



The start of a new school year is an opportunity to shape how Collaborative Learning Teams will work, learn, and make decisions together. This issue explores how leaders can create the conditions that help teams strengthen practice and improve outcomes for students.



Start Strong: Focus CLTs on What Matters Most

A START-OF-YEAR GUIDE FOR PURPOSEFUL COLLABORATION

The start of the school year is more than a chance to establish schedules and routines. It is an opportunity to build the foundation for effective Collaborative Learning Teams (CLTs). The habits teams develop early often shape the quality of their work throughout the year.

Before teams dive into content, take time to strengthen collaboration by clarifying the purpose of CLT time, establishing roles that encourage shared participation, and guiding teams in determining how they will capture key decisions, evidence, action steps, and follow-up.

BUILD THE STRUCTURE FIRST



CLARIFY PURPOSE

Center learning, evidence, and shared decision making.



SHARE THE ROLES

Build participation and shared ownership.



CAPTURE THE WORK

Record decisions, actions, evidence, and follow-up.

KEEP THE WORK FOCUSED ON FOUR ESSENTIAL AREAS



STANDARDS

What do we want students to know and be able to do?



ASSESSMENT

How will students demonstrate their level of understanding?



INSTRUCTION

What Tier 1 strategies will we use to ensure students reach proficiency?



DIFFERENTIATION

What strategies will we use to reteach AND extend learning based on the data?

Strong CLTs do more than meet regularly. They focus their time on conversations and decisions that have the greatest impact on student learning. Clear structures and a shared instructional focus help teams move beyond logistics and make collaboration a meaningful driver of improvement.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

Which area is a strength for your teams, and which needs coaching?

CONTINUE THE LEARNING

Explore Chapter 2 of *Collaborative Learning Teams: PLCs Done Right* for practical guidance on building effective CLTs.

[READ THE CHAPTER EXCERPT](#)



Six Conditions That Move Professional Learning into Practice

When teachers don't implement what they learned in professional development, the instinct is often to look at ability or buy-in. That's backwards. When implementation stalls, leaders should look beyond the individual and consider what may be getting in the way.

That's where **coaching makes the difference**. Professional learning may introduce new ideas, but Collaborative Learning Teams (CLTs) provide the structure and support needed to turn those ideas into practice.

In my work coaching CLTs, I've found that teams are far more likely to move learning into practice when **six conditions are intentionally developed**.

SIX CONDITIONS FOR MOVING LEARNING INTO PRACTICE

1

BUILD COHERENCE

Return to the standard and define mastery together so teachers share a compelling reason for change and align how they teach and assess.

2

CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ACTIVE PRACTICE

Teams plan together, analyze student work, and reflect on the impact of their decisions. Theory alone does not change instruction.

3

PROTECT TIME AND RESOURCES

Keep collaboration focused on instruction, evidence, and response. When logistics take over, learning quickly stalls.

4

CULTIVATE PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Give teachers room to speak honestly about what is working, what is not, and what needs to change. Growth depends on trust.

5

ESTABLISH FEEDBACK LOOPS

Join meetings, review agendas, ask genuine questions, and offer low-stakes feedback that helps teams refine their practice.

6

BUILD COLLECTIVE PARTICIPATION

Engage all CLT members in the work so new practices build shared ownership and spread across classrooms.

When implementation is low, the question is not, "**Why aren't teachers doing this?**" The better question is, "**Which condition is missing?**" That question points leaders toward their next coaching move.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

Which of these six conditions is strongest in your CLTs, and where might more intentional leadership support be needed?

STRENGTHEN YOUR CLTs

Explore how CLS helps schools build collaborative teams that move learning into practice.

[EXPLORE CLT COACHING](#)



Written by Tony Flach,
Director of Information, Partner

FROM THE FIELD

HOW GOLDEN OAK TURNED COLLABORATION INTO ACTION

At Golden Oak Elementary, significant student growth and recognition as a California Distinguished School give the community **much to celebrate**. Behind those accomplishments are teams of teachers who took an honest look at how they worked together and made their collaboration more meaningful.

Teams returned to the questions that matter most:

- What do students need to learn?
- What does mastery look like?
- What does the evidence tell us?
- What should we do next?

These questions helped shift conversations from completing tasks to **improving student learning**.

COACHING AND LEADERSHIP SUPPORT

CLT Coaching: With support from CLS Partner Tony Flach, teams strengthened their focus on standards, examined student evidence, and shared instructional decisions. The support was responsive to what each team needed to move forward.

Leadership Support: Principal Diane Barnett stayed closely connected while keeping teachers at the center of the work. She participated in team meetings, reviewed agendas and minutes, and provided ongoing feedback. She also created additional time for teams to examine student learning and plan together by providing release time and roving substitutes.

THE SHIFT

Over time, conversations became more focused, expectations for student learning became clearer, and teachers developed greater consistency across classrooms. **Collaboration became more than time set aside on the calendar.** It became a way for teachers to learn from one another, make decisions together, and share responsibility for student success.

Golden Oak's recognition is worth celebrating, but the real story lies in the work behind it: teachers examining their practices, strengthening their teams, and turning collaboration into meaningful action for students.

LEADERSHIP REFLECTION

What structures and support help your teams turn collaboration into action?



At CLS, Impact is Not Optional — it's Fundamental.

We partner with schools and districts to transform intention into measurable results through tailored support, research-aligned practice, and collaborative implementation.

[Let's Talk](#)

[Past Issues of CLS Monthly Newsletters](#)