

Pittsford Teacher Center Collegial Circle Structures

A collegial circle is designed to assist a group of educators who are committed to enhancing or improving their professional practice through collaborative work. The group comes together on a regular basis to discuss a common goal, need, interest, or question and there is a shared commitment to the purpose of the group.

Professional learning that takes place through collegial circles is often some of the most meaningful learning we do as educators. It is grounded in the real work going on in our classrooms/schools and its collaborative nature provides a safe environment for professionals to take risks and gather feedback. Perhaps most important, it is focused either directly or indirectly on student outcomes and what is happening with our learners.

Examples of effective structures to use in collegial circles are included below. There are additional options available to educators who wish to collaborate with their colleagues, however. If you have an idea for a structure other than what is listed here, please identify that work on the *Collegial Circle Proposal Form* and include a description of it with your proposal.

Action Research

This structure allows participants to use research techniques to identify topics important to their practice, examine their own practice, and/or explore how to become more effective. An action research group first identifies an area of focus and develops a question to be answered. Questions typically fall into one of these broad categories: student outcomes, individual practices, systems/structures, school/classroom environment, or parents/families. The next steps are to develop an action plan, collect and analyze data, and report findings related to the question. As part of the proposal process, groups selecting action research will also be asked to identify the group that could most benefit from their findings.

Literature Study

Participants who want to learn about a new idea or strategy with colleagues can do so through a literature study. In this structure, participants read a book or a series of articles related to a specific topic or strategy related to their practice. Through regular meetings, participants explore the new idea and how it can impact their work with students. Ideally, time is allotted to implement aspects of the new learning and come back together to reflect on how it went. NOTE: Participants are expected to complete the independent reading on their own time. Collegial circle hours should only include the time spent together discussing the learning and/or planning for its implementation.

Critical Friends Group

Critical Friends is a structure designed to engage colleagues in collaborative work that can improve the quality of instruction, assist in project development, and/or deepen learning experiences for students. Through regular meetings, colleagues have structured conversations focused on a shared topic/area of interest and provide feedback to each other as they discuss the work being reviewed or implemented. Participants in the group play different roles throughout the process depending on the need at each stage of the work. Members of the group select or create a protocol to be used during meetings so the time is structured and focused on their goal.

Tuning Protocol

The tuning protocol is a process for fine-tuning the work we do as educators. It is an opportunity for teachers to present their work before a group of colleagues in a structured protocol aimed at improving instructional practice and/or student outcomes. Participants in a tuning protocol follow a timed format that includes presentation of the work to be tuned, clarifying questions asked by group members, individual writing time, participant discussion, presenter reflection, and debriefing. The group can follow a prescribed set of steps or they can implement variations to the process. Critical elements however include time, consistency, active participation, substantive discussion, and balanced feedback.

Strategy Implementation

Imagine a teacher who is excited about a new strategy or technique he/she wants to implement. Too often, working in isolation makes it difficult to implement new ideas as we lack the feedback and support of others that can enhance our learning. Collegial circles focusing on strategy implementation are designed to provide a collaborative environment for a group of teachers to implement new ideas together. There is flexibility to this structure as teachers identify their needs and the process they will use for implementing the work. However, critical pieces include establishing a clear focus for the work, identifying the resource(s) to be used in their learning, specifying the necessary steps in implementation, collecting evidence showing the impact of the strategy with students, and reflecting on the impact of the implementation.

Source: *Powerful Designs for Professional Learning*, Lois Brown Easton, ed.