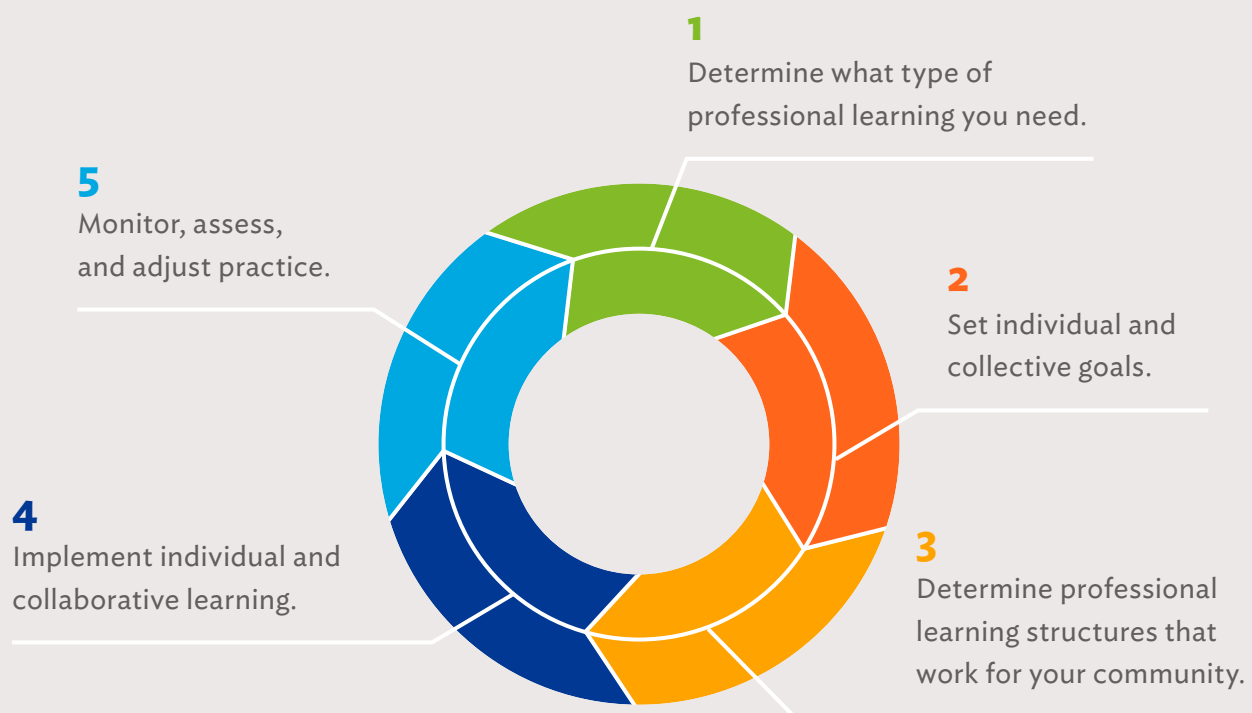


Continuous Professional Learning Cycle

Continuous Professional Learning refers to sustained efforts over time to improve knowledge and skills.

This tool is based on Learning Forward's Learning Team Cycle¹. It is designed to help educators take an in-depth look at the continuous learning process and develop a plan to support and nurture individual and collective growth with district and school staff. Use the resources in the Healthier Generation [Action Center](#) and [Training Center](#) to support you in this process.



¹Crow, T., & Hirsh, S. (2018). *Becoming a Learning Team: A Guide to a Teacher-led Cycle of Continuous Improvement*. Learning Forward.



Determine what type of professional learning you need.

- Use the self-assessments in the [Healthier Generation Action Center](#) to determine areas where your school or district staff would benefit from professional learning.
- Incorporate qualitative and quantitative data (like feedback and data on student discipline) from staff, students, and parents as appropriate.
- Get to the *root cause* of issues that data may surface and the current conditions under which they exist. Ask questions such as:
 - » Where are we now?
 - » Why and how did we get here?
 - » How can we move forward?



Set individual and collective goals.

- Put your learning into action.
 - » Invite staff to create an individual professional learning goal and a way to check-in with a peer, coach, and/or supervisor on challenges, successes, and progress towards meeting that goal.
 - » Encourage department or grade-level teams to set a goal together and check in on it during their meetings.
 - » Set a school-wide goal together that you revisit during staff meetings.
- Be realistic about timelines and start small.

Before you share with staff, ensure you've scheduled or planned for follow up. It's challenging to convince staff to take on extra professional learning unless they know they'll be making good use of it.



Determine professional learning structures that work for your community.

Some structures you might use are:

- *Pre-planning or summer professional development* – This provides an opportunity for training to kick off yearlong commitments, build excitement, and create a common language among new and returning staff.
- *Professional Learning Community (PLC) models* – This may be a higher lift if your school does not already have this model in place. [Here](#) are some ideas on creating effective professional learning communities.
- *Staff meetings, grade-level and/or department meetings* – A repetitive agenda is important to provide staff with predictability and to help them prepare to engage with professional learning during these meetings. Consider revisiting continuous professional learning at the start of each meeting to ensure protected time for the topic. It may lead to processing challenges, venting through the lens of the professional learning, or discussing new strategies, leading to problem-solving.
- *Teacher workdays* – To make the most of teacher workdays or professional development days, provide an agenda in advance and create learning based on school-wide goals. Determine ways to incorporate the training or content studies (reviewed below), in addition to timely needs flagged by staff feedback.
- *Independent learning* – How can you encourage continuous professional learning done independently? Twitter, Instagram, and other social media platforms are a great way for teachers to engage in their own self-paced learning. Consider having a teacher who is highly engaged on these platforms showcase content and support they've gained through these channels to inspire others or help them sign up.
- *Coaching structures* – Provide opportunities for staff to receive feedback on skills (like organizing small group learning or providing meaningful feedback on written work) and behavior changes (like positive reinforcement of students or addressing student behavior privately) as a part of continuous learning. This can take a lot of different forms, both formal and informal. Use opportunities that are already in place for staff to receive coaching and feedback from a peer, supervisor, non-supervisory coach, and/or mentor.



Implement individual and collaborative learning.

- Help staff acquire new and shared knowledge and mindsets.
 - » Model it: As a leader, create a culture that shows EVERYONE is a lifelong learner. Lead by example by participating in learning.
 - » School-wide training provides an opportunity for an entire team to get on the same page around a content area, establishes baseline understanding and a common language, signals a value or commitment, and typically allows staff to interface with an external expert in the field.
- Keep up with research, new findings, or new approaches through content studies.
 - » *Articles* – Choose an article for each quarter of the school year for staff to read independently and then discuss during staff or team meetings. Inspire them to want to read the article if they haven't already.
 - » *Book studies* – For continuous learning, schedule manageable reading loads in between each meeting and provide open-ended questions that will allow those who haven't caught up on reading a chance to engage.
- Offer a training to energize staff
 - » Offering a training for your staff can be a great way to kick things off or revisit a topic area as momentum slows or competing priorities overshadow the work. The [Healthier Generation Training Center](#) has a wide library of free on-demand and recorded trainings with facilitator's guides and certificates of completion. Some options for trainings are:
 - [synchronous](#) webinars
 - synchronous in-person trainings
 - [asynchronous](#) eLearning
- Provide support for staff to translate knowledge into action and skill development
 - » Decide on a schoolwide strategy or targeted practice to ensure that every teacher is working on the same content area, which will lead to a network of support.
 - » Select one strategy related to your continuous professional learning, such as a [building a sustainable gratitude practice](#) or a [technique to encourage self-regulation in students](#), and design a competition or peer observation challenge to encourage everyone to focus on this strategy.
 - » Collect baseline data on your selected strategy, then integrate the strategy into coaching or observation sections. This will help track growth and improvement over time.



Monitor, assess, and adjust practice.

- As you begin an intentional approach to professional learning, consider how you'll determine if the learning has been a meaningful contribution to the community. Revisit the original data you used to determine which structure or topic to prioritize. Create metrics and monitor or adjust for challenges as needed. Don't forget to celebrate successes and improvements!
- Monitoring your approach will also allow you to scale your approach to professional learning or repeat the structure for further growth opportunities.
- Use the following as a guide to help you consider which metrics will define success and how to gather feedback from staff, students, and families accordingly.



How Much Did We Do?

Frequency

How often is professional learning scheduled? More isn't necessarily better, but consider how frequency and the length of time between professional learning can help or hinder retention and skill-building.

Staff Leadership

How many staff are involved in the planning and leading of professional learning? Do you provide a diverse range of staff opportunities to share their best practices and insights during professional learning?

Time Spent Learning

Time with the entire staff can be rare and hard to come by. What percentage of that time is devoted to professional learning? Are there blocks of time spent on administrative updates that could be better communicated in an email?

How Well Did We Do It?

Staff Participation

Assess attendance and feedback alongside the modality of professional learning you selected. Are certain opportunities better attended, such as a book study versus a PLC? Why might that be?

Meaningful Outcomes

Assess whether staff leave professional learning feeling better equipped to meet the demands of their job. Are staff curious for more or has engagement waned?

Learning in Action

Do staff translate professional learning outcomes—such as evidence-based engagement strategies—into action during their interactions with students and families?

Is Anyone Better Off?

Staff Engagement

Has professional learning led to staff members feeling empowered to share their expertise with one another? Do staff feel more aware of which of their colleagues have expertise and skill in certain areas?

Student and Family Engagement

Are students and their families showing higher levels of engagement as a result of professional learning? Have academic outcomes increased and discipline incidents decreased in classrooms where teachers are engaging in professional learning?

Collaboration

Do you see increased levels of collaboration between the adults in your community? Are staff showing flexibility and adapting to new learning?