PLCs, collaborative practice, and schoolwide professional communities, CFGs are unique. In our review of the literature we found that terms like ‘Professional Learning Community’ are used in a variety of often contradictory ways and for a variety of purposes, and that in some cases, the term was never defined. Further, the literature on Professional Learning Communities had little to say about how to actually create and sustain PLCs, school wide communities or communal schools. On the other hand, CFG coaches know, for example, how to begin a meeting, how to look at and learn from student work or dilemmas of teacher practice, and how to offer both support and challenge to their colleagues. In thinking about our research agenda, we realized that to achieve our position simply because all CFGs share clear commitments and a substantial repertoire of skills that, at their best, are used in the service of kids. Unlike all of the other versions of PLCs that we examined, CFGs have a very intentional and focused approach to building reflective, professional collaborative communities.”

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Mike Schmoker, in his new book Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning, urges educators to confront the brutal facts about American public education. Rather than offering a defeated attitude about these facts, Schmoker encourages his readers to see them as opportunities to “blow the lid off school attitudes, dramatically and swiftly reduce the achievement gap, and enhance the ‘life chances’ of all children, regardless of their social or economic circumstances.” (p. 2)

Schmoker’s focus is clear: in order to make any kind of gain the focus must be on instruction and the supervision of instruction. We must “address the monumental gap between common and effective teaching practices, and between typical and effective instructional supervision.” (p. 3)

In this very accessible text, Schmoker sets a tone of urgency for American educators and provides a simple yet elegant framework for using what we already know to transform both adult and student learning in our nation’s schools. The book moves from stating the brutal facts into a rationale for a focus on academic literacy across all content areas. Schmoker speaks to the power of “authentic literacy” and describes it as “teaching critical and argumentative literacy” (p. 165). What I am looking for.”

The ‘solutions’ offered are achievable and the results are what we are looking for. This is not a cookie-cutter formula for school improvement; it is a conversation starter that raises the sense of urgency we all need to share around the very real gap between what we know about instruction and supervision and what we commonly see in our schools.

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Results Now: How We Can Achieve Unprecedented Improvements in Teaching and Learning
A Book Review by Chris Kingsbery, Pennsylvania