

## **CHARACTERISTICS OF PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY**

### ***Building Professional Community in Schools***

Sharon Kruse, Karen Seashore Louis, and Anthony Bryk  
Issues in Restructuring Schools – Issue Report No. 6; Spring 1994  
University of Wisconsin – Center on Organization and Restructuring

#### **1. De-Privatization of Teaching Practices**

Teachers share, observe, and discuss each other's teaching methods and philosophies; for example, through peer coaching. By sharing practice in public, teachers learn new ways to talk about what they do, and the discussions kindle new relationships between the participants.

#### **2. Opportunities for Reflective Dialogue**

Members of the community talk about their situations and the specific challenges they face. Together, they develop a set of shared norms, beliefs, and values that form a basis for action. Members of the community can use these discussions to critique themselves as well as the institution within they work. These critiques can take several different directions: they can focus on subject matter and how to present it to students, for example on generic teaching strategies, on student learning and development, on the social conditions of schooling, and issues of equity and justice.

#### **3. Collective Focus on Student Learning**

Teachers are focused on student learning. They assume that all students can learn at reasonably high levels, and the teachers can help them, despite many obstacles that students may face outside of school. Within a strong professional community, this focus is not enforced by rules, but by mutually felt obligation among teachers.

#### **4. Collaborative Workplaces**

Strong professional community encourages teachers to work together, not only to develop shared understandings of students, curriculum, and instructional policy, but also to produce materials and activities that improve instruction, curriculum, and assessment for students, and to produce new and different approaches to staff development for the teachers themselves.

#### **5. Shared Norms of Operation and Core Values**

Through their words and actions, teachers joined in a professional community affirm their common values concerning critical educational issues, and in support of their collective focus on student learning. These values can address children and their abilities to learn, priorities for the use of time and space within a school setting, and the proper role of teachers, parents, and administrators. For example, teachers might require students who are failing to take part in after-school study sessions. They devise a school policy for dealing with the added burdens these sessions entail. This would show that teachers value student achievement, and that they are willing to take responsibility for giving extra help to students who are failing.