

LEARNING TEAMS

A Learning Team is composed of individuals from the school community who are selected and prepared to collect and interpret data to inform the school's educational plan, provide support to teachers, enable professional development embedded at the school site for all personnel in the school, and help create positive conditions in the school context for teachers' as well as students' learning. The ultimate purpose of the Learning Team is to increase student learning, with an initial emphasis on literacy. The Learning Team is the key to continuing school improvement and is pivotal to creating and sustaining a dynamic professional learning community at each school site.

At a minimum, the Learning Team will be composed of the principal, the literacy coach, the math teacher leader and one or more teachers centrally involved in developing and monitoring the school's educational plan. Additional members might include other school leaders, individuals with expertise in literacy, parents and members of the community. The intent is to keep the Learning Team small and efficient. The team is expected to meet on a weekly basis to engage in the tasks identified above and to ensure continuing progress towards having each child on grade level. The working group of the MPA that drafted the guidelines for developing Learning Teams is aware that principals may have already established a variety of effective collaborative working groups in their schools and that in some buildings Learning Teams may be an adaptation of an existing organizational structure.

The Learning Team differs, however, in that it is charged with meeting weekly to keep the goal of improving student and teacher learning at the forefront of the school's work. Some of this weekly meeting time will likely be found through flexible staffing and creative scheduling. At other times the teams will need to meet after school. The MPA seeks funding to support such meetings on a weekly basis. In summary, the Learning Team differs from a committee in several ways: 1) because the scope of their work demands weekly meetings, at least initially; 2) because of their sustained emphasis on improving pupil performance in literacy; 3) because it will have an individual in a new position, the Literacy Coach, as a member; and 4) because the members of the Learning Team will contribute in a central way to the educational plan, specifically in terms of what the school is doing to advance student learning in literacy.

A well-functioning Learning Team is the vehicle to ensure that each building's educational plan is data driven, that the curriculum is aligned with standards and assessments, that school-based decision making is a shared responsibility involving teacher leadership and principal leadership, and that schools demonstrate fiscal responsibility in acquiring resources that support a balanced approach to literacy. The Learning Team is also the vehicle for creating the conditions that support the development of a professional learning community in each school, a community where teachers regularly engage in discussions of student work and how best to promote student achievement.