professional development in 21st century schools must move beyond honing one’s craft and personal repertoire of skills. Today’s teachers must transform their personal knowledge into a collectively built, widely shared, and cohesive professional knowledge base.” (Fulton, Yoon, & Lee [for the National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future], 2005, p. 4)

“[Accomplished teachers] collaborate with others to improve student learning. . . . They work with other professionals on instructional policy, curriculum development and staff development.” (National Board of Professional Teaching Standards, 2007a)

“Successful middle level teacher preparation programs place a high premium on teaching prospective and practicing middle level teachers about the importance of collaboration with colleagues and other stakeholders. One of the unique characteristics of

middle level schools for teachers is the heavy emphasis on collaboration. . . . Teachers are not operating in isolation. This permits insights and understandings about young adolescent students to be shared with others and therefore maximized.” (National Middle School Association, 2006)

“Isolation is the enemy of learning. Principals who support the learning of adults in their school organize teachers’ schedules to provide opportunities for teachers to work, plan, and think together. For instance, teams of teachers who share responsibility for the learning of all students meet regularly to plan lessons, critique student work and the assignments that led to it, and solve common instructional or classroom management problems.” (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2001, p. 45)

“A high school will regard itself as a *community* in which members of the staff collaborate to develop and implement the school’s learning goals. Teachers will provide the leadership essential to the success of reform, collaborating with others in the educational community to redefine the role of the teacher and to identify sources of support for that redefined role.” (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004, p. 4)

The third big idea in a PLC, a focus on results, has been endorsed by many experts. Evidenced-based decision-making is key to producing a results-orientation in education. Consider the following statements:

“An astonishing number of educational leaders make critical decisions about curriculum, instruction, assessment, and placement on the basis of information that is inadequate, misunderstood, misrepresented, or simply absent. Even when information is abundant and clear, I have witnessed leaders who are sincere and decent people stare directly at the information available to them, and then blithely ignore it. . . . Strategic leaders are worthy of the name because of their consistent linking of evidence to decision making. They respond to challenges not by scoring rhetorical points but by consistently elevating evidence over assertion.” (Reeves, 2006, p. 95)

“School systems must create a culture that places value on managing by results, rather than on managing by programs.” (Schlechty, 1997, p. 110)

“It is essential that leaders work to establish a culture where results are carefully assessed and actions are taken based on these assessments.” (Schlechty, 2005, p. 11)

“Concentrating on results does not negate the importance of process. On the contrary, the two are interdependent: Results tell us which processes are most effective and to what extent and whether processes need reexamining and adjusting. Processes exist for results and results should inform processes.” (Schmoker, 1996, p. 4)

“What does it take to close the achievement gaps? Our findings suggest that it comes down to how schools use data. Teachers in gap-closing schools more frequently use data to understand the skill gaps of low-achieving students. . . . When data points to a weakness in students’ academic skills, gap-closing schools are more likely to focus in on that area, making tough choices to ensure that students are immersed in what they most need.” (Symonds, 2004, p. 13)

In fact, evidence-based decisions are so important to establishing a results orientation in any organization that many experts outside education have advocated for using data:

“The ultimate measure of a great team is results. Effective teams avoid ambiguity and interpretation when it comes to results. They decide what they want to achieve, then they clarify how they will measure their progress. They select one or two indicators they can collectively focus upon and around which they can rally. They create a scoreboard that helps keep them focused on results. These teams use the scoreboard to monitor their progress against the expected achievement.” (Lencioni, 2005, p. 69)

“Companies operate under the false assumption that if they carry out enough of the ‘right’ improvement activities, actual performance improvements will inevitably materialize. At the heart of this assumption, which we call ‘activity centered,’ is a fundamentally flawed logic that confuses ends with means, processes with outcomes. Payoffs from the infusion of activities will be meager at best. And there is in fact an alternative: results-driven improvement processes that focus on achieving specific, measurable operational improvements within a few months.” (Schaffer & Thomson, 1998, p. 191)

“We found there was something distinctive about the decision-making process of the great companies we studied. First, they embraced the current reality, no matter how bad the message. Second, they developed a simple yet deeply insightful frame of reference for all decisions. . . . You absolutely cannot make a series of good decisions without first confronting the brutal facts.” (Collins, 2001, p. 69)

“Unless you can subject your decision-making to a ruthless and continuous *JUDGMENT BY RESULTS*, all your zigs and zags will only be random lunges in the dark, sooner or later bound to land you on the rocks.” (Champy, 1995, p. 120)

“Ducking the facts about performance for fear of being judged, criticized, humiliated, and punished characterizes losing streaks, not winning streaks. In a losing streak, facts are used for blame, not improvement; they are turned into weapons to persecute, not tools to find solutions. . . . In winning streaks, players get and use abundant feedback about their performance. Leaders can . . . ensure that measurements ultimately empower rather than punish people.” (Kanter, 2004, p. 208)

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Appendix C

National Initiatives, Institute, Summits and Academies

Rick DuFour has worked with individual schools and districts to support local improvement initiatives in each of the 50 states and every province of Canada. Listed below are examples of his leadership and support of regional and state Improvement Initiatives from 2002 through 2009.

- Alabama Hosted 3-day regional institute on PLCs.
- PLC model adopted by the Alabama Best Practices Center to promote school improvement throughout the state.
- Arizona Hosted four four-day national summits on PLCs.
- Arkansas Presented three two-day programs for the Arkansas Association of Educational Administrators.
- Presented two-day program for the Arkansas State Department of Education.
- California Conducted statewide simulcast presentation on PLCs to launch California State Department's high school improvement initiative.
- The California State Department of Education has adopted the PLC model for implementing its Response to Intervention program.
- Hosted three-day regional institutes on PLCs in San Diego, Los Angeles, San Francisco, Riverside, and Anaheim.
- Provided keynotes and breakouts at three state conferences hosted by the Association of California School Administrators.
- Provided keynote and breakouts on PLCs for conference hosted by WestEd/California Academic Progress Partnership.
- Presented keynote and breakouts for conference hosted by the CalSTAT State Leadership Institute.
- Presented two-day workshop for the Partnerships in Educational Achievement.
- Presented keynote and breakout for two conferences hosted by the California League of Middle Schools.
- Presented keynote and breakout for two conferences hosted by the California League of High Schools.
- Presented keynote and breakout at the Asilomar Conference hosted by the California Department of Education.
- Conducted two-year video conferencing program on PLCs for area superintendents hosted by Cal State Fresno.

Conducted multiple two-day presentations and ongoing videoconferencing to support school improvement initiatives for Regional Offices of Education for Marin County, Riverside County, Orange County, Los Angeles County, Ventura County, and Sacramento County.

Presented Keynote for the University of San Diego School Leadership Program.

Hosted four-day national summit on PLCs (2008).

Colorado

Conducted annual training program in PLCs for the University of Denver/Front Range BOCES partnership which has made the PLC concept its core strategy for school improvement.

Presented keynote and breakouts for the Colorado Council of the International Reading Association.

Hosted two three-day regional institutes on PLCs in Denver and one in Colorado Springs.

Conducted a series of two-day programs on PLCs in different locations throughout the state for the Colorado State Department of Education

Connecticut

Presented three two-day programs on PLCs for the Connecticut Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Presented keynote and breakout for Capitol Region Education Council.

Presented two-day workshop hosted by Education Connection.

Delaware

Conducted two two-day workshops on PLCs for state department of education.

Florida

Hosted a four-day state summit on PLCs.

Presented keynote and breakouts for the Florida Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Presented keynote and breakouts for the Florida Staff Development Council.

Presented keynote and breakout for the regional Title I conference.

Hosted three three-day regional institutes on PLCs.

Presented two-day program on leading PLCs for the University of Central Florida Leadership Institute.

Presented keynote and breakouts at two regional conferences hosted by the Center for Safe Schools

Georgia

Hosted five three-day institutes on PLCs.

Presented keynote and breakouts at two conferences hosted by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Conducted ongoing training program for new principals hosted by Georgia Southern University.

Hawaii

Presented three-day workshop for the Hawaii State Department of Education

Hosted four statewide three-day institutes on PLCs.

Idaho

Presented three one-day workshops on PLCs for state department of education.

Illinois

Hosted six three-day regional institutes on PLCs.

Presented keynote and breakouts at the annual conference of the North Central Association.

Presented two one-day workshops for the Midwest Principals Center.

Presented keynote and breakouts at conference hosted by the Consortium for Educational Change.

Indiana

Hosted three-day regional institute on PLCs.

Presented keynote and breakout at two conferences hosted by the Indiana Principals Association.

Iowa

Presented keynote and breakout to the Iowa Association of School Boards.

Presented keynote and breakout to the Iowa Association of School Administrators.

Presented a three-day institute on PLCs.

Kansas

The Kansas State Department of Education has created a division of Professional Learning Communities to promote PLC concepts as its core school-improvement strategy.

Conducted two two-day programs on PLCs for Kansas State Department of Education.

Conducted two two-day program on PLCs for Kansas Staff Development Council.

Hosted two three-day regional institutes on PLCs.

Kentucky

Presented keynote and breakouts for the Kentucky Association of Elementary School Principals.

Presented two two-day workshops on PLCs for the Kentucky Association of School Administrators.

Presented two two-day workshops on PLCs for the Kentucky CEO Superintendents Network.
Presented keynote for the Kentucky Association of School Administrators conference.

Presented ongoing video-conferencing support for Kentucky Association of School Administrators.

Louisiana

Created three-part improvement program for the Greater Louisiana Schools Coalition.

Presented two-day program for Louisiana Staff Development Council.

Hosted three-day regional institute on PLCs.

Maine Presented three two-day workshops for the Maine Principals Association.

Maryland Worked with State Department of Education to promote PLCs.

PLC concept adopted by Montgomery County Schools which has created a Department for Professional Learning Communities to assist schools in their improvement efforts.

Massachusetts Presented keynotes and breakout sessions for four of the annual conferences sponsored by the New England Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Presented keynote and breakout at the Massachusetts Elementary School Principals Association.

Presented two-day summer program hosted by the Massachusetts Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Hosted two three-day regional institutes on PLCs.

Presented keynote and breakouts for the New England Superintendents Association.

Michigan Presented two-day workshop for Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals.

Presented two-day workshop for the Northern Michigan Learning Consortium.

Presented keynote and breakouts for the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals.

Hosted three-day regional institute in Grand Rapids and Detroit.

Hosted three-day Great Lakes Regional Summit on PLCs

Minnesota Presented four two-day programs for the Metropolitan Principals Academy to train principals in PLC concepts.

Presented two-day workshop on PLCs hosted by the University of Minnesota.

Hosted two three-day regional institutes on PLCs.

Mississippi Presented two-day programs for new school leaders for the Mississippi State Department of Education and Millsap College.

Missouri PLC concept has been adopted by the state department of education as its model for school improvement.

Consulted with state department of education regarding its statewide initiative in PLCs.

Presented two-day leadership workshop for all new principals in Missouri for four consecutive years.

Hosted three three-day regional institutes on PLCs.

- Nebraska Provided three two-day statewide programs on PLCs hosted by Education Service Unit #3.
Hosted three-day regional institute on PLCs.
- Nevada Presented two two-day programs on PLC concepts for Nevada State Department of Education in Las Vegas and Reno.
Hosted seven annual three-day regional institutes.
- New Hampshire Presented two-day workshop on PLCs for the New Hampshire Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- New Jersey Presented two two-day workshops and one three-day workshop on PLCs hosted by New Jersey Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development and the New Jersey State Department of Education.
New Jersey State Department of Education has adopted PLC concept as its core school improvement strategy.
Hosted a three-day regional institute on PLCs.
- New Mexico Presented two regional workshops on PLCs.
Hosted a three-day institute on PLCs.
- New York Hosted two three-day regional institutes on PLCs.
Presented keynotes and workshops for the New York Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.
Presented keynote and breakout at the Schools That Learn Conference.
Presented keynotes and workshops for the New York Council of School Superintendents.
Presented statewide two-day program on PLCs for the first joint conference conducted by NYASCD and NY Council of State Superintendents.
Presented keynote and breakouts for the Reaching and Teaching Conference hosted by PBS.
- North Carolina The PLC concept has been recommended by the state superintendent as the core strategy for school improvement throughout the state.
The PLC concept has been adopted as the core school improvement strategy by the High Five Partnership serving the five counties in the Raleigh-Durham area.
Provided ongoing annual training for administrators and teachers in the High Five Partnership for four years.
Hosted three-day regional institute on PLCs.

Presented two workshops for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro initiative on school improvement.

Presented keynote and breakouts for conference hosted by the Southeast Regional Educational Laboratory.

Ohio

The newly adopted state standards for teaching include the stipulation that teachers will be members of professional learning communities.

Consulted with Cleveland State University as they adopted PLC concepts as the core strategy for school improvement in the greater Cleveland area.

Presented two-day program on PLCs annually for Cleveland State University.

Presented keynotes and workshops for the Ohio Association of School Administrators.

Hosted two three-day regional institutes on PLC concepts.

Presented two-day workshop on PLCs for the Center for Educational Leadership.

Oklahoma

Presented program on PLCs hosted by the Oklahoma Staff Development Council.

Hosted a three-day regional institute in Oklahoma.

Oregon

Presented keynote and breakouts to the Oregon School Board Association.

Presented keynote and breakouts to the Oregon Association of School Administrators.

Presented two two-day workshops for the Oregon Association of School Administrators.

Presented keynote and breakouts for two Assessment Training Institutes sponsored by Educational Testing Service.

Hosted a three-day regional workshop on PLCs.

Pennsylvania

Presented keynote and breakouts for national conference hosted by TW Branun.

Presented keynote and breakouts for conference hosted by Learning 24/7.

Hosted a three-day institute on PLCs.

Rhode Island

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University has made developing the capacity of schools to function as professional learning communities its core strategy for school improvement.

South Carolina

Presented keynote and breakouts to the South Carolina School Association of School Administrators.

Conducted two-day workshop for South Carolina Staff Development Council.

Tennessee

Presented a one-day workshop on PLCs in Memphis, Nashville, and Knoxville hosted by the state board of education.

Hosted a three-day regional institute in Nashville in 2008.

Texas

Presented workshops and keynotes for Texas Association of Elementary School Principals.

Presented workshops and keynotes for Texas Secondary School Principals.

Presented workshops and keynotes for Texas Association of School Administrators.

Presented workshops and keynotes for Texas School Board Association.

Hosted a three-day regional institute in Houston, Dallas, Austin and two regional institutes in San Antonio.

Helped train new principals for Dallas school system.

Presented keynote and breakout for the Dallas Institute for Urban Leadership.

Presented keynote at conference hosted by the Texas Reading Initiative.

Presented keynote and breakout for participants in the Principals' Center of Trinity College.

Utah

Conducted seven annual programs on PLCs hosted by Brigham Young University as its core strategy to improve schools.

Hosted two three-day regional programs on PLCs.

Facilitated two-day program to help BYU administrators apply PLC concepts to their University.

Hosted a state summit on PLCs.

Vermont

Presented two two-day programs on PLCs hosted by the Vermont Department of Education.

Presented keynote and breakouts at the New England ASCD conference three times.

Virginia

Presented two two-day programs for the Virginia Staff Development Council.

Presented two two-day programs for the Virginia Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Helped the School-University Research Network of William and Mary University adopt the PLC concept as its core school improvement strategy.

Presented three two-day programs at the Annual Leadership Conference hosted by William and Mary University.

Facilitated the adoption of the PLC concept in the largest school district in Virginia (Fairfax County), provided four-day training program for all principals and teachers from each of its more than 250 schools.

Hosted two three-day regional institutes on PLCs.

Presented two-day program on PLCs to educators in the Lynchburg College consortium.

Washington

Presented keynote and breakouts at the Washington State ASCD.

Presented two-day statewide conference on PLCs hosted by Educational Service Center 123.

Hosted three three-day institutes on PLCs.

Hosted state-wide summit on PLCs.

PLC adopted as preferred school improvement model by largest consortium of school districts in the state.

Wisconsin

Provided annual training for four years for new school administrators at conference hosted by the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators.

Presented keynote and breakouts for three conferences hosted by the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators.

Presented keynote and breakouts for two conferences hosted by the Sally Ride Academy.

Presented two-day conference on PLCs hosted by the State Department of Education.

Presented one-day program on PLCs hosted by the Wisconsin Education Association.

Wyoming

Presented one-day program on PLCs for the Wyoming State Department of Education.

Canadian Institutes and Summits

Rick DuFour has hosted PLC regional institutes or national summits in the following Canadian locations:

Toronto area (four times)
Vancouver (three times)
Saskatoon (twice)
Victoria (twice)
Niagara (twice)
Edmonton (twice)
Montreal (twice)
Ottawa (twice)
Calgary (twice)
Winnipeg (twice)
Halifax,
Moncton
Regina
St. Johns
Quebec
Charlottetown
Stratford
Banff

Focus on The Principalship

Rick is recognized as one of the nation's leading authorities on the principalship.

Rick has trained all principals in PLC concepts for the Domestic Dependent Elementary and Secondary Schools (DDESS) and Far East Department of Defense Education Schools.

When NSDC concluded principals needed assistance in understanding effective professional development, it asked him to write *The Principal as Staff Developer*.

When ASCD decided to create a seven-part video series on the principalship, they asked Rick to serve as chief author and consultant on the project.

When New Leaders for New Schools decided to create a curriculum to train aspiring principals to assume leadership of urban schools, they asked Rick to help create the curriculum.

When Laureate wanted to create an on-line course on the principalship they asked Rick to be the chief consultant and contributor for the project.

Appendix D

Extended Training Provided by Richard DuFour

Rick is committed to providing more than keynote presentations to assist educators in developing PLCs. He provided ongoing training through a series of two-day workshops as well as in-depth training in the PLC concept through the options listed below.

Regional PLC Institutes Hosted by Richard DuFour (2002-09)

The PLC Institutes provide an intensive three or four-day orientation to PLC concepts. Rick and his co-authors, Becky DuFour and Bob Eaker, lead each institute, which includes keynote addresses and breakout sessions by Rick, Becky and Bob. Breakouts are also presented by PLC Associates and local schools that have been successful in implementing PLC concepts in ways that bring about significant gains in student achievement. Rick has hosted over 70 of these institutes throughout North America between 2002 and 2008 as illustrated below. Over 70,000 educators have attended the institutes.

Northeast:	New York, Boston, Hartford, Albany, Rochester, Granby, Somerset and Philadelphia
Southeast:	Tampa, Sarasota, Atlanta (3), Raleigh-Durham, Washington, D.C. (2), Birmingham, Somerset, and Fairfax
Midwest:	Columbus, Cincinnati, Chicago (8), Detroit, St. Louis (3), Kansas City (2), Minneapolis (2), Bloomington, Grand Rapids, Nashville, Lincolnshire, Milwaukee, Rosemount
Plains:	Kansas City (2), Omaha, and Tulsa
Mountain:	Denver (3), Colorado Springs, Aurora, Provo, and Salt Lake
Southwest:	Austin, San Antonio (2), Houston, Dallas, Las Vegas (4), New Orleans, New Mexico
Northwest:	Portland (2), Seattle (3)
West:	San Diego (2), Riverside (2), Los Angeles, Anaheim, San Francisco (2), Hilo, Honolulu (5)
Canada:	Vancouver (3), Stratford, Winnipeg, Toronto (2), Halifax, New Brunswick, Hamilton, Edmonton, Montreal, Saskatoon, Langley, Moncton, Quebec, Calgary and Ottawa

State, and National Summits on PLCs Hosted by Richard DuFour (2002-09)

The PLC Summits bring together some of the leading educational thinkers in North America to discuss their insights on how to improve schools. Participants typically include Michael Fullan, Doug Reeves, Larry Lezotte, Mike Schmoker, Dennis Sparks, Jonathan Saphier, Rick Stiggins, Crystal Kuykendal, Robert Marzano, Tom Many, and Anthony Muhammad. Summits consist of keynotes, breakouts, and panels that take questions from the audience. Over 22,000 educators have attended the PLC Summit since 2005.

Summits have been held in: Niagara, Fort Lauderdale, Seattle, Phoenix, Ontario, Scottsdale (3), Anaheim, Detroit, Toronto, St. Louis, Vancouver, and Victoria.

PLC Coaching Academies

The PLC Coaching Academy was designed to provide ongoing training and support for local educational leaders who hope to coach schools and staffs through the change process as they implement PLC concepts. The Academy provides participants with the knowledge, skills, and tools to serve as change agents in their districts. Coaching Academies have been conducted in the following areas since 2006:

Arlington City Schools (Ohio)
Bowie High Schools (Texas)
Broome-Tioga BOCES (New York)
Broome-Tioga BOCES (new York)
Cartwright School District (Arizona)
Cherry Hill School District (new Jersey)
Chico Unified School District (California)
Council for Leaders in Alabama Schools
Denton ISD (Texas)
Dublin City Schools (Ohio)
Durham Public Schools (North Carolina)
Duval Public Schools (Florida)
Fairfield-Suisun Unified School District (California)
Fontana Unified School District (California)
Franklin and Riverside Central (Minnesota)
Fresno USD (California)
Green River Educational Coop (Kentucky)
Hart USD (California)
High Five Regional Partnership for High School Excellence (North Carolina)
Los Angeles County Office of Education
Marin County (California)
Maury County (Tennessee)
Multnomah ESD (Oregon)
New Brunswick Department of Education (Canada)
Paramount Unified School District (California)
Poudre Schools (Colorado)
Quincy Public Schools (Illinois)
Rapides Parish School District (Louisiana)
Region 1 (California)
Rochester Public Schools (Minnesota)
Salinas County (California)
San Bernardino County Office of Education (California)
School District 303 (Illinois)
School District of Washington (Missouri)
Volusia County Schools (Florida)
Wilson County Schools (North Carolina)
Wyoming Department of Education
Ysleta Independent School District (Texas)

Appendix E

Publications

In 2007 the National Staff Development Council included the publication of Richard DuFour's *Professional Learning Communities at Work* among the most significant events in professional learning over the past forty years. That same year the Association of Educational Publishers awarded its "Book of the Year" award in the category of School/Classroom Management to the *Professional Learning Communities at Work Plan Book*.

Michael Fullan, in partnership with Microsoft, has created a list of the "Top Twenty" books on Leadership for Change. Dr. DuFour's *Learning by Doing* is one of only seven books on the list that deals specifically with education. Here is what Fullan writes about *Learning by Doing*:

The only book on professional learning communities (PLCs) on our list, and a gem consistent with our theme of leading with action and doing.... the book is realistic in surfacing the problem that some staff may not support PLCs and what to do in the face of resistance. The authors, rightly, conclude (a) PLCs are powerfully effective, and (b) they are equally complex to create...

Why We Like This Book: It is dead on central to the core of improvement in schools. It lays out the key agenda in key terms. It pushes the "how to do it" challenge to the limit without providing an unrealistic blueprint. This is a book that shows what we need to do to achieve much-needed PLCs on a large scale. It provides all the guidelines and tips we need to accomplish PLCs and their accompanying results. And, it is a book that still says, in the end, "It's going to be hard — hard, but worth it.

Doug Reeves recently nominated Dr. DuFour's most recent book, *Learning by Doing*, for educational book of the year. The following comments are from some of the nation's most respected educators regarding *Learning By Doing*.

"Indispensable" is an over-used word for books that are merely useful; but this book, is in fact, indispensable for leaders who want to make the right changes and make them endure. When this country gets serious about good schools for all our children, the books by Rick DuFour and his colleagues will be the curriculum.

Jonathan Saphier, President of Research for Better Teaching

As professional learning communities become more and more popular, we need more than ever a definitive guide to the whys, whats, and hows of PLCs. This handbook is it: comprehensive, clear, practical and above all demanding for moving forward with deep PLCs. Anyone committed to PLCs must base their work on this powerful standard.

Michael Fullan, Special Advisor to the Premier and the Minister of Education, Ontario, Canada

This may be the best, most practical book yet written on how to implement professional learning communities. It reaches an important threshold – a greater confidence and clarity about the power and potential of PLCs. It is that rare book about which one can say: If you read it, and put its principles in action, you can expect results.

Mike Schmoker, Educational Consultant

Continuous and sustainable school improvement requires three ingredients: a shared language, an empowered leadership group, and time. *Learning by Doing* provides a compelling framework for continuous and sustainable school improvement. The book offers a clear process for bringing these essential ingredients together. It should be required reading for all professional educators dedicated to the mission of "Learning for All."

Larry Lezotte, Founder of Effective Schools Products

With this detailed roadmap, no school leader –teacher, principal, or superintendent –will ever again have to say 'I'm all for building a PLC.... but how do you do it?' I wish I had this book, which is overflowing with concrete ideas, before

me during my own turbulent years as a school principal. It would have enabled us to break out of our inertia and create the PLC we all desperately wanted and deserved.

Roland Barth, Founder of the Harvard Principal Center

Many books deserve a glance, perhaps half of them are worthy of a thorough reading, but only a few – and this book is surely in this category – should be devoured.

Doug Reeves, Chairman, Center for Performance Assessment

Dr. DuFour's articles have been selected for *The Best of Educational Leadership* (ASCD), *The Best of the Developer* (National Staff Development Council), *The Best of the Executive Educator* (*Executive Educator Magazine*), and the "Hot Topic Series" (*School Climate*) of Phi Delta Kappan. He received a citation from the National Association of Secondary Principals for outstanding contribution to professional literature. Mike Schmoker has described Dr. DuFour's article, *The Learning Centered Principal* (*Educational Leadership*, May, 2002) as "the best article on leadership I have ever read" (*Results Now*, 2006). His article, *What is a Professional Learning Community?* (*Education Leadership*, May, 2004), is one of the journal's most requested articles for permission to re-print.

Following is a list of books, videos, and articles published by Dr. DuFour:

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In Press. Bloomington, IN: Solution-Tree.
- (2007). *The Leader's Companion*. Bloomington, IN: Solution-Tree.
- (2006). *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work*. Bloomington, IN: Solution-Tree.
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- (2004). *Whatever It Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
- (2002). *Getting Started: Re-culturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
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- (1992). *Creating The New American School: A Principal's Guide to School Improvement*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.
- (1991). *The Principal as Staff Developer*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service, 1991.
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Note: Rick is the primary author of each of the books presented above. Dr. Bob Eaker co-authored *Professional Learning Communities at Work*, *Creating the New American School*, and *Fulfilling the Promise of Excellence*. Becky DuFour joined Rick and Bob as a co-author of *Getting Started, Whatever it Takes*, *Learning by Doing*, *The Professional Learning Communities Handbook*, and *The Leader's Companion*. Gayle Karhanek contributed to *Whatever it Takes*, and Dr. Tom Many contributed to *Learning by Doing*.

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(2007). Guest Editor of the special issue of *National Forum of Educational Administration and Supervision Journal*. 24 (1). The issue was devoted to Professional Learning Communities.

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Features

In Praise of Top-Down Leadership

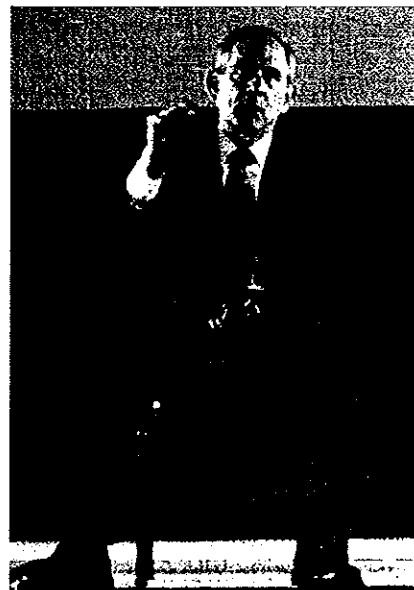
What drives your school improvement efforts — evidence of best practice or the pursuit of universal buy-in?

By Richard Dufour

I have noticed an interesting phenomenon when I work with educators on strategies to improve student achievement in their schools. They sometimes confide in me that the central office has issued a “top-down” mandate that all their schools must embrace and model certain key concepts and practices.

The term top-down is uttered with disdain, a pejorative phrase used in much the same way Rush Limbaugh would use “liberal,” and they expect me to be appalled at this affront to the autonomy of educators. After all, isn’t there ample evidence that top-down improvement doesn’t work? (Michael Fullan argues that in the fourth edition of *The New Meaning of Educational Change*.)

Isn’t it clear that improvement initiatives will not occur unless there is buy-in, a willingness of those engaged in the initiative to rally around it? Haven’t researchers warned that without this buy-in you will only generate resentful compliance that dooms the initiative to inevitable failure? Shouldn’t the people closest to the action, those at the school site, decide the direction of their schools?



Richard Dufour

Unkind Criticism

In the ongoing debate of the efficacy of top-down versus bottom-up strategies to improve school districts, top-down is clearly losing. Many district leaders are reluctant to champion improvement for fear of being labeled with the epithet “top-down leader,” the unkindest cut of all.

The glib advice given to superintendents and principals who actually hope to foster improvement is they must simply build widespread consensus for a concept or

initiative before proceeding. But what happens when a well-intentioned leader does everything right in terms of engaging staff members in the consideration of a change initiative and makes a compelling case for moving forward, but the staff prefers the status quo?

Now add one more element to the scenario. The initiative unquestionably represents a clearly better way of operating than what currently is in place. Is the laissez-faire leadership of simply allowing people to do as they wish really the only alternative when collective inquiry, persuasion and attempts at building consensus fail to stir people to act in new ways?

The tension regarding "who decides who decides" how (or even if) a school will be improved ignores a more central question: Does professional autonomy extend to the freedom to disregard what is widely considered best practice in one's field?

Educators have danced around this question rather than addressing it, and their inattention to the issue has fostered an unhealthy and unrealistic sense of what constitutes professional autonomy. District leaders have contributed to this peculiar view of professionalism because they have allowed teachers and principals the discretion to ignore even the most widely recognized best practices of the profession.

Considerable evidence from Fullan, Philip Schlechty and Richard Elmore indicates that leaving the issue of school improvement to each school to resolve on its own does not result in more effective schools. In other words, the bottom-up approach to school improvement does not work. Conversely, there is considerable research, notably the Harvard PELP Project, to suggest that high-performing districts have coherent strategies for improvement that hold adults accountable for having an impact on student learning in a positive way.

Loose and Tight

Leaders who create schools and districts capable of sustained substantive improvement are not laissez-faire in their approach to education but rather are skillful in implementing the concept of simultaneous loose and tight leadership. The concept also has been referred to as "directed empowerment" (by Robert Waterman in *The Renewal Factor: How the Best Get and Keep the Competitive Edge*) or a "culture of discipline within an ethic of entrepreneurship" (by James Collins in *Good to Great*). This leadership approach fosters autonomy and creativity (loose) within a systematic framework that stipulates clear, non-discretionary priorities and parameters (tight).

Of course, one of the most essential elements of effective loose-tight leadership is getting tight about the right things. Abundant evidence suggests that certain practices, processes and school cultures result in high levels of student achievement. For example, students learn more when those who teach them are very clear and very committed to ensuring each student acquires the intended knowledge, skills and dispositions of each course, grade level and unit of instruction. They learn more when their teachers check for understanding on an ongoing basis and use frequent team-developed common formative assessments rather than individually created summative assessments.

Also, they learn more when their school has timely, directive and systematic interventions that guarantee them additional time and support for learning when they experience difficulty. They learn more when their teachers work in collaborative teams rather than in isolation if their teachers stay focused on the right work. They learn more when members of those collaborative teams work interdependently to achieve specific, results-oriented goals linked to student learning, goals for which they are mutually accountable. They learn more when each teacher has the benefit of frequent and timely information on the achievement of his or her students, user-friendly information that helps the teacher determine the strengths and weaknesses of various instructional strategies.

Also, they learn more when professional development in the school is job-embedded and structures are in place to help teachers learn from one another as part of their routine work practice. These practices are supported by research, proven to be effective in hundreds of schools and endorsed by professional organizations. Most importantly, they are not counter-intuitive. They pass the test of common sense.

For simplicity sake, let's call the conditions described above the practices of a professional learning community. How might district leaders attempt to integrate these practices into their schools?

Three District Tales

I witnessed the following change processes in three districts that attempted to implement professional learning community concepts in their schools

- *District A: The autocratic approach*

This rural county school district of 15 schools located in the Southeast had shown little interest in professional learning communities until one of its schools demonstrated remarkable gains in student achievement. When the faculty attributed the gains to their implementation of professional learning community concepts, the central office announced every school now would be required to become a PLC. Unfortunately the pronouncement was not accompanied by any attempt to clarify the term, by training, by time for faculties to do the work of professional learning communities or by resources of any kind.

The central office made no effort to monitor the progress of the initiative in any school and did nothing to model its own commitment to PLC practices. This central-office approach had no effect on student achievement, but it did cause a great deal of resentment toward the school that had been singled out for its success.

- *District B: The laissez-faire approach*

The superintendent of this East Coast district, one of the largest in the country, became convinced of the merits of the PLC concept so the board of education stipulated in its annual goals that every school would become a PLC. The district devoted considerable resources to the initiative, offering ongoing training for all

principals and for a teacher team from each of its schools.

Unfortunately, the central office did not speak with one voice regarding the priority of the initiative. Some assistant superintendents supported principals, clarified expectations, monitored the progress of each school and worked with the district's professional development department to coordinate training according to the specific needs of each school. Other assistant superintendents left the initiative to the discretion of each principal. Many of their principals opted not to attend the training. No effort was made to monitor the progress of their schools.

At the end of two years some schools had made remarkable progress while others had made none.

- District C: Loose-tight leadership at work

The superintendent of this district, comprised of 27 schools in suburban Chicago, had become convinced the concept of professional learning communities offered the best hope for significant, sustained school improvement for his district. He arranged for two days of introductory training for the principal and a team of teachers from every school. He advised the teacher union representative of the training and invited her to attend. He actively participated in all of the training, and his entire central-office leadership team attended as well.

The training was specifically designed to create a common vocabulary, build shared knowledge about the PLC concept, make a compelling case for the benefits of the concept and give all participants the opportunity to express their concerns and questions to the consultants providing the training.

A segment of each day was devoted to "ask the superintendent," and everyone in the room was invited to present a question directly to the superintendent for an immediate and public response. The superintendent made certain to check in with his central-office staff, principals, and teachers during lunch and breaks to get their perspectives on what they were learning.

By the end of the two days there was palpable, widespread enthusiasm for the concept. Then, in the midst of the initial enthusiasm, the union representative posed a critical question to the superintendent: "This all sounds fine, but are you saying we will be required to do this? Is this a top-down mandate?"

It was a pivotal moment in the improvement process. His answer captured the essence of loose-tight leadership.

He said: "Why wouldn't we do this? Is anyone aware of any evidence that this is detrimental to student learning, teacher effectiveness or positive school cultures? This concept is supported by research, endorsed by our professional organizations, implemented with great success in schools around us, and it just makes sense. Knowing the commitment of the teachers in this district to do what is best for kids, how could we not go forward with this? I admit I am not certain as to all the details

of implementation, and I will need your ideas as to how we can help all your colleagues become familiar with the concept. I know all of us will need time and resources to move forward, and we will need to consider what we will remove from our plates if we take on this challenge. But I propose this is the work we should be doing, and we need to build on the energy and enthusiasm in this room today and commit to doing whatever it takes to make this happen in our district.”

Over the course of the next two years the school district supported ongoing training for every school in the district. Practices were aligned with the initiative, schedules were adjusted to provide teachers with time to engage in the work of professional learning communities, and the focus of administrative meetings changed to support principals in their implementation efforts. Central-office staff met with concerned faculties and groups of teachers to address their questions. In two years, the district had the greatest gains in student achievement in the state.

High Leverage

If some regard the scenario described in District C as top-down leadership, then I come to praise top-down leadership, not to bury it. One of the most essential responsibilities of leadership is clarity — clarity regarding the fundamental purpose of the organization, the future it must create to better fulfill that purpose, the most high-leverage strategies for creating that future, the indicators of progress it will monitor and the specific ways each member of the organization can contribute both to its long-term purpose and short-term goals.

If educational leaders contend that the purpose of the organization is to ensure all students learn at high levels (as virtually all our mission statements contend) and then they allow people throughout the organization to opt out of practices and processes that are clearly more effective at promoting learning than the prevailing practices, they send mixed messages that will succeed in creating confusion and cynicism but will fail to improve their schools and districts. Thus they will fail as leaders.

Leaders should certainly use every component of an effective change process and commit to what Elmore, in his 2006 book *School Reform from the Inside Out: Policy, Practice, and Performance*, refers to as “reciprocal accountability.” This principle calls upon leaders to help build the capacity of the members of the group to accomplish what they have been asked to accomplish.

For example, if teachers are being asked to collaborate, leaders have an obligation to create structures that make collaboration meaningful rather than artificial, to guarantee time for collaboration during the contractual day, to establish clear priorities and parameters so that teachers focus on the right topics, to help teams make informed decisions by making the essential knowledge base easily accessible to them, to provide meaningful and timely training based on the specific needs of each team, to offer templates and models to guide their work, and to specify clear expectations and standards to help them assess the quality of their work.

In this sense, the leader functions as a servant leader, asking, “What can I do to give people in this organization the tools and skills to ensure their eventual success as

they undertake this challenge.”

But just as certainly, leaders must be prepared to insist those within their organizations heed, not ignore, clear evidence of the best, most promising strategies for accomplishing its purpose and priorities. Educational leaders must provide both pressure and support if they are to play a role in improving their schools and districts.

Closing a Gap

I offer four assertions.

First, students will not achieve at higher levels unless the schools that serve them undergo significant changes in both their structures (policies, programs, procedures, schedules) and cultures (assumptions, beliefs, values, expectations and habits that constitute the norm for that school).

While it is relatively easy to implement structural change, it is very difficult to change the culture of an organization. Every existing system has a well-entrenched culture already in place. It is only natural that people working within that system typically will seek to preserve the status quo. They also will be inclined to filter improvement initiatives through the lens of the existing culture, distorting the initiative to fit the culture rather than changing the culture to align with the initiative.

Robert Marzano, Timothy Waters and Brian McNulty, in their 2005 synthesis of research titled *School Leadership That Works*, found in the midst of cultural change educators are likely to perceive their school has been weakened, their opinions are not valued and the stability of the school has been undermined. Periods of frustration and even anger are not uncommon. Conflict and disagreements are inevitable. In short, real cultural change is hard, and it is unrealistic to believe it will be universally embraced.

Second, cultural change will not occur without intentional leadership. Abundant evidence points to the positive impact on student achievement when the practices referenced earlier are in place. Furthermore, educators typically acknowledge the benefits of those practices. Often, however, they take no steps to implement them. Schools suffer from what Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton in their 2000 book *The Knowing-Doing Gap: How Smart Companies Turn Knowledge into Action* call the “knowing-doing gap” — the puzzling mystery of why knowledge of what needs to be done so often fails to result in action consistent with that knowledge.

The key to improving schools is ensuring that educators do the right work, but too often leaders settle for the illusion of doing. Strategic planning isn’t doing, training isn’t doing, writing mission statements isn’t doing, talking isn’t doing, even making a decision isn’t doing unless it results in action. Getting people to do differently, to act in new ways, remains the central challenge of every improvement process, and it takes intentional leadership to meet that challenge.

Third, leaders should fully engage staff in the consideration of a change process.

Leaders make a mistake when they say, “I have looked at the data and research, and

I know what needs to be done." They are much more effective when they engage staff in learning together, building shared knowledge. It is clear that people are more committed to a decision if they were engaged in the process that led to the decision.

While large group convocations may be an efficient way for leaders to pre-sent an initial case for change, small group dialogues are more effective in engaging people in the decision-making process. During these conversations, leaders should honor the concerns and objections that are presented and be willing to compromise if the modification does not violate the fundamental principles of the initiative. But it is also legitimate for leaders to present evidence and arguments that are intended to convert those who resist the initiative. Howard Gardner's insights on how to change someone's mind offer helpful advice on this topic (see related story, page 40).

A Final Assertion

If, however, all attempts to persuade educators to do the right work fails to persuade them to do it, leaders should exercise their authority to require the work be done. A professional is someone with expertise in a specialized field, an individual who has not only pursued advanced training to enter the field but who also is expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base.

A professional does not have the autonomy to ignore what is regarded as best practice in the field. We would have contempt for a medical doctor who continued to use a razor blade to perform radial keratotomy on a patient's eye rather than use the much more effective, pain-free process of LASIK surgery. We would not tolerate an attorney who continued to cite arguments from case law that had been overturned by higher courts. We would not support the notion that a airline pilot should have the right to fly a propeller plane rather than a jet because he has an affinity for propellers. Leaders within a profession have every right to expect people to seek and implement the best practice in their field.

Much is required of school leaders if they are to build the capacity of people throughout the organization to help more students learn at higher levels. They must encourage people throughout the organization to examine and articulate their assumptions. They must help build shared knowledge and encourage learning by doing. They must create new experiences for people that call upon them to act in new ways.

They also must build continuous improvement processes into the routine practices of each school. They must demonstrate fierce resolve and consistent commitment to a sustained direction over an extended period of time. And, very significantly, they must be emphatically assertive when necessary and use the power of their position to get people to act in ways that are aligned with the mission of higher levels of learning for all.

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THOUGHT LEADERS

Rick and Becky DuFour



What might be: Open the door to a better future

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THOSE CALLED upon to forecast future trends in professional development are well-advised to remember the biblical observation, "There is nothing new under the sun." In fact, a case could be made that the greatest advances in professional development will come not from identifying new strategies or processes, but rather from applying what we already know to be best practice. The most pressing issue confronting educators is not a lack of knowledge but a lack of implementation, and a key to improving schools is taking purposeful steps to close this knowing-doing gap.

It has also been argued, however, that a group must be able to envision a better future before it can take steps to create that future. The following observations are presented to help others imagine a better future — what might be in the domain of professional development for educators.

We will know a new era has dawned when educators engaged in the deepest and most meaningful learning won't even recognize they are participating in professional development. Purposeful collaboration, collective inquiry, action research, and seeking evidence of results to inform individual, team, and school practices will be so deeply embedded in educators' routine work that they will consider these powerful learning experiences as simply "the way we do things around here." The artificial distinc-

tion that has so long existed between teacher "work time" (that is, time spent in the classroom) and teacher "learning time" (that is, the days set aside annually for "institutes") will be replaced by a culture in which working and learning are so interwoven, it will be impossible to identify where one begins and the other ends.

The collaborative team will become the primary engine for this professional learning, and time for collaboration will be embedded in teachers' daily and weekly schedule. Teams will be expected to develop and pursue results-oriented goals that are specifically linked to school and district goals. Teachers working in teams will be required to analyze data, identify concerns regarding the learning of their students, build shared knowledge regarding how to best address those concerns, develop and implement short-term action plans to improve upon the current reality, analyze data to see what worked and what did not, assist each other as they work interdependently to achieve the goals for which they are mutually accountable, and continue to repeat

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this process in a perpetual cycle of improvement. Within this tight process, however, teams will enjoy tremendous autonomy in the problems they choose to address, their selection of improvement strategies, and, very importantly, in seeking the kind of professional learning they deem essential to their success.

The ongoing learning essential to this process has profound implications for schools and districts. Professional development as an event or workshop will give way to a process of continuous learning. The generic professional development presented to an entire faculty on a few designated days each year will give way to just-in-time learning specific to the issues confronting a team. Professional learning will become more timely in delivery and more precise in identifying the specific knowledge and skills educators need to address issues and achieve their goals.

And if adult learning in schools is truly to become professional development, educators must commit to the collective pursuit of best practice and

extend that pursuit beyond their classroom, their team, their school, or even their district. In too many schools and districts, decisions are based upon preferences and perceptions rather than evidence of effectiveness. The question that has driven initiatives has been "Do we like it?" rather than "Does it help more students learn at higher levels?" Discussion of complex problems devolves into a pooling of opinions, and the contrived congeniality of many faculties makes it difficult to critique diverse opinions in a culture that seems to suggest all perceptions are of equal value. A professional, however, is someone with expertise in a specialized field, who not only has pursued advanced training to enter the field, but who also is expected to remain current in its evolving knowledge base. Professional development, then, must be specifically linked to compelling evidence of best practice.

Imagine a group of 2nd-grade teachers who have worked together as a collaborative team to clarify the knowledge, skills, and dispositions their students are to acquire as a result of the upcoming unit they are about to teach. One of those skills is regrouping numbers in two-digit addition and subtraction. Members have discussed different instructional strategies, have agreed on common pacing, and have developed a common formative assessment that they administer to all students. They share the results of the assessment, seek ideas from a colleague who is achieving outstanding results, and offer support and specific strategies for a team member whose students are experiencing difficulty in learning the skill.

But perhaps no one on the team has successfully helped students become proficient with regrouping. So, that district identifies teachers and principals who represent what Jerry Sternin has described as "positive deviants" — individuals who consis-

FROM THE FIELD

Lauren Childs

Teachers with differentiated careers



"MY HOPE is that over the next 10 years, we'll begin to see teachers entering the profession with the expectation of building highly differentiated careers, a process that will put a high premium on their own learning. Someone who aspires to be a 3rd-grade teacher, for instance, may envision a career that includes work not only in the classroom, but also as an instruction/assessment leader, a school-based coach, a teacher researcher, and a professional learning facilitator. Such opportunities will push us as a profession to commit to alternative structures, practices, and resources for learning."

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tently achieve results that are dramatically superior to the norm. The district has studied those positive deviants, has asked them to reflect on and articulate their practices, has created training programs based on some of their specific skills, and makes them available as a resource to other educators in the district. The team can access the ideas, insights, and information from the district's most successful teacher in teaching 2nd-grade math skills and solicit his or her assistance as team members implement new strategies in their classrooms.

Or imagine a national network of best practices in education for every course, every discipline, and every grade level. Now, the 2nd-grade team accesses a national web site that provides the lesson plans, handouts, worksheets, teaching tips, and sample assessments for that specific skill from some of the most effective teachers in the nation. They watch a video of some of those teachers working on that skill with students similar to their own. They discuss the best way to

implement ideas they have learned, and they develop strategies for gathering evidence on their effectiveness.

This proposed openness and accessibility may seem foreign to educators who have been reluctant to open their file cabinets to or share "their stuff" with a colleague. But the Massachusetts Institute of Technology recently announced that it is making the content of all its courses available online to anyone in the world at no charge. MIT described this initiative as an act of "intellectual philanthropy." Perhaps others will follow suit. Perhaps the next "education governor" or "education president" will conclude that helping all students learn will require more than assessments and sanctions, and he or she will champion the creation of systematic intellectual philanthropy that provides educators with free and open access to the knowledge base that can serve as a vital catalyst to their ongoing professional development.

To quote John Lennon, "Imagine."

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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 Schools as Learning Communities Pages 6-11

What Is a "Professional Learning Community"?

To create a professional learning community, focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for results.



May 2004

Richard DuFour

The idea of improving schools by developing *professional learning communities* is currently in vogue. People use this term to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education—a grade-level teaching team, a school committee, a high school department, an entire school district, a state department of education, a national professional organization, and so on. In fact, the term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning.

The professional learning community model has now reached a critical juncture, one well known to those who have witnessed the fate of other well-intentioned school reform efforts. In this all-too-familiar cycle, initial enthusiasm gives way to confusion about the fundamental concepts driving the initiative, followed by inevitable implementation problems, the conclusion that the reform has failed to bring about the desired results, abandonment of the reform, and the launch of a new search for the next promising initiative. Another reform movement has come and gone, reinforcing the conventional education wisdom that promises, "This too shall pass."

The movement to develop professional learning communities can avoid this cycle, but only if educators reflect critically on the concept's merits. What are the "big ideas" that represent the core principles of professional learning communities? How do these principles guide schools' efforts to sustain the professional learning community model until it becomes deeply embedded in the culture of the school?

Big Idea #1: Ensuring That Students Learn

The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift—from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning—has profound implications for schools.

School mission statements that promise "learning for all" have become a cliché. But when a school staff takes that statement literally—when teachers view it as a pledge to ensure the success of each student rather than as politically correct hyperbole—profound changes begin to take place. The school staff finds itself asking, What school characteristics and practices have been most successful in helping all students achieve at high levels? How could we adopt those characteristics and practices in our own school? What commitments would we have to make to one another to create such a school? What indicators could we monitor to assess our progress? When the staff has built shared knowledge and found common ground on these questions, the

school has a solid foundation for moving forward with its improvement initiative.

As the school moves forward, every professional in the building must engage with colleagues in the ongoing exploration of three crucial questions that drive the work of those within a professional learning community:

- What do we want each student to learn?
- How will we know when each student has learned it?
- How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

The answer to the third question separates learning communities from traditional schools.

Here is a scenario that plays out daily in traditional schools. A teacher teaches a unit to the best of his or her ability, but at the conclusion of the unit some students have not mastered the essential outcomes. On the one hand, the teacher would like to take the time to help those students. On the other hand, the teacher feels compelled to move forward to "cover" the course content. If the teacher uses instructional time to assist students who have not learned, the progress of students who have mastered the content will suffer; if the teacher pushes on with new concepts, the struggling students will fall farther behind.

What typically happens in this situation? Almost invariably, the school leaves the solution to the discretion of individual teachers, who vary widely in the ways they respond. Some teachers conclude that the struggling students should transfer to a less rigorous course or should be considered for special education. Some lower their expectations by adopting less challenging standards for subgroups of students within their classrooms. Some look for ways to assist the students before and after school. Some allow struggling students to fail.

When a school begins to function as a professional learning community, however, teachers become aware of the incongruity between their commitment to ensure learning for all students and their lack of a coordinated strategy to respond when some students do not learn. The staff addresses this discrepancy by designing strategies to ensure that struggling students receive additional time and support, no matter who their teacher is. In addition to being systematic and schoolwide, the professional learning community's response to students who experience difficulty is

- *Timely.* The school quickly identifies students who need additional time and support.
- *Based on intervention rather than remediation.* The plan provides students with help as soon as they experience difficulty rather than relying on summer school, retention, and remedial courses.
- *Directive.* Instead of *inviting* students to seek additional help, the systematic plan *requires* students to devote extra time and receive additional assistance until they have mastered the necessary concepts.

The systematic, timely, and directive intervention program operating at Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois, provides an excellent example. Every three weeks, every student receives a progress report. Within the first month of school, new students discover that if they are not doing well in a class, they will receive a wide array of immediate interventions. First, the teacher, counselor, and faculty advisor each talk with the student individually to help resolve the problem. The school also notifies the student's parents about the concern. In addition, the school offers the struggling student a pass from study hall to a school tutoring center to get additional help in the course. An older student mentor, in conjunction with the struggling student's advisor, helps the student with homework during the student's daily

advisory period.

Any student who continues to fall short of expectations at the end of six weeks despite these interventions is required, rather than invited, to attend tutoring sessions during the study hall period. Counselors begin to make weekly checks on the struggling student's progress. If tutoring fails to bring about improvement within the next six weeks, the student is assigned to a daily guided study hall with 10 or fewer students. The guided study hall supervisor communicates with classroom teachers to learn exactly what homework each student needs to complete and monitors the completion of that homework. Parents attend a meeting at the school at which the student, parents, counselor, and classroom teacher must sign a contract clarifying what each party will do to help the student meet the standards for the course.

Stevenson High School serves more than 4,000 students. Yet this school has found a way to monitor each student's learning on a timely basis and to ensure that every student who experiences academic difficulty will receive extra time and support for learning.

Like Stevenson, schools that are truly committed to the concept of learning for each student will stop subjecting struggling students to a haphazard education lottery. These schools will guarantee that each student receives whatever additional support he or she needs.

Big Idea #2: A Culture of Collaboration

Educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture.

Despite compelling evidence indicating that working collaboratively represents best practice, teachers in many schools continue to work in isolation. Even in schools that endorse the idea of collaboration, the staff's willingness to collaborate often stops at the classroom door. Some school staffs equate the term "collaboration" with congeniality and focus on building group camaraderie. Other staffs join forces to develop consensus on operational procedures, such as how they will respond to tardiness or supervise recess. Still others organize themselves into committees to oversee different facets of the school's operation, such as discipline, technology, and social climate. Although each of these activities can serve a useful purpose, none represents the kind of professional dialogue that can transform a school into a professional learning community.

The powerful collaboration that characterizes professional learning communities is a systematic process in which teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement.

Collaborating for School Improvement

At Boones Mill Elementary School, a K-5 school serving 400 students in rural Franklin County, Virginia, the powerful collaboration of grade-level teams drives the school improvement process. The following scenario describes what Boones Mill staff members refer to as their *teaching-learning process*.

The school's five 3rd grade teachers study state and national standards, the district curriculum guide, and student achievement data to identify the essential knowledge and skills that all students should learn in an upcoming language arts unit. They also ask the 4th grade teachers what they hope students will have mastered by the time they leave 3rd grade. On the basis of the shared knowledge generated by this joint study, the 3rd grade team agrees on the critical outcomes that they will make sure each student achieves during the unit.

Next, the team turns its attention to developing common formative assessments to monitor each student's mastery of the essential outcomes. Team members discuss the most authentic and valid ways to assess student mastery. They set the standard for each skill or concept that each student must achieve to be deemed proficient. They agree on the criteria by which they will judge the quality of student work, and they practice applying those criteria until they can do so consistently. Finally, they decide when they will administer the assessments.

After each teacher has examined the results of the common formative assessment for his or her students, the team analyzes how all 3rd graders performed. Team members identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning and begin to discuss how they can build on the strengths and address the weaknesses. The entire team gains new insights into what is working and what is not, and members discuss new strategies that they can implement in their classrooms to raise student achievement.

At Boones Mill, collaborative conversations happen routinely throughout the year. Teachers use frequent formative assessments to investigate the questions "Are students learning what they need to learn?" and "Who needs additional time and support to learn?" rather than relying solely on summative assessments that ask "Which students learned what was intended and which students did not?"

Collaborative conversations call on team members to make public what has traditionally been private—goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns, and results. These discussions give every teacher someone to turn to and talk to, and they are explicitly structured to improve the classroom practice of teachers—individually and collectively.

For teachers to participate in such a powerful process, the school must ensure that everyone belongs to a team that focuses on student learning. Each team must have time to meet during the workday and throughout the school year. Teams must focus their efforts on crucial questions related to learning and generate products that reflect that focus, such as lists of essential outcomes, different kinds of assessment, analyses of student achievement, and strategies for improving results. Teams must develop norms or protocols to clarify expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and relationships among team members. Teams must adopt student achievement goals linked with school and district goals.

Removing Barriers to Success

For meaningful collaboration to occur, a number of things must also *stop* happening. Schools must stop pretending that merely presenting teachers with state standards or district curriculum guides will guarantee that all students have access to a common curriculum. Even school districts that devote tremendous time and energy to designing the *intended* curriculum often pay little attention to the *implemented* curriculum (what teachers actually teach) and even less to the *attained* curriculum (what students learn) (Marzano, 2003). Schools must also give teachers time to analyze and discuss state and district curriculum documents. More important, teacher conversations must quickly move beyond "What are we expected to teach?" to "How will we know when each student has learned?"

In addition, faculties must stop making excuses for failing to collaborate. Few educators publicly assert that working in isolation is the best strategy for improving schools. Instead, they give reasons why it is impossible for them to work together: "We just can't find the time." "Not everyone on the staff has endorsed the idea." "We need more training in collaboration." But the number of schools that have created truly collaborative cultures proves that such barriers are not insurmountable. As Roland Barth (1991) wrote,

Are teachers and administrators willing to accept the fact that they are part of the

problem? . . . God didn't create self-contained classrooms, 50-minute periods, and subjects taught in isolation. We did—because we find working alone safer than and preferable to working together. (pp. 126–127)

In the final analysis, building the collaborative culture of a professional learning community is a question of will. A group of staff members who are determined to work together will find a way.

Big Idea #3: A Focus on Results

Professional learning communities judge their effectiveness on the basis of results. Working together to improve student achievement becomes the routine work of everyone in the school. Every teacher team participates in an ongoing process of identifying the current level of student achievement, establishing a goal to improve the current level, working together to achieve that goal, and providing periodic evidence of progress. The focus of team goals shifts. Such goals as "We will adopt the Junior Great Books program" or "We will create three new labs for our science course" give way to "We will increase the percentage of students who meet the state standard in language arts from 83 percent to 90 percent" or "We will reduce the failure rate in our course by 50 percent."

Schools and teachers typically suffer from the DRIP syndrome—Data Rich/Information Poor. The results-oriented professional learning community not only welcomes data but also turns data into useful and relevant information for staff. Teachers have never suffered from a lack of data. Even a teacher who works in isolation can easily establish the mean, mode, median, standard deviation, and percentage of students who demonstrated proficiency every time he or she administers a test. However, data will become a catalyst for improved teacher practice only if the teacher has a basis of comparison.

When teacher teams develop common formative assessments throughout the school year, each teacher can identify how his or her students performed on each skill compared with other students. Individual teachers can call on their team colleagues to help them reflect on areas of concern. Each teacher has access to the ideas, materials, strategies, and talents of the entire team.

Freeport Intermediate School, located 50 miles south of Houston, Texas, attributes its success to an unrelenting focus on results. Teachers work in collaborative teams for 90 minutes daily to clarify the essential outcomes of their grade levels and courses and to align those outcomes with state standards. They develop consistent instructional calendars and administer the same brief assessment to all students at the same grade level at the conclusion of each instructional unit, roughly once a week.

Each quarter, the teams administer a common cumulative exam. Each spring, the teams develop and administer practice tests for the state exam. Each year, the teams pore over the results of the state test, which are broken down to show every teacher how his or her students performed on every skill and on every test item. The teachers share their results from all of these assessments with their colleagues, and they quickly learn when a teammate has been particularly effective in teaching a certain skill. Team members consciously look for successful practice and attempt to replicate it in their own practice; they also identify areas of the curriculum that need more attention.

Freeport Intermediate has been transformed from one of the lowest-performing schools in the state to a national model for academic achievement. Principal Clara Sale-Davis believes that the crucial first step in that transformation came when the staff began to honestly confront data on student achievement and to work together to improve results rather than make

excuses for them.

Of course, this focus on continual improvement and results requires educators to change traditional practices and revise prevalent assumptions. Educators must begin to embrace data as a useful indicator of progress. They must stop disregarding or excusing unfavorable data and honestly confront the sometimes-brutal facts. They must stop using averages to analyze student performance and begin to focus on the success of each student.

Educators who focus on results must also stop limiting improvement goals to factors outside the classroom, such as student discipline and staff morale, and shift their attention to goals that focus on student learning. They must stop assessing their own effectiveness on the basis of how busy they are or how many new initiatives they have launched and begin instead to ask, "Have we made progress on the goals that are most important to us?" Educators must stop working in isolation and hoarding their ideas, materials, and strategies and begin to work together to meet the needs of all students.

Hard Work and Commitment

Even the grandest design eventually translates into hard work. The professional learning community model is a grand design—a powerful new way of working together that profoundly affects the practices of schooling. But initiating and sustaining the concept requires hard work. It requires the school staff to focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively on matters related to learning, and hold itself accountable for the kind of results that fuel continual improvement.

When educators do the hard work necessary to implement these principles, their collective ability to help all students learn will rise. If they fail to demonstrate the discipline to initiate and sustain this work, then their school is unlikely to become more effective, even if those within it claim to be a professional learning community. The rise or fall of the professional learning community concept depends not on the merits of the concept itself, but on the most important element in the improvement of any school—the commitment and persistence of the educators within it.

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THE SCHOOL Administrator

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Features

Building a Professional Learning Community

For system leaders, it means allowing autonomy within defined parameters

By Richard DuFour

To be a school superintendent in the United States today is to feel the pull of conflicting demands and competing ideologies. The demands of different interest groups are often readily apparent—for example, parents who want smaller class sizes versus taxpayers who want cuts in the budget. Perhaps less obvious to those who never have served as a superintendent are the conflicting images of the very nature of the position. Should the superintendent be the forceful leader who implements his or her personal vision of how a school district and its individual schools should operate, or should the contemporary superintendent embrace site-based management and encourage the staff of each school to identify and pursue the issues most relevant to them? Should the desire for equity and equal opportunity lead superintendents to champion uniformity and consistency throughout the district, or should the realization that change occurs one school at a time lead superintendents to support the freedom and autonomy at each school that inevitably lead to differences between sites?

Superintendents err when they resolve this apparent dichotomy by choosing one approach or the other. In their landmark study of organizations that sustained excellence over an extended period of time, James Collins and Jerry Porras, co-authors of *Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies*, found those organizations embraced the paradox of living with two seemingly contradictory ideas or forces at the same time. They rejected the "Tyranny of the Or" and embraced the "Genius of the And." Instead of choosing between A or B, these companies figured out a way to have both A and B. For example, they developed powerful philosophical and conceptual images that drove the entire organization and that encouraged the individuals within the organization to seek and develop innovative strategies for achieving the core purpose of the organization.

Collins and Porras wrote: "We are not talking about balance here. Balance implies going to the midpoint, 50-50, half and half. ... [A] highly visionary company doesn't want to blend ying and yang into a gray, indistinguishable circle that is neither highly ying nor highly yang; it aims to be distinctly ying and distinctly yang, both at the

same time, all the time."

Superintendents who reject the "Tyranny of the Or" and embrace the "Genius of the And" are skillful in demonstrating "loose-tight leadership" or "directed autonomy." They focus on identifying and articulating both the fundamental purpose of the organization and a few "big ideas" that will help the district improve in its capacity to achieve that purpose. They are tight on purpose and big ideas—insisting that those within the organization act in ways consistent with those concepts and demanding that the district align all of its practices and programs with them.

At the same time, however, they encourage individual and organizational autonomy in the day-to-day operations of the various schools and departments. This autonomy is not characterized by random acts of innovation, but rather is guided by carefully defined parameters that give focus and direction to schools and those within them.

I am convinced that the parameters—the focused purpose and big ideas—that should drive school districts today are found in the concept of the professional learning community.

I have worked with school districts throughout North America and witnessed the different approaches superintendents have taken to implement the concepts of the learning community model in their districts. Some have invited schools to consider the learning community model as a strategy for stimulating improvement. Others have proclaimed that all schools must become learning communities, then left the details as to how to bring about this transformation to each school to resolve. Still others have been more prescriptive about the precise policies, programs and procedures each school must adopt to develop as a learning organization.

The strategy proven most effective, however, is one that is loose and tight, a strategy that establishes a clear priority and discernible parameters and then provides each school and department with the autonomy to chart its own course for achieving the objectives.

Shared Knowledge

The efforts of a superintendent of a suburban school district offer an excellent example of leading the professional learning community initiative on a districtwide basis. She began by building shared knowledge about professional learning communities with her leadership team—central-office staff, principals and leaders of the teachers' union. She distributed articles and made the content of those articles the focus of monthly team meetings.

In addition, she presented a book on learning communities to every member of the team, raised questions based on the book and solicited reactions to the concepts it presented. She required all members of the leadership team to attend a two-day workshop on professional learning communities to ensure her entire team heard a consistent message and developed a common vocabulary. She demonstrated the importance she placed on the workshop by attending every minute of it herself. Soon thereafter she held a follow-up meeting of the team where she asked if the professional learning community model offered a preferred alternative to the current reality of the district's operations.

Although this superintendent was a proponent of collaborative decision making, she recognized the importance of building shared knowledge as a prerequisite for the decision-making process. She understood that as a leader she was called on not merely to pool opinions, but rather to ensure that each member of the group had sufficient knowledge to make good decisions. Thus she ensured that members of her team were able to draw upon consistent information, operate from the same conceptual framework and use a common vocabulary when called upon to assess the potential of the professional learning community model. She attended to a critical component of the process—building shared knowledge.

Constructing Consensus

While most superintendents acknowledge the benefits of building consensus, they often operate under the assumption that the group does not achieve consensus until each member has endorsed the proposal under consideration.

This superintendent understood the difference between “consensus” and “unanimity.” If everyone must agree before the group can take action, it is unlikely that action will ever occur. Therefore, she had established an operational definition for consensus that was understood by every member of the team.

This definition included two important criteria: 1) all points of view have been heard and 2) the will of the group is evident, even to those who most oppose it. Once those criteria were met, the superintendent declared the team had arrived at consensus and made it clear she expected the full cooperation of each member of the team in implementing the professional learning community model throughout the district.

She then arranged for a series of meetings with members of the team to articulate her expectations and to clarify priorities. She used a small-group format for these meetings to encourage dialogue and questions. At each meeting she explained that she intended to be tight on the following concepts.

** A focus on learning.*

The superintendent reviewed the district mission statement and its pledge to ensure high levels of learning for all students. She contended that if the school district was to fulfill that pledge, administrators and teachers at all levels had to focus their energies on three critical questions: what is it we want all students to learn, how will we know when they have learned it, and how will we respond when a student is not learning?

She called on every school to monitor the learning of each student on a timely basis and to develop systematic procedures to give additional time and support—during the school day—to any student who was experiencing difficulty. The particulars of each school’s plan could vary, but every school was called on to create a system of interventions that ensured students received additional time and support.

** Collaborative teams.*

The superintendent called upon each school to organize the professional staff into collaborative teams. The structure of the teams was left to each school’s discretion—course specific, grade level, interdisciplinary, vertical or departmental. Although the superintendent insisted that teams be provided time to meet during the

school day, each school was free to create its own strategy for providing this time.

The superintendent, however, was adamant about two points: every professional staff member would be a member of a team, and the focus of the team would be student learning. To ensure this focus on learning, she insisted that every team identify and pursue a specific, measurable goal that, if achieved, would result in demonstrably higher levels of student learning.

** Teacher teams focused on results.*

The superintendent recognized most districts address the three critical questions at the central-office level. Directors of curriculum develop district curriculum guides. Directors of assessment monitor results on district and state assessments. The central office directs school improvement committees that must develop strategies for raising student performance.

However, she also recognized that all this activity at the central-office level often had little impact on the day-to-day workings of classroom teachers. She made it clear she wanted to engage, not just central-office staff, but each teacher team in every school in the investigation of the critical questions. She proposed a four-part process to promote that team engagement.

Periodic Reviews

The superintendent then explained she would meet individually with every member of the leadership team over the next several months to review the following areas:

- * **Planning:** What is your plan for implementing the professional learning community process in your school or department? What specific steps do you plan to take and when will you take them? What are you doing to align the practices and processes of your school with these concepts?
- * **Monitoring:** What are your strategies for monitoring each student's mastery of essential learning? How are you monitoring the productivity of your teams? How will you assess the results of this initiative in your school or department?
- * **Modeling:** How are you modeling a focus on student learning and your commitment to collaboration? What have you done to create a guiding coalition to assist you in this important endeavor in your school or department?
- * **Driving questions:** What questions have you posed to guide the work of the teams and the progress of the initiative?
- * **Allocating time:** How have you ensured that every student who experiences initial difficulty is provided additional time and support for learning during the school day? What steps have you taken to give every collaborative team time to work together during the school day?
- * **Celebrating:** What are you doing to celebrate the work of teams and the progress of your school in order to sustain this initiative?
- * **Confronting:** What resistance and obstacles have you encountered and how have you responded?

The superintendent concluded by sharing the assumptions that she hoped would drive the work of the leadership team:

1. The fundamental purpose of the district was to ensure high levels of learning for every student.
2. This important purpose could not be achieved if people throughout the organization worked in isolation. Coordination and collaboration were essential.
3. By working together to build the capacity of the district to function as a professional learning community, all staff would experience both greater job satisfaction and the sense of accomplishment that comes with making a positive difference in the lives of the students.
4. The advancement of the professional learning community concept would be the top priority of the district, and each member of the leadership team would be called upon to present tangible evidence of his or her contribution to the effort.

A Collective Effort

The leadership of this superintendent has not eliminated obstacles and problems as the district moves forward with the professional learning community initiative. Obstacles and problems are an inevitable byproduct of the change process. But her efforts to build shared knowledge and to arrive at consensus have created a guiding coalition for the initiative.

In addition, she has delineated both the broad parameters to guide the work of schools and the specific areas in which the staff in those schools have the freedom to find the best strategies for achieving the district's goals. She has embraced the "Genius of the And" and given the people in her district rare gifts—a clear sense of organizational direction and a better understanding of how each person can contribute to the collective effort to make a difference in the lives of students.

Richard DuFour, a former superintendent, is an educational consultant. He can be reached at 465 Island Pointe Lane, Moneta, VA 24121. E-mail: rdufour@district125.k12.il.us. He is the co-author of *Getting Started: Reculturing Schools to Become Professional Learning Communities*.

[Back to Top](#)

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To the Brock International Prize Committee:

It is my distinct honor to recommend Dr. Rick DuFour for your consideration as the Brock International Laureate for 2008. Dr. DuFour exemplifies the tradition of excellence embodied in the Brock Award and his distinguished record of service to the world of education speaks for itself. I would only offer a few highlights for your review:

- **Impact:** The world's foremost advocate of Professional Learning Communities, Dr. DuFour maintains a writing and speaking schedule that has an exceptional international impact. His continuing influence is on a par with that of former Brock Laureate John Goodlad, who remains a giant in educational leadership. In my annual quarter-million miles of travel around the world, I rarely find a school system that is not directly influenced by the work of Dr. DuFour.
- **Humility and Generosity:** In an era of personal aggrandizement, Dr. DuFour stands out for the way in which he shares credit and opportunity with others. His anthologies regularly include new and unpublished authors, and he has personally launched the careers of a large and diverse group of authors, speakers, and educators. Decades from now, leading lights in education will point to Rick DuFour as the person who gave them their big break and an opportunity to make a difference in education.
- **Work Ethic:** Dr. DuFour is the hardest working person in education, with a crushing schedule of travel, writing, and teaching. Nevertheless, I have observed him take the time to meet with individuals and small groups. He takes time to send personal notes recommending new research to other authors, encouraging teachers and administrators, and he regularly extends such personal courtesies throughout the world of education, from the newest student teacher to the nation's foremost educational leaders.

The generosity of the Brock family is exceptional. Rick DuFour's name and accomplishments would bring great honor to the Brock International Prize and I hope that you will give him your most serious consideration.

Sincerely,

Douglas B. Reeves

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Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education
-Making a positive difference through education and service-

June 28, 2008

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing to nominate Dr. Richard DuFour for the Brock International Award in Education. The following is a quote about the award itself:

Dr. Michael P. Wolfe, executive director of the international honor society Kappa Delta Pi, says the Brock Prize is the most significant individual educational award in the world, dedicated to honoring one person each year that has made a significant impact on the practice or understanding of the science and art of education. Contributions considered include new teaching techniques, the discovery of learning processes, the organization of a school or school system, the radical modification of government involvement in education or other educational innovations in education, medicine or business.

When I think of the ways the state of Missouri has used Rick's support and resources to create collaborative learning environments from entities as small as the classroom level to one as large as the state department, I think it is fair to say he has provided for systemic change throughout the state. Below is a list of just a few of things that he has done in Missouri:

- Presented at The Satellite Academy Program
- Presented for the Missouri PLC Project in Kansas City, St. Louis and Columbia, MO
- Hosted Missouri state department representatives at the National Summit in Scottsdale, AZ
- Presented at multiple National Institutes held in St. Louis, MO
- Helped create and will present at the Missouri State Summit in October

This doesn't include the many text resources he has created that are used by numerous schools and districts across the state. There is evidence that this work is making a difference in the state. Three-quarters of the winners of the Missouri Gold Star Award last year stated that becoming Professional Learning Communities assisted them with achieving their success. There are many schools that have shown a dramatic increase in student achievement scores after becoming more collaborative in their way of doing business.

Rick has made a significant difference in the national educational front, especially in Missouri.

Thank you for your consideration of him for this prestigious award.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Douglas G. Miller", with a long, sweeping underline.

Douglas G. Miller, PhD
Coordinator of Professional Development/Leadership Academy for Missouri



June 4, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

Re: Letter of Recommendation for Dr. Richard DuFour

It is our pleasure to recommend for your consideration Dr. Richard DuFour for the Brock International Prize in Education in which he has been nominated. We have had the privilege to work with Dr. DuFour in several capacities, the most important of which has been with the Brigham Young University Principals Academy. The Principals Academy is a developmental opportunity for school principals to engage in learning how to develop professional learning communities (PLCs) within the culture of their schools.

Because of his efforts, Dr. DuFour has influenced the leadership and teaching practices of hundreds of principals and thousands of teachers in the state of Utah. These principals and teachers are now equipped to improve teaching and learning in their schools. Specifically, Dr. DuFour has done more than any other expert to develop these educators to lead their schools in the cultural shift from the entrenched norms of isolation to norms of interdependence and collegiality. The principals and teachers are focused on providing high quality learning for all students through systems of preventions and interventions. Dr. DuFour has helped these educators to develop the knowledge and leadership practices that unite everyone in the community in this cultural transformation.

Particularly, Dr. DuFour has played a significant role in helping principals and teachers make two fundamental cultural shifts that are integral for schools to function as PLCs: the development of educators to focus on learning for all students and collaboration among all educators on issues related to improving teaching and learning. The following are documented results that we have collected on the BYU Principals Academy that Dr. DuFour has helped develop:

- Schools have observed initial improvement in student learning as measured by end of level testing and teacher-made assessments.
- Several schools have emerged as high functioning PLCs that serve as models for other principals and teachers throughout the area who observe the PLC processes such as, teams collaborating to improve student learning, data drawn from common assessments to identify students who need extra help and resources.

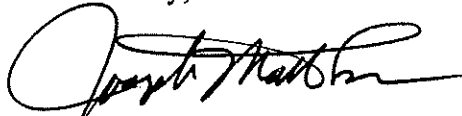
- Groups of principals in several districts have spontaneously started collaborating regularly to solve problems they encounter and to strategize ways to build stronger support at the district level for PLCs. These principals are influencing other administrators and policy makers in the way the work of education is conducted throughout their districts.
- In one rural district, all of the principals succeeded in persuading their Board of Education to provide early out days once a week so that teams of teachers could collaborate during contract hours to improve student learning.
- In another large school district, all schools use early out Mondays to conduct teacher collaboration on student learning.
- Another large district has recently adopted a weekly early dismissal day so that teachers have collaborative time to improve student learning. In this district, one of the principals influenced by Richard DuFour and the principals academy is now consulting nationally with many schools and districts.
- Above all else, these schools have documented increased student achievement because of the efforts of the PLC movement and Dr. DuFour.

Another substantial area of influence that Dr. DuFour has on educators in our area and throughout the world has been his writings. Too numerous to list, but of great influence has been the books that he and his colleagues have published. In the BYU Principals Academy and in our course work, we have used these books as supplemental textbooks for the development of pre-service and in-service principals and teachers.

We have also observed that Dr. DuFour communicates exceptionally well with others. As we have observed his work with professors, practitioners, and others, we have been impressed with the positive relationships he has developed. We have observed by his interaction with others that he is an effective communicator that can diffuse any conflictual situation. Perhaps, his greatest skill lies with his ability in communicating well with others.

We would be hard pressed to recommend a more deserving person for this honor. Dr. Richard DuFour is likely the most influential educator in America today and perhaps internationally as well. We hope you give him every consideration for receiving the Brock International Award in Education.

Sincerely,



L. Joseph Matthews
Associate Professor



Ellen J. Williams
Associate Professor



High Five Regional Partnership for High School Excellence

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(919) 531-1670 • (919) 531-1674 fax • vannlangston@trianglehighfive.org • www.trianglehighfive.org

July 3, 2008

University of Oklahoma
College of Liberal Studies: Brock Selection Committee
1610 Asp Ave Ste 108
Norman, OK 73072-6405

Dear Brock Prize Executive Committee,

Fortunately for the almost quarter-million students in our five-district collaborative, Rick DuFour answered my e-mail inquiry in the Fall of 2005! I asked him if he would be willing to work with the High Five: Regional Partnership on an extended basis to help our five districts reach our goal of 100% high school graduates by 2013. He said, "yes." That response has led to a remarkably successful effort to develop Professional Learning Communities in our 325 schools. Though our focus initially was on our 45 high schools, Rick's effect on teachers and principals in the very first presentation led to a "word of mouth" campaign so powerful that we had to rethink our audience to include PreK- 8 schools as well. The PreK-8 staffs were insistent that we should not keep Rick and his system for learning to ourselves! Since that Fall of 2005 presentation, Rick has introduced PLC beliefs and principles to more than 6000 teachers and administrators in our region and beyond. During the four sessions where he has introduced PLCs, more than 25 school districts across the state have also attended our sessions and many are initiating PLCs in their districts as well.

The real accomplishment of Rick DuFour is not that he is a master presenter (which he is) but that he has managed to create a complete system of school organization which blends the research of others with his own experiences in a new powerful way. Rick's view of school and classroom management creates a direct focus on teacher teams' capacity to design instruction and to monitor student learning today so that adults can adjust their behaviors immediately. Before Rick's system, when we conducted book studies of the literature on professional learning communities, teachers came away with a world view that learning together as adults was the goal but often there was not a direct and constant connection to what teachers and students did the next day.

Chapel Hill-Carrboro City Schools • Durham Public Schools



Johnston County Schools • Orange County Schools • Wake County Public School System

Rick's system shifts the school to an immediate and daily intensity around student learning; isn't that what school ought to be about?

We feel that Rick's influence will change the face of education in this country as it already has in our own schools. He will do it within the current structure by working from within, using the time available in different ways, collecting and sharing data and by reinforcing the professional status of teachers.

As a consequence of Rick's direct and indirect support, more than 325 schools in our five districts are somewhere on the PLC journey and many are fully developed. Rick is a master presenter who consistently receives the highest rating available from his audiences even as the audiences have grown to 1500 on several occasions. He is viewed as an educator who empowers teachers and principals to believe in their profession and in the ability of all children to learn. His audiences see his system as "doable". His life's work is devoted to seeing that every child learns the essential outcomes. Educators are literally "on fire" when they leave his two-day training sessions! But more importantly, they return to school and act on what they have learned. We have surveyed more than 10,000 educators about the level of PLC implementation in their schools and have found deep penetration of PLC practices in almost all our schools (an average rating of 80+ percent implementation of the elements of PLCs in just three years).

Rick provides personal follow-up services via e-mail and phone to me and other key leaders as implementation issues arise. He also participates in blogs which provide answers to the questions of many practitioners to anyone who chooses to go online. Rick is also the force behind the development of a cadre of national PLC trainers who must meet his standards of quality and who can provide support to local districts in alignment with Rick's system. He recognizes the necessity of a "coaching system" to nurture the implementation of PLCs once his introductory sessions and reading materials have been shared. In addition, he has written and continues to write books and manuals which support this national effort to improve schools.

In order to help facilitate the implementation of PLCs, Rick frequently volunteers to meet with key leaders such as local Boards of Education, our own State Board of Education, superintendents and central staff members, business leaders and others before and after his daily presentations. He is very clear about the need for change and he often goes to the "edge" to push the thinking of us all. Rick has helped countless school districts across the country change their vision and their practice to allow for full implementation of his model. He understands that organizational theories alone do not create the impact they might unless one applies change management to the process. He certainly goes beyond the "call of duty" to help change the context in which each of us works.

Rick DuFour is that exceptional person who creates a theory of change and action, practices it and fine tunes it during a lifetime of service in schools and develops a plan for communicating it effectively across the country through his writings and his master presentations. We are convinced that our schools can improve under his system to the point that all students really do learn and can ultimately graduate from high school. That goal is a national one under No Child Left Behind - Rick DuFour has given this country the tools, the capacity and the will to achieve it.

For these reasons High Five is proud to endorse Rick DuFour as an exemplar of school reform. His model is changing the efficacy of schools across the nation while improving the quality of life for both teachers and students.

Sincerely Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Vann Langston". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Vann Langston
Executive Director High Five: Regional Partnership



DOMESTIC DEPENDENT ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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June 26, 2008

Dr. Thomas W. Many
Superintendent of Schools
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Buffalo Grove, IL 60089

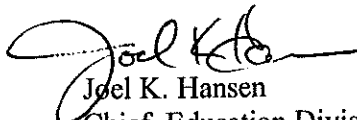
Dear Dr. Many:

For many years, the Department of Defense Education Activity has been proud to be recognized as "the President's School System." It has embraced current issues in education and has applied best practices to all levels in military dependents schools throughout Europe, the Pacific and the United States. In DDESS, the agency component that trains the DoD schools at military bases in the continental United States, we have been particularly interested in assisting our instructional leaders to become better at their profession. This past January, we invited Dr. Rick DuFour to be a part of our *Making Connections* Principals Conference to work with our team of administrators and staff developers. Needless to say, our administrators left the conference filled with enthusiasm and excitement ready to go back to their schools and share the knowledge gained regarding Professional Learning Communities.

Dr. DuFour was able to energize the DDESS administrators into believing in themselves and fulfilling the notion that they can make a difference in improving their students' achievement. His wit, humor, and profound expertise in understanding schools and what makes them function efficiently has made a tremendous impact on the way our schools look at staff development and the way that the principal leads his/her staff. His ability to put theory into practical steps that have been proven over time instilled confidence in the administrators. Frequent conversations with our administrators following the conference indicate there are many changes in the way most of our administrators are leading their schools. Examining their school's progress more closely, as well as collaboratively involving teachers in Professional Learning Communities are two obvious results that have strengthened their ability to successfully approach school improvement with confidence.

It is a pleasure to write this letter of endorsement of Dr. DuFour for the Brock International Award for Education. He is by far a worthy candidate for this prestigious award and this honor would bring an added dimension of credibility to his already outstanding efforts of making our schools successful by raising the achievement levels of students.

Sincerely,


Joel K. Hansen
Chief, Education Division

School Board of Brevard County

2700 Judge Fran Jamieson Way • Viera, FL 32940-6601

Richard A. DiPatri, Ed.D., Superintendent



June 10, 2008

Dear Members of the Brock International Prize in Education Selection Committee:

It is an honor and privilege to submit this letter of recommendation for Dr. Richard DuFour and his work with Professional Learning Communities. I first met Dr. DuFour in 1993 when I attended the National Staff Development Council's (NSDC) national conference in Dallas, Texas. I had just left the principalship for the director of professional development position in my district, and I was especially interested in his topic, *The Principal as Staff Developer*. I was so impressed with his session on principal leadership and the concept of expanding the power of the principalship through powerful, organized teams – the precursor to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). As the person responsible for principal and leadership professional development, I brought him into our district in 1994 to give his presentation to 150 Leadership Team members -- principals, Senior Staff, and directors & managers. Little did I know how his presentation would permanently change the lives of our instructional leaders and the direction in which our district was going. Little did I know the ultimate impact on our students. Since 1993, the long-term impact of our relationship has been significant and tremendously positive.

Several years ago, I brought Dr. DuFour and his wife, Becky, back to the district to focus on the importance of vision, mission, values, and behaviors & attitudes as they related to our ever-increasing emphasis on our organizational values and ethics. Presented within the constructs of the Professional Learning Communities, it gave our school-based leaders a foundation upon which they could build their school teams so that values and ethics are embedded into the everyday structure of our schools and not considered as add-ons.

At the state level, I am on the Board of Directors for the Florida Association for Staff Development (FASD). I suggested that we bring Rick and Becky to present at our state-level Fall Leadership Conference a few years ago so that all state professional developers in Florida could hear about the work that they were doing with PLCs. The statewide impact of Dr. DuFour's work has again been significant and very positive.

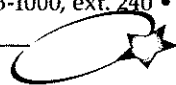
Florida is a very unique state with regard to professional development. We have the Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol which is based on the twelve NSDC standards for professional development. To my knowledge, we are the only state that has a statewide professional development system protocol as extensive and comprehensive as ours. All 67 districts are reviewed every three years through a rigorous examination process of their professional development systems. Florida's protocol has 66 professional development standards that are contained in four strands (planning, delivery, follow up and evaluation) and at three levels (district, school, and faculty). The two most challenging standards to systemically implement center on the implementation of Professional Learning Communities at the school and faculty levels. After working with the PLC

Winner of the 2007
Governor's Sterling Award



Office of Educational Leadership and Professional Development

Phone: (321) 633-1000, ext. 240 • Fax: (321) 633-3433



concepts over the past three years, our district's average rating in the two PLC standards rose dramatically from 2.0 to 3.1 (school level rating) and from 1.8 to 2.8 (faculty level rating). These ratings are based on a 1 to 4 scale with 1 being "unacceptable" and 4 being "excellent". These outstanding results over the past three years are a result of our successful implementation of the PLC concepts. The overall rating for our 2006 protocol results improved 207% over the 2004 results. Our work with PLCs had a great deal to do with this impressive systemic improvement.

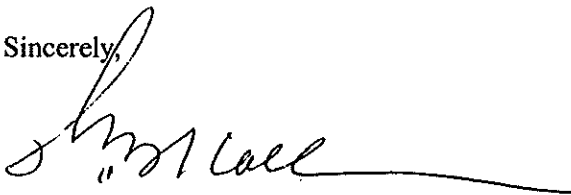
My school district, Brevard Public Schools, was recently awarded the 2007 Governor's Sterling Award. This prestigious award is based on the Baldrige Award Criteria and is awarded to organizations recognized as role models for organizational performance excellence. We are only the second Florida school district in 15 years since the award was established to have received this honor. Several of the recognized strengths and best practices in our application were attributed to Professional Learning Communities and our successful implementation of their concepts.

Dr. DuFour's impact through his work with PLCs is comprehensive on a national and international scale; however, his influence has been equally significant at the personal level. He has encouraged me to continue my work with PLCs by inviting me to be a member of the Professional Learning Communities at Work Leaders Academy. This year-long academy gave participants first-hand experiences and practice with PLC concepts under Dr. DuFour's watchful eye. As a result of my work with the academy, he encouraged me to write for professional journals and present at the national level. These experiences have been professionally and personally rewarding. They have enhanced my work to support PLCs in my own district and state.

Dr. Rick DuFour and his work with Professional Learning Communities have significantly impacted individuals, schools, and school systems for a number of years. This work has had far-reaching, positive results in education in our district, our state, and in our nation. It has been my experience and personal observation that the evidence of the impact of this work is clear and convincing – PLC concepts are the future for improving schools and school districts nationwide. The impact on students, teachers, and schools has been positive and extensive. As a result of implementing PLC concepts, school leadership teams and guiding coalitions in our schools have made significant improvement in student achievement and leadership development.

It is my privilege to enthusiastically recommend Dr. Richard DuFour for consideration for the Brock International Prize in Education for 2009. Should you wish to discuss any part of this recommendation with me, feel free to contact me at 321.633.1000 extension 240.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William B. Hall", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

William B. Hall, Director
Educational Leadership and Professional Development
Brevard Public Schools



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info@rbteach.com (e-mail)

6/19/08

To Whom It May Concern:

I am writing to endorse Dr. Rick DuFour's nomination for the Brock International Award for Education. Dr. DuFour's outstanding accomplishments as principal of Stevenson High School in Illinois are well known and his success in raising student achievement is well documented. Since leaving Stevenson, however, Dr. DuFour has worked tirelessly and with stunning effectiveness to increase the capacity of educators well beyond Illinois.

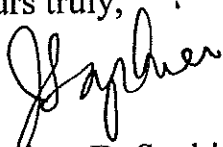
He stands at the center of and is the main force behind what has become a movement that is sweeping the country called the PLC movement, standing for Professional Learning Community. At the heart of this movement are teams of teachers who teach the same content, meeting at least weekly to identify concepts and skills with which students are struggling in their classes. Then they devise re-teaching strategies that remedy the confusion or misconception. A host of leadership and support measures surround these team meetings, things like common curriculum outcomes, common assessments, data analysis tools, scheduling arrangements, team accountability structures, and the skill and courage to build and hold to demanding team norms.

These structures, however, require close collaboration and deep commitment to student success to get results. Rick DuFour has been brilliant at building this spirit and commitment, and teaching others how to do so as well.

Through a series books, articles, and brilliantly designed training experiences, over the last ten years he has reached every corner of the country with a constellation of practical and powerful ideas and empowered educators to implement them.

It is rare for a successful administrator to leave behind the opportunity for higher office or larger superintendencies to become a staff developer. Only a great teacher and inspirational figure like Dr. DuFour could pull it off. We are all better off because he has chosen to do so.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Saphier". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'S'.

Jonathon D. Saphier Ed.D.



SCHOOL DISTRICT 54

Ensuring Student Success

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Edward F. Rafferty
Superintendent of Schools

Letter of Recommendation for Dr. Rick DuFour

June 25, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

It is an honor to be asked to write a letter of support for Dr. Rick DuFour and his work in creating and sustaining Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). If you are looking for an outstanding leader in the field of education, whose work has had a significant impact in School District 54 and in other districts throughout North America, your search should stop here! After thoroughly investigating Dr. DuFour's many contributions, I am certain that you will be proud to add him to your list of distinguished recipients of the Brock International Prize in Education.

This is my 32nd year in public education. No philosophical framework has had as much of an impact on improving teaching and learning as what Professional Learning Communities has to offer. I became Superintendent of Schaumburg Community Consolidated School District 54, the largest elementary school district in Illinois, four years ago. We serve more than 14,000 pre-kindergarten through eighth-grade students in 27 schools. When I was hired, the Board of Education stated that my primary goal was to improve student learning. Prior to my appointment, student achievement results had flat-lined and staff had become complacent. Given the high expectations from our community, in addition to the increased accountability requirements from our state and federal government, these outcomes were no longer acceptable.

I was familiar with many of the PLC principles and the long-term success that schools and districts have experienced after working with Dr. DuFour and utilizing PLCs as a framework. Articles or books that discuss school improvement initiatives typically reference Rick DuFour and his involvement in PLCs. In my first year as Superintendent, I had the opportunity to attend a workshop sponsored by the National School Boards Association; Dr. DuFour was a keynote speaker. During the presentation to more than 2,500 superintendents and school board members, it became readily apparent that Rick DuFour and his extensive experience with PLCs were what we needed to move School District 54 forward.

We have been extremely fortunate to have just completed our third year of work in PLCs. Dr. DuFour has provided ongoing professional development to teams from each of our schools. As his ideas have taken root and our staffs have seen the benefits of the PLC principles, their excitement has spread to many of the neighboring districts. In addition to the 975 District 54 staff members who have attended his two-day workshops, more than 400 teachers and administrators from 20 other districts have participated and are equally as excited about what PLCs have to offer. We currently have requests from an additional seven districts to send teams for training during the coming school year. Our district is not the same as it was prior to Dr. DuFour's involvement. We now have become more focused on what we can do to improve student learning.

The PLC philosophy is the framework that is used to guide our district's school improvement efforts. With Dr. DuFour's support and professional expertise, this framework has enabled us to evaluate and refine our teaching practices. Since our involvement in PLCs, staff members now work collaboratively to analyze student data and utilize the results as they plan instructional activities for their students. The PLC concepts were used as the foundation for the revised District 54 Mission, Vision, Collective Commitments and Goals approved by the Board of Education last year.

Under Dr. DuFour's guidance, PLCs have supported and directed our district's improvement efforts in several key areas. PLCs have helped ensure that our students are learning and achieving at high levels. School structures and support systems that promote a collaborative culture have been created. All staff members now work in grade-level or content-specific teams to analyze their teaching practices and learn from the successes of their colleagues what they can do to enhance student learning. There is a renewed focus on results, with every staff member taking responsibility for student achievement.

Teachers and support staff meet at least two times per week to assess student progress. Through a school-wide coordinated effort, additional time and support for individuals and groups of students are provided. Every school has scheduled, uninterrupted instructional blocks, while also providing additional time on a daily basis to assist students as soon as they experience difficulty. Prior to our involvement in PLCs, help was usually offered after a student was unsuccessful over an extended period of time. Daily enrichment opportunities are also provided for students who have already mastered the particular concepts that are being taught.

Teachers are involved in daily, proactive, problem-solving, professional dialogue, also a significant change that has taken place. Rather than looking for excuses for why a particular student or group of students is not learning, they now collectively work to answer what they can individually or collectively do to support high levels of student achievement. PLC teams evaluate their effectiveness through regular feedback and an ongoing analysis of student achievement data.

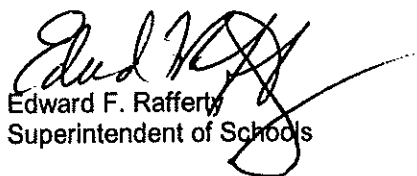
District 54 has already seen strong evidence to support the ongoing implementation of PLCs at the district and school levels. Our action research and data analysis support the growing body of research which has found that implementation of PLCs has a positive impact on both staff and students. Results from staff surveys consistently show that there is greater job satisfaction and increased excitement for teaching.

Students in all 27 schools have demonstrated statistically significant academic gains in math, science and reading. After only one year of working with Rick DuFour and implementing PLCs, District 54 experienced the largest single-year increase in achievement as measured on both state and local assessments. In 2006, our ranking as compared to the other 851 school districts in Illinois moved from 241 to 143. In 2007, we again showed a significant increase in student achievement; our overall rank was 120 out of 851. We are awaiting the official results from the 2008 state assessment results; however, preliminary data indicates a significant increase will be realized again. An independent benchmarking consultant reported that School District 54 has experienced greater gains in student achievement over the past three years than any other school district in Illinois. This unprecedented growth is directly attributed to working with Rick DuFour as our district implemented PLCs.

PLCs will continue to be the vehicle that is used as we strive to meet the new district goals over the next several years. Our district's success is contingent upon every staff member working together to continuously monitor, evaluate and improve teaching practices. The bar has been raised for students, and expectations for our teaching and support staff have increased. Thanks to Rick DuFour and his work in PLCs, we now have the principles, framework and support for ongoing improvement efforts.

I highly recommend Dr. Rick DuFour to be the recipient of the Brock International Prize in Education. His specific contributions to the field of education have a proven record of success. He has assisted us in clarifying our focus and in changing how our schools are structured and operate. He has done this by providing us with the research, strategies and systems to make a significant impact on student learning. We in School District 54 strongly believe that there is no one more deserving than Dr. Rick DuFour to receive the Brock International Prize in Education.

Sincerely,


Edward F. Rafferty
Superintendent of Schools

RIVERSIDE | BROOKFIELD HIGH SCHOOL

DISTRICT 208
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JACK BALDERMANN
SUPERINTENDENT/PRINCIPAL

To the Brock International Prize for Education Committee:

The Professional Learning Community initiative, led by Rick DuFour, is certainly the most powerful and positive movement in American education today. I have visited over 100 high schools throughout the country and presented at conferences throughout our nation. I cannot think of an idea or thinker that have had a more meaningful or significant impact. Rick is the most genuine, caring and effective educational leader I know.

Since I first met Rick DuFour twelve years ago, I have worked with my school improvement teams to implement the Professional Learning Community model at two different high schools. At both schools, the lives of our students were dramatically improved.

At Riverside Brookfield High School (Illinois), our graduation rate increased from a ten year average of 91% to 99% (including a 100% graduation rate for our Hispanic and African-American students), and our student achievement scores saw impressive gains. Before we implemented the Professional learning Community model, our school was not ranked in the top 1,000 high schools in the nation according to *Newsweek* magazine. Last year, Riverside Brookfield was named one of the 100 Best High Schools in America. We have also realized significant gains in the tests mandated by our state. In fact, our high school will rank in the top 1% of most improved schools in Illinois. This would not have occurred without Rick's influence and the Professional Learning Community concepts. Our staff has unanimously employed the PLC model and the quality of education at our school has improved because of it.

Beyond the numbers, statistics and rankings, I am most impressed by Rick's work that encourages that we demand success for every student and do "Whatever it Takes" to see that our students learn.

Rick DuFour has influenced my career more than any other educator, and the Professional Learning Community model is embraced willingly by quality educators throughout this country because it benefits students, schools and teachers.

Sincerely,



Jack Baldermann
Superintendent/Principal

6-25-2008



Kentucky
Association
of School
Administrators

July 9, 2008

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To Whom It May Concern:

It is with great honor that I recommend Dr. Rick DuFour for the prestigious Brock International Prize in Education for 2009. I feel privileged to do this because I have witnessed first hand the positive impact Dr. DuFour's work has and continues to have in Kentucky as we constantly strive to strengthen our school improvement efforts.

As the director of the Kentucky Leadership Academy (KLA), I have had the opportunity to work with Dr. DuFour during the past several years. His "teachings" have influenced the curriculum we use with the Academy, and in other professional growth venues, through his written publications, his video series, and on-site presentations. For the past four years, his work has provided the foundation from which we build our professional learning opportunities for Kentucky's education leaders. We have provided our participants with several of Dr. DuFour's publications to use as professional growth tools and to supplement our efforts. In March of 2009, Rick and Becky DuFour will once again return to Kentucky for two days to continue our PLC work with a presentation entitled "Assessing and Advancing Professional Learning Communities." We will also plan to provide our education leaders with copies of his latest publications.

Not only has Dr. DuFour's work been prevalent in Kentucky through KLA, he has also impacted the professional learning of our CEO network (Kentucky's superintendents), our Kentucky Instructional Leadership Team Network, and our educational cooperatives. In fact, his visit in March 2009 will serve as a culminating event for each of these groups to collaboratively learn together to build even greater capacity to impact student achievement.

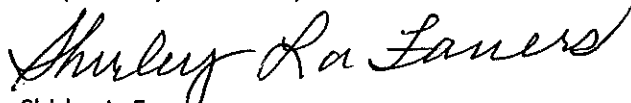
Another result of our work with Rick DuFour has been the formation of a statewide network of professional learning, consisting of educators and education partners, to support our PLC work. The mission of this group is to transform every school and district in Kentucky into a professional learning community. This has very powerful implications.

As evidence indicates, Kentucky has heavily invested our time and fiscal resources in our efforts to embed the PLC philosophy as a critical part of our "learnings." Through our collaborative

efforts with Rick DuFour, Kentucky's schools and districts are embracing the PLC philosophy with remarkable levels of success. And the work continues . . .

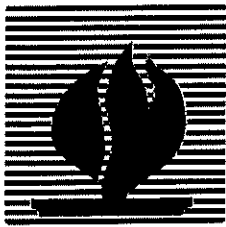
Again, it is with a great deal of professional respect that I support the selection of Dr. Rick DuFour as the recipient of the Brock International Prize in Education for 2009.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shirley LaFavers". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Shirley LaFavers

Director of Professional Development



KENNETH M. YOUNG
Riverside County Superintendent of Schools

Office of the Superintendent

Dear Committee Members of the Brock International Prize in Education,

3939 Thirteenth Street
P.O. Box 868
Riverside, California
92502-0868

47-336 Oasis Street
Indio, California
92201-6998

24980 Las Brisas Road
Murrieta, California
92562

As Superintendent of Riverside County Office of Education (RCOE), I am committed to helping teachers, administrators and school board members in our 23 local school districts provide the highest quality education possible for every student. Dr. Richard DuFour has made a significant contribution to this work in Riverside County. His impact has been far reaching in our county with well over 420,000 students and growing every day, we are California's fourth largest county office of education. We have a long standing tradition of excellence and a reputation for service that ranges far and wide in our field. It is this desire to provide extraordinary service to our districts that has led us to invite Dr. DuFour to Riverside County eight times and consult with him on numerous occasions since 2004.

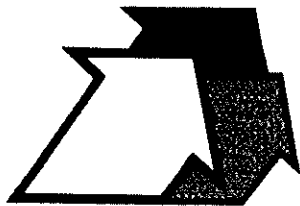
Dr. DuFour's work has had a tremendous effect on the school reform movement in Riverside County and on the work at RCOE where the concepts of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) have become a foundation of the service we provide our districts. Approximately 5,000 educators who work in connection with RCOE have had the opportunity to learn from Dr. DuFour the importance of creating professional learning communities in order to reach the goal of success for all students. Dr. DuFour's influence is magnified as these 5,000 go back to their districts, share what they learned, and expand on the concept that all students can and will learn. The three big ideas of a PLC include (1) Focus on Learning, (2) Collaborative Culture, and (3) Focus on Results as presented by Dr. DuFour easily lead our endeavors. Our schools are improving, our achievement continues to climb, and all of our districts are becoming learning communities.

Noting Dr. DuFour's significant impact on educational practice and instructional leadership that leads to high levels of student learning, I can think of no one who is more deserving of the Brock International Prize Award than Dr. Richard DuFour. He has changed the landscape of the school reform effort to include success for all.

Sincerely,

Kenneth M. Young
Riverside County
Superintendent of Schools
(951) 826-6670 / FAX [951] 826-6199

KMY:rl



SASKATCHEWAN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP UNIT

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College of Education, University of Saskatchewan
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Saskatoon, SK S7N 0X1
Phone: (306) 966-7634 Fax: (306) 966-7916**

Letter of Recommendation For the Brock International Prize in Education

Re: Dr. Richard Dufour

As a starting point for this letter of recommendation for Richard Dufour, I would like to provide the context for my comments regarding his work in our province.

In this regard, I am the Associate Director of the Saskatchewan Education Leadership Unit (SELU) in the Department of Educational Administration, College of Education at the University of Saskatchewan. Our role in the province is to provide services to the field in areas such as leadership development and research. Many of our contracts are with Saskatchewan school districts, making it essential that we are well informed of trends and initiatives undertaken by them. Professional Learning Communities is one such area of interest for our organization.

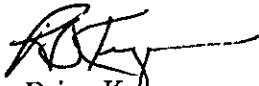
Since 2003, on three occasions our organization has brought Richard and Rebecca Dufour into our province to deliver one or two-day workshops related to the development and implementation of Professional Learning Communities. In each case, the size of the audience grew from 450 to 650 to 1300 participants. Essentially, over this three-year span there have been over 4,000 Saskatchewan teachers and administrators involved in these workshops. This is a testament to the quality of presentations and the delivery of a message that resounded with the participants involved in the workshops. Similar interest has been shown for the PLC movement in Alberta and Manitoba that was generated by the work of Dr. Dufour. Participants typically come away from the workshop with fresh insights and a feeling that changes in the way they work in schools empowers them as professionals and makes a difference in student learning.

From my experience in being an educator in this province for over 35 years, I can't remember any topic that has been as fully embraced by teachers, administrators and school boards than Professional Learning Communities. This is a tremendous tribute to Dr. Dufour and his work in this province. The formalization of teachers working in a

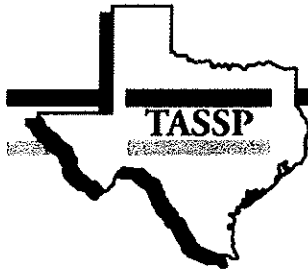
collegial relationship focusing on learning has spurred many of districts to incorporate the principles and practices espoused by Richard Dufour in his presentations, articles and books. The impact of his work in this province has been well documented from our research into school division implementation of PLC's.

In closing, in my opinion and I should say, in the opinion of many of my colleagues in Saskatchewan, Richard Dufour's work in the area of Professional Learning Communities has contributed greatly to education in our province. I would not hesitate to recommend Dr. Dufour to be the recipient of the Brock International Prize in Education for 2009.

Yours truly,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Keegan', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brian Keegan
Associate Director



TEXAS ASSOCIATION OF SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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Pflugerville ISD

Executive Director

Archie E. McAfee

July 21, 2008

Thomas W. Many, Ed. D.
Superintendent of Schools
Kildeer Countryside Community
Consolidated School District 96
1050 Ivy Hall Lane
Buffalo Grove, IL 60089

Dear Dr. Many,

If the selection of the Brock International Award for Education is for instructional leaders who exemplify commitment, knowledge and motivation for creating professional learning communities that make a lasting impact on academic achievement, then **Rick DuFour** is worthy of this honor.

Rick has designed processes based on research, both qualitative and quantitative, that can break the shackles of traditional instructional pedagogy by creating an opportunity for teachers and students to become more engaged in their educational journey. **Rick** demonstrates the courage to provide high-quality, defined methods for increasing collaboration and engagement in the teaching and learning processes. **Rick** promotes interactive teaching strategies that can build a community of learners focused on the needs of the child. He stresses that learning must be relevant, instruction rigorous and relationships personal. Even though students are challenged by what one might call, "barriers to success", **Rick** models high expectations for all students. **Rick** is confident, courageous and committed to sharing his findings with educators and providing the training needed to achieve the desired results.

TASSP recommends **Rick DuFour** for this prestigious award. We ask that you consider this letter of support as a sign of our trust in the impact that **Rick** has made on education in Texas.

Respectfully submitted,

Archie E. McAfee
Executive Director

Cindy Kirby
Director of High School Services

*"Above All,
Students First"*

Texas Association of Secondary
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Janel Keating, Deputy Superintendent

July 20, 2008

To Whom This May Concern:

It is an honor to write this letter in support of Dr. Richard (Rick) DuFour. The intent of this letter is to share the impact of Rick's pioneering work in professional learning communities across the state of Washington, from a single elementary school, to an entire school district, across a region, within a statewide association and ultimately to the senate education committee.

Mountain Meadow Elementary School in Buckley, Washington is an example of Dr. DuFour's impact at the individual school level. Rick's work with professional learning communities served as a roadmap and a way of thinking for improving student learning at Mountain Meadow Elementary and played a significant role in the school's remarkable improvement in student achievement.

After becoming familiar with Rick's work, the staff of Mountain Meadow began implementing a number of "best practices" under the professional learning community framework. It was difficult, and at times frustrating work, but it was also encouraging and exciting work. The staff began working together in a collaborative culture focusing intensely on the learning of individual students. Students began to show improvement. Six years later, the data revealed dramatic improvement, with 98 percent meeting state standards in reading and 92 percent meeting the state standards in math. Mountain Meadow achieved:

- 100% AYP in reading 2004 and 2006; 99% AYP in 2005
- Achieved 100% AYP in math in 2004; 94.6% in 2005; 96.6% in 2006

Mountain Meadow Elementary School was recognized as one of the highest academically performing elementary schools in the state of Washington. It became a showcase school for other teachers and administrators. Other educators were given the opportunity to observe the work of collaborative teams at Mountain Meadow, as well as other successful learning programs, pyramids of intervention and strategies to embed

additional time, support and enrichment for students.

As Mountain Meadow began to receive local and state recognition, the issue became obvious, "If they can do it, why can't we?" Mountain Meadow's success served to "kick start" the entire district on its journey to becoming a professional learning community and the journey has been remarkably successful.

Re-culturing a school district into a professional learning community is not only complex, difficult work, it is an incremental journey that occurs over an extended period of time. Too often educators seek the "quick fix" or the "magic bullet" that will somehow, miraculously transform a district. In White River, we knew that if the professional learning community concept was to have a district-wide impact, we must recognize that unless our efforts ultimately affected what happens in classrooms, with students, our efforts would be in vain. Constant attention has been paid to ensuring that professional learning community practices are drilled deep into school, team and classroom cultures, ultimately impacting the learning of each child. Recently, in a meeting with the White River Board of Education, a veteran teacher and former union president commented, "I have been teaching for 29 years and this is the best work of my career." The voices of the teachers in White River have attracted the attention of other school districts, educational service districts and state organizations in Washington and in other states as well.

The North Central Educational Service District in Wenatchee, Washington has launched a major math initiative-- the Math Leadership Alliance. This alliance includes 29 school districts, with the goal of improving mathematics achievement by 20% across all student demographics over the next three years. Their framework for a regional model to increase student achievement in math – professional learning communities - focuses on four guiding questions that are derived directly from the work of Dr. DuFour:

What do we expect all students to learn?

How will we know when they have learned it?

What are we doing about the students that are not learning?

What are we doing about the students that have already met the standard?

The educators in the North Central Educational Service District are excited about their work with the professional learning community concept and I am confident other Educational Service Districts will join with North Central in utilizing the professional learning community framework to guide improvement initiatives in their member districts. In short, Rick's work is having a tremendous impact at the district and regional level, across the state of Washington.

The Washington State Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development is also utilizing the professional learning communities concept to impact education. The WSASCD responds to professional development needs identified by Washington educators and the needs request for 2008-2010 was a short list. Educators in Washington indicated they were seeking training in the professional learning community

concept and practices. In response to these requests, WSASCD, which has already provided some training in professional learning communities, is offering a number of training sessions in various locations in Washington over the next two years. There is no doubt that Dr. DuFour's work will continue to impact educators for years to come.

Rick's pioneering work in the professional learning community concept hasn't been limited to individual schools, school districts, educational service districts, and state educational associations. Word about the great work in White River reached the ears of the Education Committee of the Washington State Senate and the State department of Education in Olympia! Recently, a contingent of White River educators was invited to present before the Senate Education Committee about the professional learning communities model and its impact on student learning at White River. In a personal note to the State Deputy Superintendent after the presentation, a Washington State Government Relations staff member wrote these words:

"Would you please pass on my sincere thanks...for the informative, uplifting and downright fabulous presentation you gave to Senator McAuliffe and her committee yesterday. I was so pleased that the legislators had this opportunity to hear about what is RIGHT with our public schools."

On a more personal note, I would like to comment on Rick's commitment and work with young leaders in education. One of the basic assumptions of the professional learning community concept is the responsibility of leaders to develop the leadership capacity of others. Rick DuFour not only takes this responsibility seriously, he models it every day. He takes the time to counsel, encourage and inspire the work of other educators who are dedicated to making a difference in the lives of their students. Rick's work is sure to live on for years to come through the work of other leaders who have been mentored by him.

It would be easy to simply focus on the dramatic increases in test scores that resulted from Rick DuFour's professional learning communities work, but the test scores only tell a portion of the story. This work is changing the culture of schools and school districts across Washington State-- a culture that focuses on the learning and emotional needs of each child. Ultimately, Dr. DuFour's greatest contribution is found in the lives of children who are learning more each day in classrooms, schools and school districts in the state of Washington and across North America. I am honored to know and work with Rick DuFour and to share these thoughts about his work and his impact on education and the lives of countless students.

Sincerely,

Janel Keating

Dr. Austin G. Buffum
2611 Via Cascadita
San Clemente, CA 92672

June 23, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

It is my great honor to write this letter of recommendation for Dr. Richard DuFour regarding his nomination for the Brock International Prize in Education for 2009. I want to comment upon the tremendous impact of his work on Professional Learning Communities (PLC) from four different perspectives: Senior Deputy Superintendent of California's ninth-largest school district; recipient of the 2006 Curriculum and Instruction Administrator of the Year Award by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA); Adjunct Professor of Educational Leadership, California State University Fullerton; and as an Associate of Solution Tree, the organization supporting the work of Professional Learning Communities throughout North America.

I served the Capistrano Unified School District, California's ninth-largest school district of 51,000 students for over thirty years, the last nine of which I held the position of Senior Deputy Superintendent – the equivalent of Chief Educational Officer. During those thirty years of service I witnessed, participated in, and directed scores of well-intentioned school improvement initiatives. I can state without equivocation that none of these efforts even approached the impact on the Capistrano Unified School District made by Dr. DuFour and his work with Professional Learning Communities. As a result of his work in our school district, thirty-seven of our fifty-eight schools achieved California Distinguished School status, and eleven of our schools received National Blue Ribbon recognition. Student achievement scores showed continuous, if not remarkable, improvement. The district was asked to share its work at national forums such as the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), and the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP). Additionally, Capistrano Unified received the prestigious Magna Award of the National School Boards Association (NSBA) in both 2002 and 2005. As our district endeavored to increasingly operate as a community of learners, we witnessed an unleashing of human potential and focused energy often hoped for in our past reform efforts, but seldom, if ever realized. All of this was a direct result of the influence of Dr. Richard DuFour, who visited Capistrano Unified on a number of occasions, speaking to both large and small groups of educators and in doing so, made a lasting impact on teaching and learning in our district.

Dr. Austin G. Buffum
2611 Via Cascadita
San Clemente, CA 92672

I believe my selection as the Curriculum and Instruction Administrator of the Year by the Association of California School Administrators (ACSA) was based in large part upon the results generated by Capistrano Unified School District's (CUSD) implementation of PLCs. As interest in Dr. DuFour's work has grown in California, schools and school districts have increasingly examined both the qualitative and quantitative data gathered and utilized by our district to build a model of continuous improvement through implementing PLC concepts. Because of Dr. DuFour's influence on CUSD, monthly tours are now scheduled in several of our schools because educators throughout California and indeed the entire Nation want to see with their own eyes how these schools have transformed their cultures from giving students the opportunity to learn to ensuring that all students learn at high levels. Further evidence of the impact of Dr. DuFour's work throughout California is illustrated by recent high school accreditation visits by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Several of our recent accreditation visits have included a focus upon the school's implementation of PLC concepts – additional evidence that this deep cultural change is not regarded as just another “reform du jour” by this important and prestigious organization.

As an Adjunct Professor at California State University Fullerton (CSUF), I have the opportunity to teach a course entitled “Organizational Leadership” to candidates seeking a Master's Degree in Educational Administration. My syllabus for this course now includes two class sessions devoted to Professional Learning Communities. It seems to me that the work of Dr. DuFour is so important that it merits a place alongside the contributions of Frederick Taylor, Parsons, Blau and Scott, Etzioni, Mintzberg and Senge. Interestingly, because of the inclusion of Dr. DuFour's work in my classroom, other professors at CSUF have now begun to include his work in their syllabi as well, recognizing the tremendous impact that Professional Learning Communities have had thus far upon school and district leadership in North America.

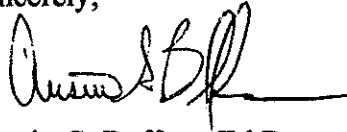
Finally, as an Associate of Solution Tree, I have now had the opportunity to speak in over fifty different schools or school districts throughout the United States, including California, New Mexico, Oregon, Washington, Hawaii, Illinois, Tennessee, Alabama, New Jersey, Nevada, Florida, North Carolina, Ohio and Idaho. I am amazed by the unanimity of interest in and impact of Professional Learning Communities in both the United States and Canada today. Dr. DuFour's work has profoundly impacted the structure and culture of districts I have personally visited, including those as diverse as the Combined K-12 School of Jackpot, Nevada (enrollment 250), and the 210,000 student Houston Independent School District. When implemented with fidelity, I have found that PLCs in very different settings consistently lead to

Dr. Austin G. Buffum
2611 Via Cascadita
San Clemente, CA 92672

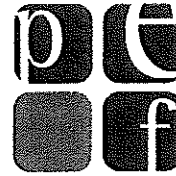
improved student achievement and teacher satisfaction. Never, in my thirty-six year career, have I seen such universal agreement on best practice in education as I see today in the work of Professional Learning Communities as implemented and advocated by Dr. DuFour. Practitioners and researchers such as Michael Fullan, Rick Stiggins, Larry Lezotte, Roland Barth, Doug Reeves and Mike Schmoker have universally endorsed the tenets of PLCs as best practice in education today.

The Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger once said, "Universality is the distinguishing mark of genius." I can personally attest through each of my roles as described above, that I have never witnessed anything so universally effective, impactful and inspiring to the work of educators throughout North America as the development and implementation of Professional Learning Communities by Dr. Richard DuFour.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Austin G. Buffum". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Austin G. Buffum, Ed.D.
Senior Deputy Superintendent (retired)
Capistrano Unified School District, CA
Adjunct Professor, California State University, Fullerton
Curriculum and Instruction Administrator of the Year (2006),
Awarded by the Association of California School Administrators
PLC Associate, Solution Tree Inc.



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www.pefchattanooga.org

June 15, 2008

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of Dr. Rick DuFour, it is with pleasure that I offer a professional and personal reference in support of him receiving the prestigious Brock International Prize in Education for 2009. I am a former middle school principal from a suburban high-poverty school that has traveled on an exciting journey of transformation. The professional learning communities concept was embedded in our school, which at one time was low-performing, and now is an award-winning school that serves as a model for PLC's and high academic achievement. Because of the success in our school and the national publicity that it still receives, I was sought to apply for a directorship for an urban initiative. I am now employed by the Public Education Foundation as the Director for the Benwood Initiative in Chattanooga, Tennessee. This initiative, created and supported by civic leaders, is focused on closing the achievement gaps to increase the achievement in 16 high poverty schools. A strong sense of urgency to transform these schools exists since 9 out of 16 schools were at one time the lowest performing schools in the state.

Since November, these schools have embraced the concepts of professional learning communities, and Dr. DuFour continues to support the goals of our initiative. His research, teachings, and presentations have accelerated the professional development initiatives in the Benwood Schools. He adds a personal touch by accommodating phone calls, e-mail responses, and by "being there" for us when we need to access his professional expertise. At the June institute in Nashville, he took time out of his busy agenda to have lunch with our principals to offer support for their work and leadership. His "Whatever It Takes" attitude continues to permeate the culture of this county. We seek knowledge through his books and network with other schools across the nation that demonstrate the passion and persistence that is needed for our journey. Thanks to his teaching and leadership, we are embarking on changing the culture of schools, and most importantly the lives of children. Through the work of professional learning communities, there is hope for all children, regardless of skin color or socioeconomic status, to attain high levels of learning that lead to their success.

By experience, I am a strong believer in the power of professional learning communities. Thanks to Rick's encouragement, I have been afforded this opportunity to continue this work from a suburban coastal town in Texas to the urban/suburban areas of Tennessee. Rick has not only supported my career change, but has served as a "cheerleader" and coach throughout this experience. He not only inspires me to "expand the territory" of professional learning communities, but inspires the nation to work collaboratively to achieve great things for children. I am blessed to be one of his colleagues, associates, and friend.

Respectfully,

Clara Sale-Davis, Director
Benwood Initiative

California League of Middle Schools

6615 E. Pacific Coast Highway, Suite 120 • Long Beach, CA 90803 • (800) 326-1880 • FAX 562-430-5607

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Peter F. Murphy

June 30, 2008

Committee Member Representing Richard DuFour
2009 Brock International Prize in Education

Dear Committee Member:

As the executive director of the nonprofit organizations the California League of Middle Schools (CLMS) and California League of High Schools (CLHS), I am writing to inform you of the impact that the professional learning communities (PLCs) model is making and will continue to make on public education.

PLCs are one of the most powerful reform tools available to K-12 schools. For teachers, they open doors that are otherwise closed, provide the opportunity to collaboratively discuss individual students, and allow stronger faculty members to share their knowledge and skills with less experienced or less skilled colleagues. By working together, faculty members can improve their own practice, as well as the school's overall curriculum, instruction and assessment, climate, community and more – all the components that impact student learning.

For students, PLCs can counter what current research shows – that students feel disconnected from school and disengaged from learning. By having procedures in place to ensure that multiple adults interact with struggling students to reach specific outcomes, student success rates improve in properly implemented PLC schools.

Schools benefit from PLCs by engaging faculty around the mission and goals of the school and having a structure in place that promotes staff buy-in and school-wide implementation of positive change. Schools that are struggling have the opportunity to systematically and holistically examine their practices for improvement. And, as every organization can always improve, successful schools can do the same.

Richard DuFour's name is synonymous with Professional Learning Communities. He is highly respected among teachers and administrators alike. Word of mouth has spread; educators of all grade levels are eager to learn from him and implement, or improve their implementation of, PLCs. After all, his message is empowering and makes sense at the gut level to veteran educators.

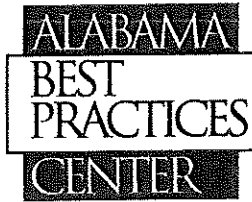
From board members to panel members and colleagues throughout public education in California and in the nation, I know many educators who are participating in professional learning communities at their school sites and are energized by the process. In the 35-plus years I've been in education, I have never seen a reform offer as great an opportunity to make a difference in student success as the professional learning communities concept does.

The fact that Richard DuFour has managed to create, implement and share the success of the collaborative PLC model so broadly shows the strong impact he has made and continues to make on public education. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (800) 326-1880, ext. 26 or p_murphy@clms.net.

Sincerely,



Peter Murphy
Executive Director, CLMS and CLHS
President, National Forum to Accelerate Middle-Grades Reform



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www.bestpracticescenter.org

May 30, 2008

Tulsa Community Foundation
Brock International Prize in Education
7020 S. Yale Avenue #220
Tulsa, OK 74136

Dear Brock Prize Executive Committee:

It is my distinct pleasure and honor to write about the impact of Rick DuFour's work on teaching and learning in Alabama. The work of Dr. DuFour first came to our attention about eight years ago, just as the Alabama Best Practices Center was established by the A+ Education Foundation. A+, the state's Business Roundtable affiliate, has strong working relationships with Governor Bob Riley, the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education.

A+ works for great schools for every child – and a bright future for Alabama. The Alabama Best Practices Center contributes to that mission by helping educators utilize effective professional development to improve teaching and learning in their schools. Its mission is to help teachers and administrators develop the competence, commitment and courage to do whatever it takes to improve student learning.

Our research into best practice led us to the work of Dr. DuFour and the role of professional learning communities (PLCs). Helping educators understand and implement PLCs has become the cornerstone of our work.

Just this week, Dr. Joellen Killion, the Deputy Executive Director of the National Staff Development Council and the external evaluator for our Wachovia Teachers and Teaching Initiative grant, was in Alabama to gauge the impact of our work. Without exception, every educator mentioned the impact of PLCs, and most mentioned Rick DuFour's name.

The Wachovia Foundation grant enables the Alabama Best Practices Center to provide ongoing professional development to the state and regional staff of the Alabama Reading Initiative. This highly acclaimed initiative is now in every elementary school in the state. This year, the state is investing \$64.5 million in the Alabama Reading Initiative, with the major portion of that funding allocated to the provision of school-based reading coaches. For the first two years, we focused the Alabama Reading Initiative's professional development on professional learning communities. The initiative's more than 100 staff members serve more than a thousand schools.

We began with the concept of learning communities because we were convinced that a collaborative school culture girded by high expectations for every child was necessary to

reach the goal of 100 percent literacy in every school in Alabama. We designed highly interactive book studies for *Whatever it Takes*, *On Common Ground*, and *Learning by Doing* and provided the training and materials to the state and regional staff in a train-the-trainer model.

We also used PLCs as the theme for the Powerful Conversations Network, made up of more than 200 Alabama schools interested in improving teaching and learning. To “practice what we preach,” we instituted afternoon inquiry groups at our Quarterly Meetings, where school leadership teams from 5-6 schools met to discuss their SMART goals and learn from each other.

Is this emphasis on professional learning communities making a difference? Last fall, Alabama led the nation in 4th-grade reading gains on the National Assessment of Education Progress, also known as the Nation’s Report Card. Mark Schneider, Commissioner, National Center for Educational Statistics, said:

“Alabama’s gain in fourth grade reading scores is higher than any other state between 2005 and 2007. This gain stands out for this year’s assessment, and in the history of NAEP’s state-level Reading Assessment.”

During this week’s focus group, the ARI staff member who directs regional reading coach trainers indicated that emphasis on creating vibrant learning communities in ARI schools was key to improved teaching and learning.

Six years ago, the term professional learning community was largely unfamiliar to Alabama educators. Today – because of Dr. DuFour’s work and the emphasis that the Alabama Best Practices Center and the Alabama Reading Initiative have placed on it – professional learning communities are quickly becoming the norm.

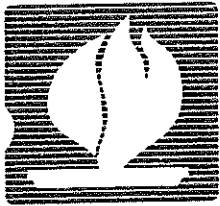
Recently when I was looking for a succinct way to describe our work, I once again turned to Rick DuFour. In his book *Learning by Doing*, he tells us that “when educators learn to clarify their priorities, to assess the current reality of their situation, to work together, and to build continuous improvement into the very fabric of their collective work, they create conditions for ongoing learning and self-efficacy essential to solving whatever problems they confront.”

That succinctly describes our philosophy and our work.

Sincerely,



Cathy Gassenheimer
Executive Vice President for the
Alabama Best Practices Center



**RIVERSIDE COUNTY
OFFICE OF EDUCATION**
KENNETH M. YOUNG
Riverside County Superintendent of Schools

To Whom It May Concern:

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92201-6998

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92562

Riverside County, California is one of the fastest growing regions in the United States today. It is quite diverse with schools serving more than 400,000 students in 23 different school districts, including 24% limited English speakers and 26 different home languages. In 2002, our newly-elected superintendent initiated the call that we at the county office of education were to serve our districts on a more regular and timely basis. We were to be more available at school sites, not sitting at our desks planning events. At the same time, the accountability movement hit the state and the country...and we were found wanting. Many of our students were not proficient in reading, writing, or math. In particular, our significant subgroups were in danger; the English learners, the children of poverty, and the special education students. We went into the field armed with the traditional means of creating change. But the interesting thing about change is that it is rarely brought about by tradition. We built a good work and called ourselves Riverside County Achievement Team, but there was something missing. That something, we later learned, would be of benefit to all students. That something would ask the questions: *What do we want our students to learn? How do we know they have learned? What do we do if they don't learn?* That something used the keyword "learning," not "teaching." That something is PLC, Professional Learning Communities. Listening to the words, reading the books, and studying the research of Dr. Richard DuFour turned our world upside down. We had found the "something" we needed to make a difference in the lives of our students in Riverside County. Our new vision became: "Every school assisted by RCAT will demonstrate improvement through a sustainable, systematic focus on learning that is grounded in the professional learning community process."

Currently in 2008, a new superintendent has deepened our commitment to school improvement through the expectation of "extraordinary service, support, and partnership." And, our work continues.

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Adolfo Mediano, Jr.

The idea of having a mission, vision, values and goals built on, not rhetoric of years past, but on professional learning communities that advocate for current reality and a sense of urgency has developed. We, as a profession, are not successful if our constituents are failing... and many were. A focus on learning-results and collaboration around data, gave a name and a need to a before nondescript number on a page of charts and graphs.

In January, 2004, the Riverside County Office of Education held its first DuFour Conference with Dr. DuFour presenting his experience and research in creating Professional Learning Communities. We set a limit to the number of participants we could accommodate, but soon realized we had more interest than the room

could hold. The wave of enthusiasm grew and so did additional DuFour conferences. We concluded an event in September 2007 for 1,200 registrants and have another one scheduled for November, 2008 for the same number. Over the last four years nearly 5,000 educators have participated in these events. Every nationally scheduled DuFour event is filled. One participant responded that listening to Dr. DuFour speak was like a religious experience—or maybe a better phraseology would be a great awakening to what we as educators need to be doing *to help all students learn*.

Throughout our county, each of our twenty-three districts is working toward becoming a PLC. At our office, the student programs we provide in alternative and special education are using this model to improve achievement. We have been invited to speak at other county offices in California about what we do here that is different, and then the answer to the question: *How do we do it?* We have a partnership with the California Department of Education to focus on the achievement of special education students in sixteen sites throughout California. The resulting data of improvement is leading us to create a certificate program where other county office educators can learn from our experiences and implement their own PLC. All of this work is based on the concepts of professional learning communities. The work of Dr. DuFour has had a tsunami effect in Riverside County and throughout California.

Others could write a much more professional letter than I, but this letter of recommendation for Dr. Richard DuFour and how he has had a significant impact on education comes from my heart. He has changed the way we do business in education. We no longer look to working in isolation as the means to improve student achievement; we collaborate and work together. The research is lined up behind this change agent—PLC. Today's leading educators are proponents and advocates. One principal stated clearly, "PLC is not a program, another new idea, or a simple process. It cannot be categorized, compartmentalized or limited to scheduled times. PLC is what you are, do and live. It's a mindset."

It is without hesitation that we recommend Dr. Richard DuFour for the prestigious Brock International Award in Education. To say he has made a significant impact on the practice and understanding of the science and art of education, is at best an understatement. Learning communities are a powerful systems change whose benefits will grow as teams of educators put the learning of our students foremost. We see the results daily at the schools and districts we visit. Student achievement is on the rise in Riverside County. Dr. DuFour has been the catalyst and the leader for this change.

Respectfully,



Nita Grantham, Director I
Riverside County Office of Education
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POWAY UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

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June 27, 2008

Re: Richard DuFour and Professional Learning Communities

To Whom It May Concern:

It gives me great pleasure to write this letter of commendation for Richard DuFour as a powerful educator whose work has positively impacted the lives of millions of students. I first met Rick 8 years ago when he visited my district to share his story about reculturing Adlai Stevenson High School. Rick's ideas ignited the minds of every person in the room and, simultaneously, touched the hearts of each and every educator. He helped us believe and gave us hope that we could achieve the mission of our organization ~ "All Students Learning ... Whatever It Takes."


Since that time, the seeds that Rick planted have continued to sprout and grow at all 34 schools in our district. Each of the 3 big ideas of a professional learning community have taken root and reaped benefits for students across our system. By focusing on learning, teachers at all levels and in all grades have ensured that their students successfully meet academic standards. The results are evident in the fact that 99.96% of Poway's 2007 graduates passed the California High School Exit Exam.

The second big idea of a professional learning community – collaborative culture – has also taken root. Meetings throughout the system focus on professional learning and collaboration. Classified staff members, certificated administrators, and teachers alike dedicate a portion of every week to learning and continuous improvement. As a result, significant progress has been made towards reaching each of our district's two key goals. Critical to our success is the unique and powerful collaborative relationship that exists between district management and each of the three unions representing teachers and classified staff members.

Finally, because our district has embraced the third big idea of governing our actions by results, our students continue to excel. Poway is recognized across the state and nation as a high-performing district whose students set the standard of excellence for their peers. At the conclusion of the 2007-2008 school year, 100% of our schools had met all NCLB requirements.

In conclusion, Rick DuFour and the concepts of a professional learning community have had a profound influence on students, teachers, and schools across the continent. Because of his continued efforts, students' lives are being touched in ways that will create more opportunities for their futures than ever before. Without question, Rick is deserving of recognition and appreciation for his work.

Sincerely,


Janet Malone
Director of Staff Development

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Black Mountain Ranch, Carmel Mountain Ranch, Rancho Bernardo, Rancho Peñasquitos, Sabre Springs, Santa Fe Valley, Torrey Highlands, 4S Ranch

June 30, 2008

To the International Prize in Education for 2009 Awards Committee:

It is with great pleasure I write this letter of support for Dr. Richard P. DuFour the quintessential leader of the *Professional Learning Communities* educational reform movement. His passion is the improved achievement of every student, and his legacy is the cultural shift in adult — administrative and faculty — learning and development that makes it a reality.

As the former Director of Mathematics and Science, the immediate past Superintendent of Adlai E. Stevenson High School District 125 in Lincolnshire, Illinois, and a twenty-one year administrator in the District, I had the privilege and benefit of working with Dr. DuFour in the very “school laboratory” in which he crafted the mission and vision of adults working in schools committed to becoming a professional learning community. When looking for the root causes to why students do not learn, researcher and staff developer Doug Reeves states:

A growing body of research ... makes it clear that poverty and ethnicity are not the primary causal variables related to student achievement. These demographic variables have strength only when researchers fail to measure teaching and leadership variables. In other words, when the adults in the system—teachers and leaders—start to take responsibility for their role in educational accountability, it becomes much more difficult to blame children and parents for poor student achievement.

- Doug Reeves, 2000 -

Dr. DuFour single handedly blasted through the 1980's and 1990's mindset barrier that student learning must be conditional to factors outside of any adult responsibility. Dr. DuFour synthesized research, transformed craft knowledge from industry into the educational genre, and authored or co-authored four groundbreaking books that have

become a sustained and systemic part of the staff development curriculum at thousands of school districts throughout the United States.

These books include:

- *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (1998 and 2008). This book has been recognized by the National Staff Development Council as one of the essential elements in the historical evolution of professional learning and development in schools.
- *Whatever it Takes* (2004)
- *On Common Ground* (2005)
- *Learning by Doing* (2006)

Dr. DuFour has also published more than forty educational leadership articles for ASCD, NSDC, Kappan, Solution Tree, NSDC and NASSP to name a few, that are required reading in most university graduate school educational leadership classes.

In large part, due to Dr. DuFour's passionate vision for and commitment to the ideals of professional learning communities, our school district has been host to more than 15,000 educational leaders representing over 1100 school districts throughout the world during the past six years. An educational revolution that requires adult accountability and responsibility for sustained and significant improvement in student learning has been sparked by Richard DuFour's uncanny ability to lead and teach other school leaders and teachers to explore the barriers of teacher isolation and the inherent inequities and inconsistent rigor caused by such isolation.

Leading educational and "results-driven" authority Michael Schmoker established an "Iron Clad Case for Professional Learning Communities" and stated that "*the best, least expensive, most professional rewarding way to improve schools*" is through professional learning communities. Dr. Schmoker joins a chorus of highly recognized educational professionals that can testify to Dr. Richard DuFour's crucial leadership role in serving as the catalyst and bridge of professional learning community theory into actual school practice. The founding father of this educational reform movement, Dr. DuFour has brought coherence to many of the nation's leading thinkers on this issue including: Thomas Sergiovanni, Michael Fullan, Doug Reeves, Dennis Sparks, Richard Elmore, Rick Stiggins, Linda Darling-Hammond, Milbrey McLaughlin, James Stigler, Grant Wiggins, and others.

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins identifies *professional will and personal humility* as an essential trait of best organizational leaders – or Level 5 Leaders. This is the essence of Dr. Richard DuFour. He is a leader that has tremendous will for removing barriers to student learning, holding all adults accountable to a cycle of continuous improvement, and taking personal responsibility for creating hope and high expectations for all

students. Dr. DuFour is a window/mirror leader –he looks in the mirror to take responsibility for poor results, and he gives credit to others while looking out the window when success is to be celebrated.

In his book, *Whatever it Takes: How Professional Learning Communities Respond When Kids Don't Learn*, Dr. DuFour states:

We should indeed promote high levels of learning for every child entrusted to us, not because of legislation or fear of sanctions, but because we have a moral and ethical imperative to do so. We can no longer claim that our [adult] efforts have no impact on the learning of our students. Second, it is possible to help more students succeed at higher levels than ever before if we are willing to change many of our assumptions and practices, most of which draw their origins from earlier times when education was intended to serve a far different purpose. This book rests upon the conviction that test scores will take care of themselves if educators commit to ensuring that each student masters essential skills and concepts in every unit of instruction, align their practices and resources toward that purpose, and discontinue many traditional practices that do not serve that purpose.

Rick DuFour is an extremely talented and gifted leader, and these words capture the fundamental essence of his expectations – and the expectations of a professional learning community. His work has had such a significant impact on my life as a leader, that as President of the National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM), we created the PRIME National Leadership Standards Framework built upon the tenets of a professional learning community and the expectations of the shifts in adult behaviors that will deeply impact student achievement. The PRIME Framework is a reflection of the teachings of Dr. DuFour.

I can think of no one more deserving for this prestigious award than Dr. Richard DuFour.

Most sincerely,



Timothy D. Kanold, Ph.D.
President, National Council of Supervisors of Mathematics (NCSM)

TDK:nw



A n a m C a r a
Leading and Learning with Soul

June 6, 2008

Dear Brock Prize Committee,

I recommend Dr. Richard DuFour for the Brock International Prize in Education. Given the award's purpose – to honor an individual who has made a specific innovation or contribution to the science and art of education, resulting in a significant impact on the practice or understanding of the field of education – I can think of no other as deserving of this award as Dr. DuFour for his work in developing and implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).

I have the privilege of supporting schools across North America in implementing and operating as Professional Learning Communities. In my 20 years as an educator and school improvement facilitator, I have never observed a more powerful school improvement effort than when teachers collaborate in community to answer what it is they want students to learn, use common assessments to determine whether or not they have learned it, and problem-solve to address both the students who did not learn it and the students who already know it. Teacher engagement in this process is empowering and the results are stunning! Classroom by classroom and school by school, teachers are impacting student learning with achievement scores that make significant gains in a single year's time and then continue the upward climb to close achievement gaps. I believe the remarkable and consistent student achievement gains alone should qualify Dr. DuFour as having made a significant impact in the practice and understanding of the work of education.

I believe there are two additional qualifiers regarding Dr. DuFour's work that probably don't have much formal documentation or publicity around them quite yet, but that are equally significant to his contribution: collective efficacy and hopefulness.

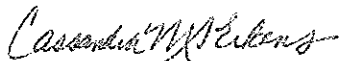
The idea of improving low achievement results can be daunting and teachers often express a sense of being overwhelmed and helpless as they begin. Fortunately, the PLC process helps them quickly understand and claim their own powerbase. The first time I observed this, I was working in a high school that nervously agreed to address their reading scores school wide using the PLC process. In one year's time the students in that

school moved from performing below the state average to exceeding the state average in reading. Even though the school had additional work to do in addressing their reading achievement gap, staff now understood their ability and accepted their responsibility to make a difference. Teacher efficacy across the staff seemed to increase as dramatically as their achievement results and this pattern is consistent in all of the PLC schools and districts in which I work. In effective PLC schools, collective efficacy is both evident and irreversible.

It goes without saying that consistent increases in student achievement and dramatic improvements in teacher efficacy create a sense of hope. More than that, however, I am noticing a fundamental shift in the way we now approach our work; across the field, our attitudes and even our language has begun to change from "victim" to "victor." It may be because I have the thrill of working with empowered teachers almost every day, but it seems as if we are now reaching a tipping point where hope is more prevalent than despair because even those who've not yet experienced participation in a Professional Learning Community are beginning to notice and understand that the potential for impacting student achievement exists. Like the staffs with whom I work, I now have hope that we can, in fact, revamp and revitalize education for the benefit of student *and* teacher learning.

Selecting Dr. Richard DuFour for the Brock International Prize in Education would not only be appropriate, it would also be advantageous as it would continue the momentum of hope and spread the word that school improvement really is possible, enabling the Brock International Prize itself to contribute to "a significant impact on the practice or understanding of the field of education."

Sincerely,



Cassandra M. S. Erkens
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