

# Developing a Learning Community

What does success look like and how do you get there?

## The goal

The lack of professional support for many teachers is a major factor underlying teacher attrition rates, with nearly 50 percent of new teachers leaving the field within their first five years.<sup>1</sup> Learning Communities are a way to foster growth and development, with the shared goal of improving school outcomes.

## What goes into a Learning Community?

Learning Communities are achieved by combining five core elements. Members of a Learning Community must be able to 1) share their knowledge; 2) develop communication, time management and teamwork skills; 3) expose members to others' questions, thinking, strategies and tactics; 4) provide peer support; and 5) gain intercultural perspectives.<sup>2</sup>

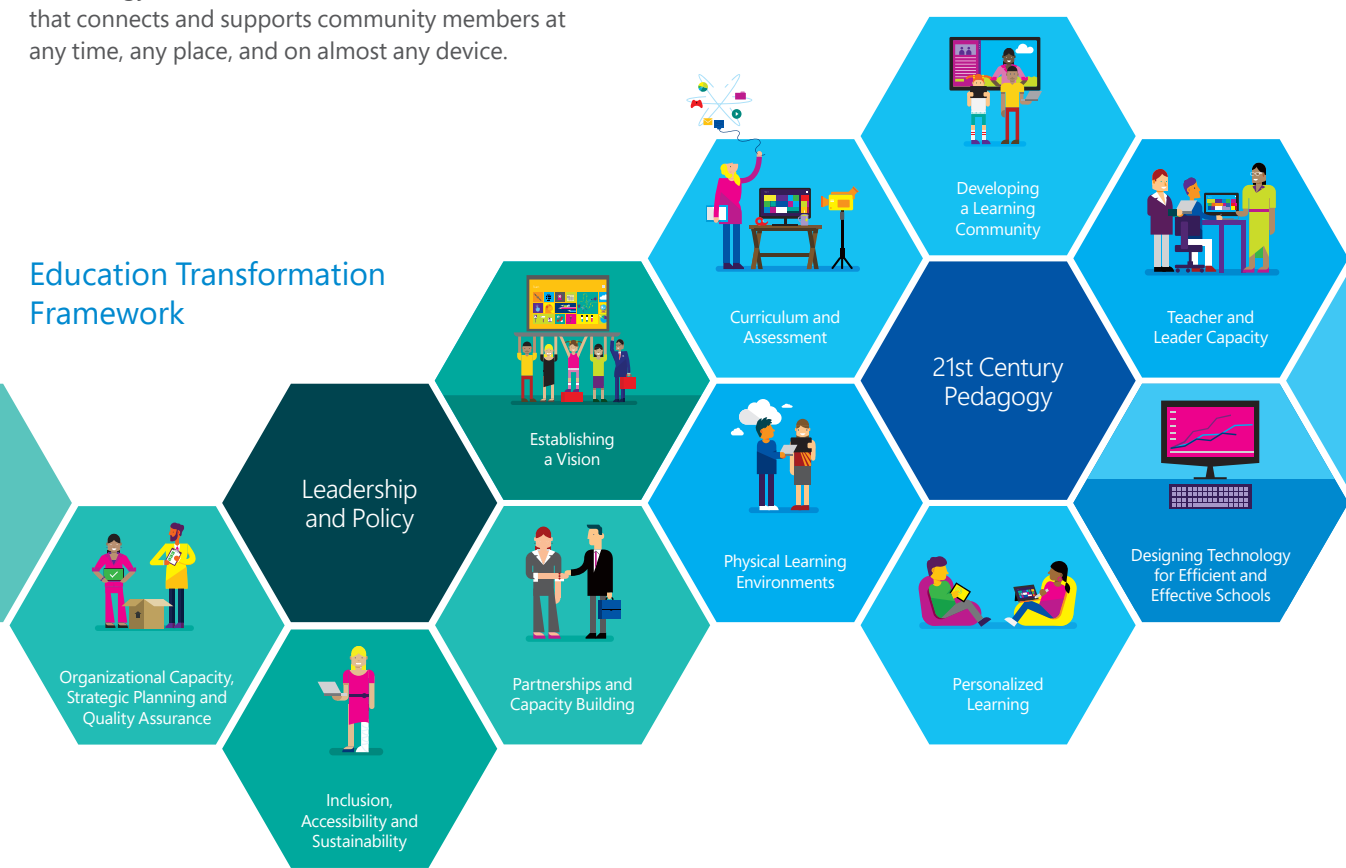
Putting these structures in place is easier than ever, thanks to modern technology. Tools within Office 365 Education like OneNote and Yammer, as well as Skype and OneDrive, give Learning Communities the ability to communicate and collaborate in real-time. Technology can be combined to build a virtual hub that connects and supports community members at any time, any place, and on almost any device.

## How do we start one?

Chris Collison and Geoff Parcell<sup>3</sup> offer steps on launching enriching Learning Communities:

1. Have a goal or intention and plan
2. Determine who leads and who should be a member
3. Organize a face-to-face meeting for everyone with relationship-building activities
4. Draft a charter with rationale, scope, expectations, commitments and benchmarks for success
5. Select tools that will facilitate the community. Decide which technologies will best support your objectives
6. Choose a lead facilitator to organize meetings, monitor success and guide members
7. Call members to action. Start a conversation with questions around your community's goals
8. Provide timely reminders about critical dates and aims<sup>4</sup>
9. Promote the community by publishing goals, activities and achievements
10. Celebrate wins.

## Education Transformation Framework



# Guiding questions

How are we supporting and enabling communities of practice and inquiry?

Do our teachers and staff have access to personal learning networks in our school, region, country and the world?

Do we support continuity of learning outside our premises?

Is our support for teachers and students technical and learning focused?  
Is it both face-to-face and virtual?

Is the current allocation of resources and budgets appropriate for the vision?

What guidelines and timelines are needed to achieve our goals?

## How can technology help build capacity?

Technology is an important glue for a learning community, allowing its members to communicate and collaborate freely – in real-time and asynchronously. Here is how some schools are using it:

- Members are collaborating socially and create content with Microsoft Office
- Microsoft OneDrive enables document and content storage
- Yammer and Edmodo enable self-created communities for social conversation, blogging and knowledge
- Opportunities for support and skills acquisition via Microsoft IT Academy and the Answer Desk.

## Resources

### Whitepaper: Learning Communities and Support

Authored by Dr Christopher D. Sessums, visiting Professor at John Hopkins University, this paper examines strategies for supporting teacher professional development and learning achievement. It also explores how cloud and mobile technology can be used to build and support learning communities.

The complete version is available at [microsoft.com/education/leaders](http://microsoft.com/education/leaders)

### Workshop

- School Leadership Academies

### Additional Support Materials

- Redefining Learning Conference Guide

To organize a workshop or for resource materials, contact your Microsoft Education Specialist.

## References

1. Dede, C. (Ed.). (2006). Online professional development for teachers: Emerging models and methods. Cambridge, Ma: Harvard Education Press.
2. Anderson, T., Annand, D. & Wark, N. (2005). The search for learning community in learner-paced distance education programming, or "Having your cake and eating it, too!" Australian Journal of Educational Technology, 21(2): 222-241.
3. Collison, C. & Parcell, G. (2004). Learning to Fly: Practical knowledge management from leading and learning organisations. Chichester, West Sussex: Capstone.
4. Sessums, C. D. (2009). The Path from Insight to Action: The Case of an Online Learning Community in Support of Collaborative Teacher Inquiry. Unpublished dissertation, University of Florida, Gainesville, FL. Available at [http://etd.fcla.edu/UF/UFE0024330/sessums\\_c.pdf](http://etd.fcla.edu/UF/UFE0024330/sessums_c.pdf)

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