Definition

Over the years, groups of teachers collaborating have gone by different names: critical friends groups (CFGs), professional learning communities (PLCs), intensive learning teams (ILTs), and many school-specific alternatives. The Great Schools Partnership (GSP) uses the term professional learning group (PLG). PLGs are small teams of teachers who may share common students, interests, or teaching responsibilities, such as the same content area, grade level, or team assignment. Groups may also be organized in a cross-curricular way to deepen collegiality, collaboration, and program cohesion. The goal of these groups is to capture and build on the knowledge and skills of participating teachers in ways that will help them equitably support the aspirations and achievement of all students.

To ensure scheduled time is used effectively and remains focused on increasing educational equity, PLGs should:

- Meet regularly
- Have skilled facilitation
- Use agendas and protocols to discuss teacher work, student work, research, and data
- Be configured in a way that has value for each participant.

Rationale

Professional learning groups can be powerful vehicles for ongoing professional development in any school. With clear and shared purposes, regular meeting times that are prioritized, and effective facilitation, PLGs can influence the culture of the school community and increase equitable outcomes for all students. By honoring the skills and knowledge of each participating teacher, as well as the research and experiences of educators outside the PLG, teachers can develop strategies to reach all students. PLGs give structure to professional conversations and provide a safe forum in which colleagues can examine student data, learn from student work, and share instructional strategies, while also working through dilemmas in collaboration rather than isolation. As PLG tools and structures become embedded in meetings throughout the school community, a culture of authentic collaboration can develop that is palpably different from other types of teacher meetings.

For PLGs to have a lasting and sustained impact, ongoing care and attention must be given to defining and clarifying their purpose, designing their structure, ensuring ongoing supports, and nurturing a culture of collaborative, student-focused professional learning.