# Collaboration and Shared Accountability

**Quality professional learning facilitates the development of a shared purpose for student learning and collective responsibility for achieving it.**

Learning is an active, social process of constructing understanding and meaning. Professional learning research confirms this concept and shows that educators improve when they work in community to build common goals, exchange practices, and share accountability for outcomes. While educators can individually engage in some types of professional learning, tasks such as evaluating and solving problems of practice or implementing evidence-based instructional practices are usually best accomplished peer-to-peer or collectively. When successfully facilitated, collaboration among educators capitalizes on their multiple perspectives and experiences and distributes responsibilities across the group so that there is sustained interest and long-term focus on problem solving and improving practice.

To have the greatest impact on increasing educator and student results at the school site or district level, quality professional learning must include broad, collaborative participation from, for example, the principal, content and special-assignment teachers, nurses, librarians, counselors, technology specialists, and other instructional and support staff. When additional expertise or support is needed to address professional learning goals, educators may choose to work with collaborators who are external to the site and who can offer needed options that are meaningful, relevant, and results oriented. Roles of participants vary widely across districts and schools, depending on the local context. However, educators, regardless of roles, share responsibility to effectively address student learning needs and are accountable for continuously developing individual and collective expertise to do so successfully.

## Element A: Collaborative Culture

Quality professional learning builds a culture of collaboration and mutual trust by facilitating opportunities for educators to work together to strengthen their practice and improve student learning.

### INDICATORS

Quality professional learning:

1. Establishes professional communities of practice to support mutually agreed-upon student learning goals and outcomes.

2. Sets clear purposes, goals, and working agreements that support the sharing of practices and results within a safe and supportive environment.

3. Integrates a common understanding of the terminology and group process skills involved in establishing and sustaining a professional community of practice.

4. Structures collective learning around an evidence-based cycle of continuous learning and improvement, maintaining a consistent focus on shared goals.

5. Supports educators in making practice more transparent, through peer observation, common planning, and experimentation with feedback.

## Element B: Shared Accountability

Quality professional learning builds the capacity of educators to commit to shared ownership and accountability for effective professional practice and student learning.

### INDICATORS

Quality professional learning:

1. Emphasizes educators' responsibility to hold themselves and their peers accountable for upholding professional standards and improving student learning outcomes.

2. Expects educators to identify personal challenges and receive constructive support from their peers that expands their personal and collective expertise.

3. Extends educators' commitment to try new approaches and share results with their colleagues.

4. Presents opportunities to recognize and use the expertise of educators within schools or districts.

## Element C: External Networks

Quality professional learning includes external collaborations that provide effective options for educators with diverse experiences and needs to improve their practice.

### INDICATORS

Quality professional learning:

1. Builds educators' skills in working with and evaluating external professional learning providers.

2. Includes families, community members, regional partnerships, institutions of higher education, professional organizations, and others as professional learning providers and partners.

3. Structures opportunities for educators and external collaborators to exchange promising prac-tices and resources.

4. Capitalizes on relationships with networks that have specialized expertise or resources, in order to extend educators' access to resources not available locally.

5. Uses technology to support cross-community communications and extend educators' access to learning and resources.