



Preschool Education IN Applied Sciences

Learning Community Leader's Guide



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Dedicated to the teachers and staff who selflessly
serve our nation's children and families.

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Welcome PEAS Learning Community Leaders!

The PEAS Program supports the creation of center-based PEAS Learning Communities. The goal of forming a PEAS Learning Community is to help teachers in your center work together as you progress through the PEAS program to improve science knowledge and skills. As the Leader of your learning community, you play an important role in making this happen!

This guide was created specifically for you, as an early childhood teacher, and aims to help you create, grow, and sustain your PEAS Learning Community.

What are Learning Communities?

A learning community is a group of teachers, and sometimes other professionals, that meet to share their ideas and work together to problem solve related to teaching and working with children.

The PEAS Team believes learning communities are valuable because they can:

- 1) Help teachers develop new content knowledge**
- 2) Provide teachers with opportunities to practice new skills in the classroom**
- 3) Give teachers time and space to reflect on their teaching practice and share**
- 4) Create opportunities for feedback and growth**

While you may not have heard of them before, learning communities aren't new, they've been around in the K-12 setting for over 30 years as a way to help teachers collaborate and better meet students' needs (Archer, 2012). After seeing the benefits

of learning communities, early childhood professionals are recognizing that learning communities can also benefit preschool teachers and classroom (Fairfield, 2011; Rone, 2009; Thornton & Cherrington, 2019)!



Why Have a Learning Community?

Collaboration is an essential part of teaching. However, in many educational settings, teachers are still teaching in silos, and if collaboration happens, the conversation stops outside the classroom door. In a learning community, collaboration becomes the culture of a center and it doesn't stop at the classroom door! Teachers learn to work together to share their classroom practices in ways that lead to better results for their students, team, and center (AllThingsPLC, n.d.).

We hope as you lead your PEAS Learning Community, you see the benefits of collaboration come to life among the teachers in your center!

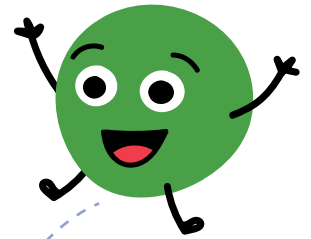


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"Quality teaching is not an individual accomplishment, it is the result of a collaborative culture that empowers teachers to team up to improve student learning beyond what any one of them can achieve alone"

(Carroll, 2009, p.13).



Essential Characteristics of PEAS Learning Communities

Successful learning communities are guided by key principles. We recommend grounding your PEAS Learning Community in the below principles.

For more information about essential elements of a healthy learning community, see **Appendix A**. Visit www.morepeasplease.org to download documents provided in the Appendices.

Supportive and Shared Leadership

Every teacher is a leader and has a leadership role to play. School leaders/center directors recognize and respect teachers as leaders and allow for shared power, authority, and decision-making.

Shared Values and Vision

Establish together as a group what your shared values are. Establish what your vision is for your group to accomplish. Post your values and vision on a physical or virtual wall where you meet so everyone can see.

Collective & Committed Learning

Work collaboratively to plan, solve problems, and seek knowledge, skills, and strategies to apply in the classroom. Teachers commit to prioritize attending meetings and having on-task conversations.

Shared Personal Practice

Open the doors to your classroom to allow other teachers to observe you in action while you teach, give constructive and meaningful feedback, have in-depth discussions, and allow space for new ideas.

Supportive Relational Conditions

Respect and trust are the foundation of healthy learning communities. Related to respect, all individuals discussed during the meeting (teachers, children, administrators), should be treated with respect. Related to trust, anything discussed during a learning community meeting should be treated as confidential, and should stay within that learning community meeting, unless teachers decide there is a need to do otherwise (e.g., decision to discuss an issue with administrator).

[Adapted from DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008]

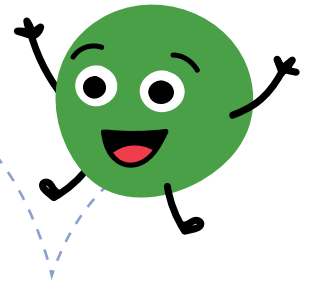


Planning a PEAS Learning Community

As a new Leader of a PEAS Learning Community, you may have a number of questions. Don't worry, it is normal to have lots of questions as you begin! The below chart helps clarify how your PEAS Learning Community will work.

FREQUENTLY-ASKED LEADER QUESTIONS	
How often will we meet?	PEAS Learning Community will meet at least three times , but as often as needed, in the spring semester (January-May).
How long should our meetings be?	The time for meeting is mutually decided and often scheduled after the school day or during in-service days. The suggested time for a PEAS Learning Community meeting is 1 hour .
What should membership look like?	Every center will form their own PEAS Learning Community. All teachers participating in the PEAS Program are a part of their center's PEAS Learning Community.
What role does a leader play within the learning community?	<p>Every PEAS Learning Community will have a committed and chosen leader and co-leader. This leadership will be maintained throughout the whole year of the PEAS Program.</p> <p>The leader will be in charge of sending reminders to teachers before meetings and leading meetings (see Page 10).</p> <p>The co-leader plays an important role as the recorder of the meeting and will lead the meeting in the absence of the elected leader.</p>
What's the purpose of ground rules?	Ground rules are set so that meetings run smoothly, and all members are aware of their responsibilities. Page 9 provides additional information on ground rules.
What needs to be done after the meeting?	The leader (and co-leaders, if applicable) is responsible for completing the documentation forms during/after each meeting (Appendix C-E).

Ground Rules for PEAS Learning Communities



Ground Rules for PEAS Learning Communities help establish norms for the group to follow. It also creates a framework of expectations that learning community members commit to follow to ensure learning communities are meaningful for everyone.

Be sure to keep these ground rules handy at each meeting. Also, feel free to modify these rules as needed based on your group’s needs. You should have each teacher in your PEAS Learning Community sign the Ground Rules Contract at your first learning community meeting (**Appendix A**).

Guideline	Practical Application
Use of Time in Meetings	<p>Prioritize attending learning community meetings from start to finish</p> <p>Share time fairly – avoid monopolizing discussions and make sure everyone that wants to speak is heard</p> <p>Stay on task by adhering to time limits set on the agenda and avoiding non-Learning Community business or announcements (see Appendix C-E for meeting agendas)</p>
How We Speak	<p>Be honest about where you are excelling and where you are struggling</p> <p>Speak respectfully to other teachers, both novice and experienced, at all times, even when disagreeing</p> <p>Speak respectfully and avoid making judgments about children and families, even when describing behaviors and issues</p>
How We Listen and Provide Support	<p>Use active listening, keep an open mind about new ideas</p> <p>When making suggestions to colleagues be honest and supportive and base your suggestions on your own experiences or those of your colleagues</p> <p>Don’t expect everyone to do it your way—different approaches work for different teachers and students</p>
Productive Attitudes	<p>Develop a realistic, positive attitude toward your work</p> <p>Remember that you’re here as part of a change process—be open to learning new things and change teaching based on evidence-based practices</p> <p>Maintain awareness of the group’s tasks, mood, and relevance of own and others’ contributions</p>
Presuming positive intentions	<p>Assume that other’s intentions are positive and that they mean well</p> <p>Restrain impulsivity triggered by own emotional responses</p> <p>Use positive language when responding to and asking others questions</p>
Pursuing a balance between advocacy and inquiry	<p>Present rationale for your ideas and opinions, including assumption, fact, and feelings</p> <p>Disagree respectfully and offer rationale for disagreement</p> <p>Ask others about their experiences and opinions</p>

Leading a PEAS Learning Community Meeting

As the PEAS Learning Community Leader, you should now have an idea of some Learning Community basics such as what are learning communities (page 4), why we believe in learning communities (page 4), the logistics of your PEAS Learning Community (page 8), and ground rules for learning communities (page 9).

But how do you actually lead a PEAS Learning Community meeting?

The timeline below outlines the steps from start to finish to help you lead a successful PEAS Learning Community meeting. You can find proposed agendas for each meeting follow this format (**Appendix C-E**).

Adapted from Kuh (2012)

One Day Before the Meeting

Connect with your co-leader to review the agenda one more time. Make sure you both feel comfortable with the topics you plan to discuss. Co-leaders will take notes on the agenda during the meeting in the designated note space.

Ensure the space where you will be meeting is ready (enough chairs, tables, etc.).

One Week Before the Meeting

Review the agenda for the meeting (**Appendix C-E**). Send out an email to all the teachers in your PEAS Learning Community to remind them the date/time of meeting and attach a picture of the agenda.

Facilitate Sharing & Opportunities for Discussion (45 minutes)

Ask members the questions posed on the agenda (**Appendix C-E**). You may find it helpful to go around in a circle and give each teacher a chance to respond. Ensure other teachers are paying attention to whoever is speaking. If interruptions occur, kindly remind members of the ground rules.

To reduce interruptions, you may find it helpful to have a “speaking stick” or another item to designate who is supposed to be speaking.

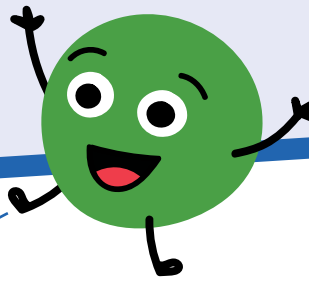
After a member has shared a response, open the floor for discussion by asking, “Does anyone want to comment on what [NAME] just said? Did any questions or concerns come up while [NAME] was speaking?”

Discussion should revolve around idea that was just presented. As the leader, make sure topics stay on-task and keep an eye on time. If it is time to move on to the next question on the agenda, you can say “Thank you everyone for sharing. It’s now time to move on but if we would like to revisit this topic again, I can add it to next meeting’s agenda.”

Start the Meeting with Intention (5 minutes)

Welcome all the teachers. Explain the main purpose/objective of the meeting and list the agenda items that will be discussed.

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How to Form a Workable Meeting Agenda

The workplace is filled with distractions that take our attention away from the task at hand. The same is true for PEAS Learning Community meetings! With limited time to accomplish many tasks, it is important to maintain focus. In the past, you may have experienced a meeting where one team member derailed the whole meeting! One off-topic conversation can take several of minutes to redirect and delay the work you want to accomplish. As a PEAS Learning Community leader, learning how to keep the meeting on track takes practice. With time, meetings will start running smoother. One of the best tools to keep you on track is the agenda.

The agenda outlines every topic and/or question to be discussed during the PEAS Learning Community Meeting. The agenda also outlines how much time will be given to each topic. You will use the agenda to make sure you are staying on track!

We've helped you start the agenda for each of your PEAS Learning Communities meetings (**Appendix C-E**), but feel free to edit to best fit the needs of your group.

Adapted from The Learning Community Guidebook (2010)

Wrap-Up Reflections and Support (5 minutes)

As the meeting comes to an end, ask teachers if they have any questions for the PEAS Team or your Head Start center directors/administrators. It's okay if not!

Remind teachers that learning community conversations are confidential and are not to leave the meeting unless agreed upon by all teachers (e.g., you've decided as a group to talk to your center director about an issue).

Offer opportunities for support and collaboration to teachers. For example, ask if any teachers would like to visit another teacher's class to observe.

3 Days After the Meeting

Meet with your co-leader to discuss how the meeting went. Talk through the checklist "How Did the Meeting Go?" (**Appendix F**).

Send out a recap email thanking teachers for coming to the PEAS Learning Community meeting. In the email, state the date/time of the next meeting.

Keep your PEAS Learning Community Agendas (**Appendix C-E**) handy, you will review them with your PEAS Coach!

One of the best tools to keep you on track during a meeting is an agenda.

Conclude the Meeting with Gratitude (1 minute)

Thank everyone for participating in today's PEAS Learning Community and thank your co-leader for taking notes. We thank YOU for leading!



You are Ready to Start Your PEAS Learning Community!

You may be thinking “learning communities are hard and a lot of work!” and you are right! Shifting our mentality away from seeing ourselves as individual teachers to being a collaborative team of teachers isn’t easy! In fact, every learning community goes through four stages of growth: Beginning, Developing, Growing and Sustaining (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008). Throughout these stages your learning community will find its groove, handle hard situations, and learn how to best support each other. We hope that your experience leading a PEAS Learning Community is rewarding and creates a more positive and supportive culture at your center.

You may even find that you want to continue Learning Communities even after you finish the PEAS program and focus on a different area of child learning! If this interests you, you can find more information about how to keep your learning community going next year in **Appendix I**.

As you get ready to begin, know that our PEAS team is here to help you along the way. Remember, PEAS Learning Communities are about partnership and progress, not perfection! We are excited to watch you lead!

Visit www.morepeasplease.org to download documents provided in the Appendices.

Appendix A.

Essential Elements of Healthy Learning Communities

1. Healthy Learning Communities establish a **vision** that creates a path for learning.
2. Healthy Learning Communities build **trust** among group members.
3. Healthy Learning Communities appreciate and embrace **collaboration**.
4. Healthy Learning Communities encourage, recognize, and appreciate **diversity** within the group.
5. Healthy Learning Communities have members who support one another professionally by **problem-solving** together.
6. Healthy Learning Communities have members who stay **mindful** and **communicate** with one another about their goals in between meetings.
7. Healthy Learning Communities hold their group members **accountable** for staying on task and documenting their learning.
8. Healthy Learning Communities collect and **discuss** data to best meet the needs of the children they service.
9. Healthy Learning Communities understand the **importance of change** and acknowledge the discomfort it may bring to some Learning Communities members.
10. Healthy Learning Communities **work with** their building administrators to further their centers vision.

[Adapted from The Professional Learning Community Book. Dana & Yendol-Hoppey, 2016]

Appendix B.

PEAS Learning Community Ground Rules Contract

We are excited to be forming a PEAS Learning Community in our preschool center. A PEAS Learning Community is a collaborative group of teachers who meet regularly to share ideas and support one another to improve teaching practice and child outcomes. The way we conduct our Learning Community meetings is important.

By signing this contract, you agree to adhere to these established ground rules during each Learning Community Meeting. All Learning Community members will keep each other accountable to abide by these rules.

Member Name: _____

As a group member of this PEAS Learning Community, **I will:**

- **Be on time** for every meeting
- Try to **attend** all 3 meetings in their entirety
- **Speak** appropriately at every meeting
- **Listen and support** all those involved in the Learning Community
- Hold a **productive attitude**
- **Presume positive intentions** toward others
- Balance my time between **sharing and listening**
- **Focus on topic-at-hand** throughout the meetings

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix C.

PEAS Learning Community Kickoff Meeting Agenda

As the PEAS Learning Communities Leader, review this form and add any additional agenda items prior to meeting. While meeting is being held, the co-leader should take notes and fill in other applicable items. For reminders on how to lead a meeting, see page 10 of the PEAS Learning Community Guide.

Center: _____ **Date:** _____

Teachers present: _____

Purpose(s) / Objectives of the Meeting:

Discuss PEAS progress, including teaching strategies highlighted in this month’s training module.

1) Introduction (5 minutes): Welcome everyone. Read aloud the Ground Rules of a PEAS Learning Community (page 9). Have every teacher sign the Ground Rules Contract (**Appendix B**). Then Introduce the Purpose of today’s Learning Community Meeting.

2) Facilitate Sharing & Opportunities for Discussion (45 minutes):

a) Take a moment to reflect on 1-3 featured teaching strategies:

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

What’s something new you learned? What’s something that challenged you?

Note, for any teachers who may not have completed the most current PEAS module/learning activities, ask them to reflect on another way that they made a connection between PEAS and their classroom since the last time your PEAS Learning Community met.

b) Reflect on the Model Learning Activities that you completed in your classroom.

Model Learning Activity Topic: _____

How did children learn? What went well? What didn't?

c) What supports do you need to have to make the next module a more successful experience?

d) Use this space to write any additional questions you would like to ask during the meeting:

3) Wrap-Up Reflections and Support (8 minutes):

a) What questions or concerns, if any, do we have for the PEAS Team?

b) What questions or concerns, if any, do we have for the Center Director?

c) What teachers, if any, would like to observe another teacher's practice between now and our next meeting? Arrange a time after the meeting ends to observe.

4) Conclusion (2 minutes): Thank everyone for attending today's PEAS Learning Community meeting. Thank your Co-Leader for taking notes. Remind everyone of the next meeting.

The next PEAS Learning Community will be on _____ (date) **at** _____ (time).

Appendix D.

PEAS Learning Community Mid-Year Meeting Agenda

As the PEAS Learning Communities Leader, review this form and add any additional agenda items prior to meeting. While meeting is being held, the co-leader should take notes and fill in other applicable items. For reminders on how to lead a meeting, see page 10 of the PEAS Learning Community Guide.

Center: _____ **Date:** _____

Teachers present: _____

Purpose(s) / Objectives of the Meeting:

Discuss PEAS progress, including teaching strategies discussed in this month’s training module.

1) Introduction (5 minutes): Welcome everyone. Introduce the Purpose of today’s meeting.

2) Facilitate Sharing & Opportunities for Discussion (45 minutes):

a) Take a moment to reflect on 1-3 featured teaching strategies:

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

What’s something new you learned? What’s something that challenged you?

Note, for any teachers who may not have completed the most current PEAS module/learning activities, ask them to reflect on another way that they made a connection between PEAS and their classroom since the last time your PEAS Learning Community met.

b) Reflect on the Model Learning Activities that you completed in your classroom.

Model Learning Activity Topic: _____

How did children learn? What went well? What didn’t?

c) What supports do you need to have to make the next module a more successful experience?

d) Use this space to write any additional questions you would like to ask during the meeting:

3) Wrap-Up Reflections and Support (8 minutes):

a) What questions or concerns, if any, do we have for the PEAS Team?

b) What questions or concerns, if any, do we have for the Center Director?

c) What teachers, if any, would like to observe another teacher's practice between now and our next meeting? Arrange a time after the meeting ends to observe.

4) Conclusion (2 minutes): Thank everyone for attending today's PEAS Learning Community meeting. Thank your Co-Leader for taking notes. Remind everyone of the next meeting.

The next PEAS Learning Community will be on _____ (date) at _____ (time).

Appendix E.

PEAS Learning Community End-of-Year Meeting Agenda

As the PEAS Learning Communities Leader, review this form and add any additional agenda items prior to meeting. While meeting is being held, the co-leader should take notes and fill in other applicable items. For reminders on how to lead a meeting, see page 10 of the PEAS Learning Community Guide.

Center: _____ **Date:** _____

Teachers present: _____

Purpose(s) / Objectives of the Meeting:

Discuss PEAS progress, including teaching strategies discussed in this month’s training module.

1) Introduction (5 minutes): Welcome everyone. Introduce the Purpose of today’s meeting.

2) Facilitate Sharing & Opportunities for Discussion (45 minutes):

a) Take a moment to reflect on 1-3 featured teaching strategies:

- i. _____
- ii. _____
- iii. _____

b) Reflect on the Model Learning Activities that you completed in your classroom.

Model Learning Activity Topic: _____

How did children learn? What went well? What didn’t? If new activities were not implemented prior to your final meeting, skip this question or broadly discuss the activities implemented over the school year.

c) Take a moment to reflect on all of the PEAS strategies you’ve learned about throughout the training modules. What’s your biggest takeaway?

d) What supports would make PEAS a more successful experience for you?

e) Use this space to write any additional questions you would like to ask during the meeting:

3) Wrap-Up Reflections and Support (8 minutes):

a) What questions or concerns, if any, do we have for the PEAS Team?

b) What questions or concerns, if any, do we have for the Center Director?

c) What is our interest in continuing a Learning Community in our center next year? What topics are people interested in? See Appendix I for additional ideas.

4) Conclusion (2 minutes): Thank everyone for attending today's PEAS Learning Community meeting. Thank your Co-Leader for taking notes.

Appendix F.

How Did the Meeting Go? Checklist

Planning and conducting a meeting is not an easy task. As the leader, you can utilize this optional checklist with your co-leader after the meeting to reflect on how the meeting went. This checklist might also help you decide what topics should be added to the next PEAS Learning Community meeting agenda.

QUESTION		Y	N
Purpose & Pacing	1. Did we address all items on the agenda that were planned for this meeting?		
	If no, why?		
Process	2. Did we have to revisit any ideas or thoughts from the previous meeting?		
	If no, why?		
	3. Did we get any feedback from members on the way Learning Community meetings are run during this meeting?		
	If no, why?		
	4. Did we discuss what worked and did not work well in this meeting?		
	If no, why?		
Preparation	5. Did we come up with agenda items for the next meeting?		
	If no, why?		
	6. Did we send out a recap email with notes from this meeting and a reminder for the date of the next meeting?		
	If no, why?		

Appendix G.

Sustaining Learning Communities in Your Centers

As you and the teachers at your center get used to learning communities, you may even find that you want to continue learning communities even after you finish the PEAS program to focus on a different area of child learning. The neat part about learning communities is that they can adapt and continue to foster collaboration year-to-year.

If you are thinking about continuing a learning community for the next school year, ask yourself:

- 1) **How could we improve our Learning Community?**
- 2) **How can we sustain Learning Communities at our own individual centers?**
- 3) **Who else could be trained as a Learning Community Leader?**
- 4) **Are there other topics we want to explore as a Learning Community?**

Next, choose a focus for your Learning Community for next year. It could be about science or something else entirely! You may want to ask other members of your Learning Community for their opinion on what topics they'd like to explore.

Then, consider these questions you need to ask and reflect on:

- 1) What should our leadership roles and responsibilities be for next year's Learning Communities?
 - a. How will the present **leadership** help the next leadership transition into their new leadership roles? OR Do we continue with the same leadership for the next year as well?
 - i. If leadership will be changed, identify a new leader and co-leader for the coming year during the last meeting of this year
 - ii. Revisit the roles and responsibilities of a leader as stated in this guide
- 2) How will you **seek continued support** from the leaders (administrators) at your center?
 - a. What policies, practices, or infrastructure support you need to sustain Learning Communities?
 - i. Decide as a group if you want to involve your administrators in some of your meetings
 - ii. Invite your administrators towards the end of your first meeting to discuss the possibility of involvement
- 3) How do you individually and as a group **commit to sustaining** our Learning Community?
 - a. What action will you take to sustain PEAS Learning Communities
 - i. Formulate a new Learning Community around a new topic

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