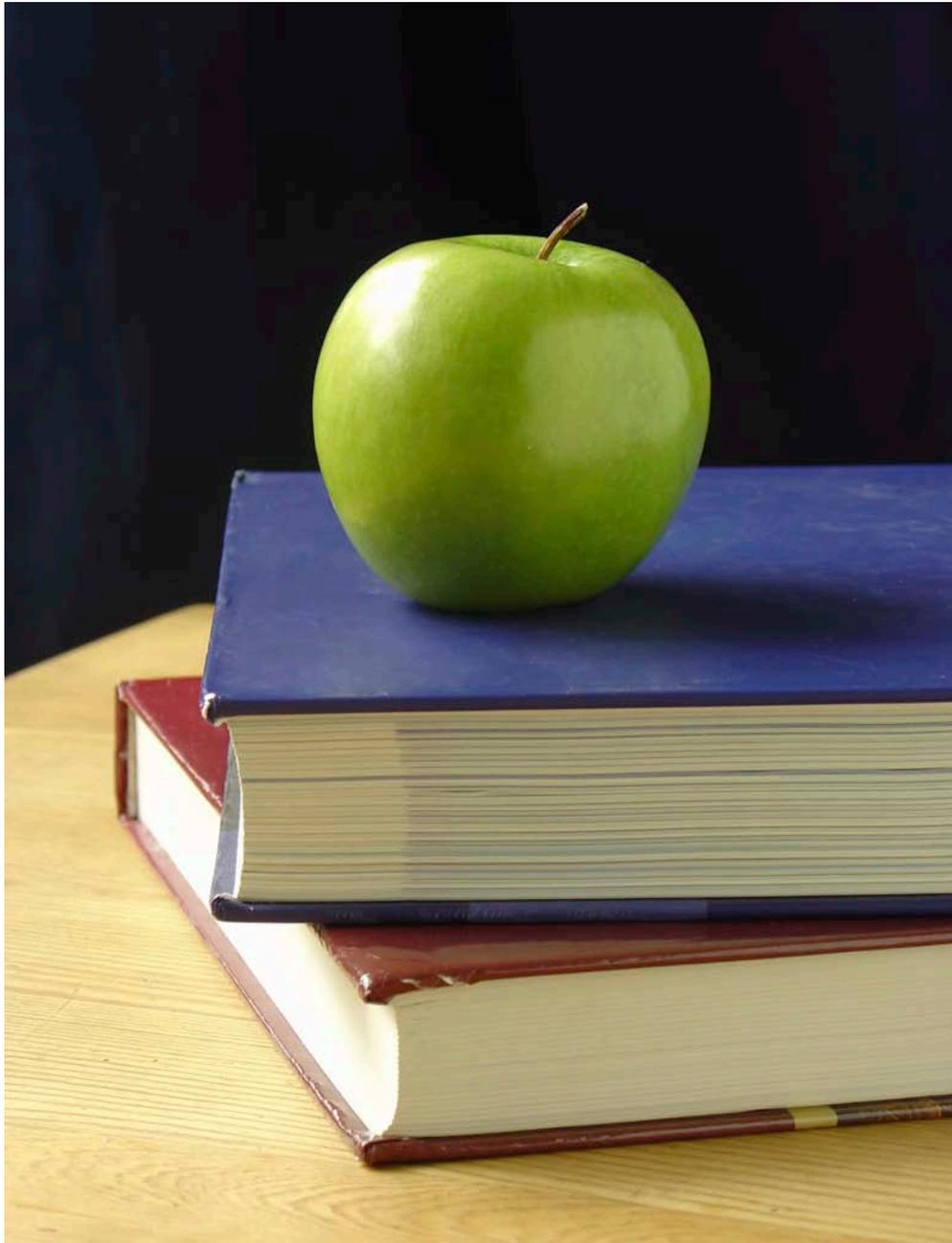# HIGH SCHOOL
PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES, 2008–2009

Austin Independent School District
Department of Program Evaluation

December 2009
Publication Number 08.65

ABOUT THE DEPARTMENT OF PROGRAM EVALUATION

The Department of Program Evaluation (DPE), a department within Austin Independent School District's (AISD) Office of Accountability, is charged with evaluating federal, state, and locally funded programs in AISD. DPE works with program staff throughout the district to design and conduct formative and summative program evaluations. DPE's methods for evaluating programs vary depending on the research question, program design, and reporting requirements. The evaluations report objectively about program implementation and outcomes, and serve to inform program staff, decision makers, and planners in the district. DPE also responds to information needs at all levels. DPE reports may be accessed online at http://www.austinisd.org/inside/accountability/evaluation/reports.phtml.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

After earning degrees in elementary education, curriculum and instruction, and educational administration at Texas A&M University and obtaining certifications for school principalship and superintendency, Dr. Karen Looby began to specialize in program evaluation. Currently, she supervises multiple projects in DPE, and her team focuses on programs being implemented in middle and high schools.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) is a popular approach to school improvement and reform across the country (DuFour, 2004). To ensure PLCs can truly support school improvement efforts, educators must think critically about the mission of their PLCs and communicate it in a way that embodies the core principles and characteristics of effective PLCs. In this process, school leaders should carefully guide a school's efforts to sustain the PLC model until that model becomes deeply embedded in the culture of the school.

The 2008–2009 school year marked the second year in the district's official implementation of PLCs. The fundamental objective of PLCs for the 2008–2009 school year was to provide a forum for teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches to work collaboratively on an ongoing basis to improve the quality of teacher instruction and student learning in classrooms. Across campuses, the models used to facilitate these collegial learning groups varied. The PLCs were supported by different internal and external providers. They met at various times during the school day and the school year. They may have occurred during common planning periods within the school day, after school, or on designated professional development activity days set aside by the district.

The PLC evaluation was designed to provide information to the district regarding the extent to which the requisite resources for successful implementation of PLCs were present in the schools and the extent to which participants held a shared understanding of PLCs. To do so, DPE staff conducted a survey of 472 teachers involved in PLCs on high school campuses and held a series of focus groups to enhance the contextual understanding of the survey data. Evaluation findings included the following:

- Most teachers reported requisite conditions for high-functioning PLCs (e.g., time, leadership, resources, and protocols) were in place to implement successful PLC(s).
- Across high schools, PLCs appeared to be established, and for the most part, working together regularly. However, a sizeable percentage of teachers (28.9%) reported they were not participating regularly in a PLC and/or did not have enough time to meet (22%).
- Most teachers perceived their principals as supportive of their PLCs (79.3%) and as providing time and resources for their collegial work (76.9%).
- Most teachers indicated they were involved in PLCs that had the critical characteristics and social resources necessary to function at a high level (e.g., openness to improvement, respect, collaboration, reflection). However, teachers gave mixed responses with respect to whether PLC members shared norms and values: 18% of teachers indicated they were not sure members shared norms and values, and 20.8% strongly disagreed that members shared norms and values.

- Many teachers did not have a clear conceptual understanding about the nature, participant roles, and objectives of their PLCs. Thus, the activities within their PLCs were variable and often were reported as being administrative in nature.
- Overall, the majority of teachers highly valued the time spent and the work conducted in their PLCs, especially when the work was content focused. Approximately 65% of teachers rated their PLC experiences positively, and 35% indicated a need for improvement, as evidenced by their fair or poor ratings.

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

The implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) is a popular approach to school improvement and reform across the country (DuFour, 2004). To ensure PLCs can truly support school improvement efforts, educators must think critically about the mission of their PLCs and communicate it in a way that embodies the core principles and/or characteristics of effective PLCs. In this process, school leaders should carefully guide a school's efforts to sustain the PLC model until that model becomes deeply embedded in the culture of the school.

The effective development and support of PLCs is an arduous task because PLCs often are described in a variety of ways to include every possible combination of individuals engaging in a multitude of different activities. Thus, it is essential that all persons involved (e.g., district- and campus-level administrators, teachers, program coordinators) have a common, comprehensive understanding about what effective PLCs are and how they should be developed and supported.

DuFour (2004) proposed that highly effective PLCs should be distinguished by three major characteristics. First, PLCs should shift the focus from teaching to student learning. This simple shift—from teaching to learning—challenges school staff to make real changes affecting outcomes for children. As every school staff person on the campus engages with colleagues in PLCs, he or she should ask:

• What should each student learn?

• How will we know when each student has learned what he or she needs to learn?

• How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

Second, the PLC structure should promote a collaborative culture. This focus on collaboration is a departure from the traditional isolated way many teachers continue to work, and it requires PLCs to meet during the workday and throughout the school year. PLCs also must focus on critical questions related to learning and must generate products that reflect that focus. For example, PLCs should develop lists of expected student outcomes, different kinds of assessment, analyses of student achievement, and strategies for improving results. Teams also must create norms or protocols to clarify expectations regarding roles, responsibilities, and relationships among team members. This collaborative environment provides a forum where teachers can turn to one another for help in their quest to improve student learning and make public what has customarily been private (e.g., goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns, and results).

Third, all teachers should participate in the ongoing process of examining individual, classroom, school, and district levels of student learning and should work toward achieving individual and collective goals in highly effective PLCs. Furthermore, the PLCs should include a careful evaluation of teacher effectiveness, based on student learning results. This requires PLCs to embrace data as a useful indicator of progress, and to move beyond using averages to analyze student performance and instead to focus on the success of individual students.

DISTRICT CONTEXT

The 2008–2009 school year marked the second year in the district's official implementation of PLCs. The fundamental objective of PLCs for the 2008–2009 school year was to provide a environment for teachers, administrators, and instructional coaches to work collaboratively on an ongoing basis to improve the quality of teacher instruction and student learning in classrooms. As a long-term result of the initiative, PLCs are expected to

- increase teachers' skills, confidence levels, and excitement about teaching;
- increase collaboration among teachers;
- increase teacher retention;
- increase levels of student engagement and performance; and
- decrease achievement gaps between student groups.

PLCs were established in all district high schools in 2007–2008 and were expected to develop into high-functioning, collaborative groups in the 2008–2009 school year. Across campuses, the models used to facilitate these collegial learning groups varied and were supported by different external providers. Some high schools (e.g., Eastside, International, Lanier, and Bowie) created their own professional learning goals and structures, based on campus-identified needs. LBJ, Reagan, and Travis used the First Things First (FTF) model, which featured a multidisciplinary, small learning community (SLC) approach to promote student engagement and learning. Akins, Anderson, Austin, Bowie (Social Studies/Science), Crockett, and McCallum used the Disciplinary Literacy (DL) model, supported by University of Pittsburgh's Institute for Learning (IFL). The DL-PLC model focused on assisting teachers to design and implement rigorous instruction within core content areas.

The PLCs met at various times during the school day and the school year. The meetings may have occurred during common planning periods within the school day, after school, and/or on designated professional development activity days set aside by the district. High school teachers were generally provided with two periods per day to engage in administrative tasks, instructional planning, and professional learning activities. Thus, teachers were expected to use one of these periods to meet with their PLCs. Additionally, high school campuses delayed class start times for an hour on selected dates during the course of the academic year.

These late-start days created time for the PLCs to focus on the improvement of teaching and learning, without taking teachers out of the classroom (Looby, 2008).

With these structures in place, PLCs were operated in the district with little direct cost. Training sessions and support services for PLCs often were provided by contracted providers or district personnel. Funding for these activities were supplied through various program budgets or funding sources as determined by program, school, or district decision makers. An estimation of actual cost to the district could not be determined.

METHODS

PURPOSE OF THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was designed to provide information to the district regarding the extent to which the requisite resources for successful implementation of PLCs were present within each campus, and the extent to which participants held a shared understanding about PLCs. As PLC work progresses in subsequent years, more advanced forms of evaluation will be necessary to inform progress and district planning.

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the evaluation of the district's PLC program:

- To what extent were the requisite conditions (e.g., time, leadership, trained facilitation, resources, and protocols) in place to implement successful PLC(s) on each campus?
- To what extent did PLC participants express a clear conceptual understanding about the nature, participant roles, and objectives of PLCs?
- To what extent did PLC participants express a clear understanding about the activities (i.e., in a manner that indicated their PLC involvement)?
- What were the specific PLC-related activities on each campus?

DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSES

To address the evaluation questions, the existing PLC Survey was modified for use in the 2008–2009 school year. With input from Office of High Schools staff, Office of Curriculum and Instruction staff, and researchers from Stanford University's Center for Research on the Context of Teaching, DPE staff used items from the Professional Learning Communities Survey, previously developed by the National School Reform Faculty, and a survey developed by Stanford University staff for the 2007–2008 evaluation of the district's DL-PLC program, to revise the 2007–2008 PLC Survey. The revised survey was considered to be better aligned with district expectations compared with the survey developed in the previous year. It asked teachers to assess the major factors associated with the development of a well-functioning PLC and to estimate the frequency of desired PLC activities.

To minimize the burden on campuses, the district's online Employee Coordinated Survey administered in May 2009 contained the newly revised PLC survey questions. The Employee Coordinated Survey allowed multiple questionnaires to be administered in a single data collection instrument. The survey process randomly sampled teachers who taught a variety of course subjects, and 61.2% of the 472 teachers sampled completed the survey. Survey results were summarized using descriptive statistics.

Results between school years and campuses were not analyzed for the 2008–2009 school year. The survey response categories had been greatly revised from the previous year, preventing a comparison of items across school years. Furthermore, the sampling method used in the Employee Coordinated Survey did not allow a representative sample to be drawn at the campus level, and campus-level summaries and comparisons could not be conducted.

DPE staff also conducted focus groups with teachers from all district high schools in April and May 2009. The focus groups were designed to describe and understand the context in which the PLCs operate, the support structures provided for PLC implementation, the roles of PLC members, and the activities that take place within the PLCs. Approximately 137 teachers representing all course areas and grade levels at each high school participated in these discussions. Content analysis techniques were used to identify important details, themes, and patterns within the focus group data.

EVALUATION RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

STRUCTURAL CONDITIONS FOR PLCS

The PLC Survey questions elicited information about the structural conditions necessary for the development of highly effective PLCs (Table 1). Most teachers reported their PLC *always* or *often* met regularly (72.6%) and used an organized agenda to facilitate its meetings (74.3%). Approximately 58% of the teachers reported they *always* or *often* had plenty of time to meet and talk in their PLC, and 22% reported they *occasionally* or *never* had plenty of time to meet and talk in their PLC. Overall, 71.1% of the teachers reported they *always* or *often* participated in a PLC, 28.9% participated *sometimes*, *occasionally* or *never*. Challenges to meeting regularly for an adequate amount of time were not explored within the survey.

Table 1. Structural Conditions of Professional Learning Communities, Spring 2009

My PLC…	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Occasionally (2)	Never (1)	Mean
Conducts regularly scheduled meetings.	41.1%	31.5%	15.9%	7.4%	4.1%	4.0
Uses an organized agenda to facilitate meetings.	40.5%	33.8%	13.4%	5.6%	6.7%	4.0
Has plenty of time to meet and talk.	28.5%	29.6%	19.6%	13.7%	8.5%	3.5

Source. District Professional Learning Community Survey, administered within the district's Employee Coordinated Survey.
Note. For positive responses (always and often) exceeding 70%, the results are in green font. For less desirable responses (occasionally and never) exceeding 20%, the results are in red font**.**

During teacher focus group discussions, teachers described the varying structures of their PLCs. PLCs met at different times during the day and at different intervals. Many PLCs met during common planning time, late start mornings, and before or after school. The PLCs met with different frequencies, depending on the expectations of campus administrators, teacher schedules, and the nature of the work.

Time for PLC work was set aside throughout the school year on designated district-wide late start days. Teachers described mixed feelings about the late start days. Most believed that late start days were critical in providing time for the ongoing work of their PLCs and well worth the time. However, teachers reported that many of the late start mornings were spent in a training or lecture format, without much collegial activity. They were frustrated with the lack of interactivity or relevance of these sessions. Additionally, they worried about whether the time spent in their PLCs on late start mornings was more important than having that time with the students in their classrooms.

> **Most teachers reported most requisite structural conditions for high-functioning PLCs were in place to implement successful PLCs. However, time was still an issue for many.**

Late start days aside, many teachers expressed concerns about the time commitment of PLCs. They explained that it was difficult for them to commit on a regular basis to the large amount of time associated with PLC, because the time set aside for their participation in PLCs often was taken by other required meetings and/or activities. Furthermore, teachers were left with little time during the day to attend to required administrative tasks or individual planning and preparation.

Many PLCs were facilitated by the department chair or lead teacher, while other PLCs shared the responsibility of facilitating the work across members. Teachers reported the effective facilitation of the PLC was critical to ensuring that PLCs would be high functioning. As their facilitation skills were developing, many teachers reported their PLC experiences were becoming more consistent and productive over time. However, many teachers described instances in which a facilitator struggled to engage resistant teachers in the work of a PLC. Consequently, teachers recommended more training and support for PLC facilitators.

PRINCIPAL SUPPORT FOR PLCs

Associated with the structural conditions, the level of support from the school principal was considered critical to the development of the PLCs (Table 2). Most teachers perceived their principals as supportive of their PLCs (79.3%) and as providing time and resources for their collegial work (76.9%). Seventy-one percent of the teachers perceived their principals to be supportive of teacher empowerment and autonomy. Still, a considerable percentage of teachers (20% to 25%) were not sure about or disagreed that their principal was supportive of or provided the resources for their PLCs.

Table 2. Principal Support for Professional Learning Communities, Spring 2009

At my school, my principal…	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Mean
Supports the development of PLCs in our school.	**32.1%**	**47.2%**	17.4%	1.1%	2.3%	**4.1**
Provides time and resources for teachers to collaborate and plan together in PLCs.	**27.8%**	**49.1%**	11.0%	8.0%	4.2%	3.8
Supports teacher empowerment and autonomy in the improvement of their practice.	**26.0%**	**45.3%**	16.2%	6.8%	5.7%	3.8

Source. District Professional Learning Community Survey, administered within the district's Employee Coordinated Survey.
Note. For positive responses *(always* and *often)* exceeding 70%, the results are in green font. For less desirable responses *(occasionally* and *never)* exceeding 20%, the results are in red font**.**

Teachers in focus group discussions often voiced opinions that contradicted the survey results pertaining to their principal's support for teacher empowerment and autonomy. Many teachers in the focus groups reported most of their PLC time was prescribed by district and campus administrators. They wanted more autonomy in deciding how their PLCs could grow

and develop. They did not think many of the resources (e.g., experience, ideas, and interests) they could contribute were considered or used by their school leadership.

CRITICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PLCS

The PLC Survey also asked teachers to indicate the degree to which critical characteristics of highly effective PLCs were evident in their group (Table 3). Specifically, these characteristics included openness to improvement, respect for one another, collaboration, shared norm and values, and reflective dialogue. High percentages (more than 70%) of the teachers *strongly agreed* or *agreed* their PLC members were open to improvement, respected each other, worked collaboratively, shared norms and values, and engaged in reflective dialogue. The responses pertaining to whether PLC members shared norms and values were mixed, with 18% of the teachers indicting they were *not sure* and 20.8% *strongly disagreeing*.

Table 3. Characteristics of Professional Learning Communities, Spring 2009

The members of my PLC…	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Mean
Are open to improvement.	24.2	52.1	15.9	5.7	2.3	4.0
Respect each other.	32.4	46.4	12.8	6.4	1.9	4.1
Work collaboratively.	27.3	52.6	13.6	4.6	1.9	4.0
Share norms and values.	20.8	51.3	18.1	7.5	20.8	3.8
Engage in reflective dialogue.	22.4	55.5	12.9	6.8	2.3	3.8

Source. District Professional Learning Community Survey, administered within the district's Employee Coordinated Survey.
Note. For positive responses (*always* and *often*) exceeding 70%, the results are in green font. For less desirable responses *(occasionally* and *never)* exceeding 20%, the results are in red font**.**

Teachers also were asked to describe the frequency with which they engaged in various activities typically found in high-functioning PLCs (Table 4). Overall, the teachers' responses were mixed. More than half (56%) of the teachers reported their groups *always* or *often* shared and discussed new teaching approaches to increase student engagement, alignment, and rigor. However, the majority teachers indicated they engaged in the other desirable PLC activities (e.g., sharing and discussing student work, analyzing student data, and developing common

> Most teachers indicated their PLC possessed the critical characteristics necessary to function at a high level (e.g., openness to improvement, respect, collaboration, and reflection).

assessments) *sometimes*, *occasionally*, or *never*. Teacher observation of their peers teaching in their classrooms appeared to occur less frequently than did all other activities.

Table 4. Professional Learning Community Activities, Spring 2009

In my PLC, we…	Always (5)	Often (4)	Sometimes (3)	Occasionally (2)	Never (1)	Mean
Share and discuss student work.	8.3%	28.8%	36.1%	19.2%	8.3%	3.1
Share and discuss new teaching approaches to increase student engagement, alignment, and rigor.	18.4%	37.6%	24.4%	12.0%	7.5%	3.5
Engage in systematic analysis of student performance data.	7.5%	34.9%	29.3%	19.2%	9.0%	3.1
Observe each other's classroom instruction.	4.5%	17.0%	30.6%	27.2%	20.1%	2.5
Plan lessons and units together.	15.5%	29.1%	26.0%	15.8%	13.6%	3.2
Develop common student assessments.	18.4%	28.9%	22.9%	13.9%	15.8%	3.2
Share and discuss research on effective teaching and learning practices.	12.6%	32.1%	25.6%	20.6%	9.1%	3.1
Develop strategies to support struggling learners.	12.9%	33.5%	28.5%	14.8%	10.3%	3.2

Source. District Professional Learning Community Survey administered withinthe district Employee Coordinated Survey.
Note. For positive responses (always and *often) exceeding 70%, the results are in green font. For less desirable responses (occasionally* and *never) exceeding 20%, the results are in red font.*

During the focus groups discussions, teachers variably described the characteristics of and activities in their PLCs within and across schools. In many instances, PLCs were described as a structure in which teachers could collaborate to improve their practice and student learning. Examples of their activities were provided, and included planning instructional units together, engaging in professional development training activities, reviewing student data, and observing their peers. In this process, they reported they were building closer relationships with their colleagues, which allowed them to feel more comfortable sharing their practices and asking for help. Teachers expected their collaboration and transparency of practices would increase rigor in individual classrooms and standardize the level of rigor across classrooms.

Teachers of special education students and/or English language learners were especially supportive of PLCs because they had opportunities to plan with core course area teachers. They believed this practice increased the alignment, relevance, and rigor for students with special needs.

However, in many other instances, teachers reported they did not fully understand the purpose of their PLC, their roles within the PLC, and/or the activities to take place within an effective PLC. Often, the teachers simply did not know where to start the work of their PLC or how to integrate the effective practices of PLCs (e.g., planning together, engaging in professional development training, participating in reflective study, and reviewing student data). In these instances, the teachers reported the time they spent meeting in their PLCs was not used effectively. As a result, their PLCs became a substitute for departmental meetings in which they focused on administrative tasks and in which little work was related to the professional growth of the teachers or was focused on student learning.

> **Many teachers did not have a clear conceptual understanding about the nature, participant roles, and objectives of their PLCs. Thus, the activities within their PLCs were variable and often were reported as being administrative in nature.**

TEACHER SATISFACTION

In sum, teachers were asked in the survey to indicate their level of satisfaction with their PLC groups. Approximately 65% of teachers rated their PLC experiences positively, and approximately 35% indicated a need for improvement, evidenced by their *fair* or *poor* ratings. Sixty percent of teachers would recommend engaging in PLCs, while 28% were not sure they would do so. Almost 64% of teachers believed their participation in a PLC helped them improve their teaching practice.

Table 5. Teachers' Satisfaction With Their Professional Learning Communities, Spring 2009

	Strongly agree (5)	Agree (4)	Not sure (3)	Disagree (2)	Strongly disagree (1)	Mean
Participation in a PLC has improved my teaching practice.	17.2	46.7	23.0	9.6	3.4	3.6
Would you recommend PLCs to another school district?	19.8	40.0	27.8	8.0	4.6	3.6
	Excellent (4)	Good (3)	Fair (2)	Poor (1)		
Based on your experience, how would you rate your PLC experience overall?	19.5	45.4	24.8	10.3		2.7

Source. District Professional Learning Community Survey administered withinthe district Employee Coordinated Survey.
Note. For positive responses (strongly agree and agree) exceeding 70%, the results are in green font.
For less desirable responses (disagree and strongly disagree) exceeding 20%, the results are in red font.

In focus groups, teachers also were asked to summarize their PLC experiences overall, and their responses were primarily positive. Teachers reported they highly valued the opportunities for collegial learning and collaboration. Most of them highly rated the PLCs when the groups were organized according to and working in their content areas. In content-focused PLCs, the teachers reported a strong focus on collaborative instructional planning and improvement of their instructional practices during their PLC meetings. Most teachers were members of more than one PLC and thought the responsibility was too much. They wanted to have the time to work more comprehensively within one group.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation was designed to provide information to the district regarding the extent to which the requisite resources for successful implementation of PLCs were present in the schools and the extent to which participants held a shared understanding of PLCs. To do so, DPE staff conducted a survey of 472 teachers involved in PLCs on high school campuses and held a series of focus groups to enhance the contextual understanding of the survey data.

Across high schools, PLCs appeared to be established with many meeting regularly. Most teachers indicated they were participating regularly in a PLC and had plenty of time to meet. However, a sizeable percentage of teachers (28.9%) reported they were not participating regularly in a PLC and/or did not have enough time to meet (22%). From the focus groups, it became clear that considerable variability in the regularity of PLC meetings and actual teacher

attendance existed within and among schools. *Considering the district's expectation that all teachers actively participate in a PLC, it is recommended campus and district administrators (a) reiterate the expectation that PLCs are to meet regularly and for a sufficient amount of time, (b) monitor the frequency of PLC meetings to ensure they are occurring regularly and for an adequate amount of time, (c) identify the challenges associated with regular and timely meetings, and (d) develop structures and/or support systems to address the identified challenges to ensure all teachers are participating often.*

Principal support for PLCs was perceived positively by most teachers. They believed principals were supportive of PLCs, provided time and resources, and encouraged teacher empowerment and autonomy. Still, a considerable percentage of teachers (20% to 25%) were *not sure* about or *disagreed* their principal was supportive of or provided the resources for their PLCs. *It is recommended principals clearly articulate their expectations of and support for PLCs and with some frequency to ensure all teachers are aware of their encouragement.*

Teacher empowerment and autonomy are difficult to develop and require that the principal communicate his or her vision of instructional improvement through the development of teacher expertise (Keedy & Finch, 1994). Consistent practice and skilled leadership are required to achieve a balance between teacher/school empowerment and the development of common goals for the classroom, the school, and the district to ensure coherence in teaching and learning for all students (Blase & Blase, 2001). *Thus, further inquiry is recommended to explore the practices of campus administrators as they facilitate the development of PLCs on their respective campuses. This inquiry may help the district identify best practices for creating highly effective PLCs. Also, additional and ongoing support should be provided to principals so they can effectively facilitate the development of PLCs in their schools.*

Most teachers indicated they were involved in PLCs with the critical characteristics and social resources necessary to function at a high level. However, the responses pertaining to whether PLC members shared norms and values were mixed, with 18% indicting they were not sure members shared norms and values, and 20.8% strongly disagreeing members shared norms and values. Shared norms and values are critical to the improvement of student learning. Teachers need to develop and reaffirm their common beliefs about children, teaching and learning, roles and responsibilities, the importance of interpersonal relationships, and commitment to a common purpose. In focus groups, it often was not clear whether teachers really understood the value of developing shared norms and values or what a cohesive focus on student learning should or could look like. *It is recommended that principals and PLC leaders received ongoing training and support to assist PLCs in developing shared norms and values to ensure a cohesive focus on student learning.*

Teachers indicated they were participating to differing degrees in activities associated with well-functioning PLCs. Most often, teachers reported their groups shared and discussed new teaching approaches to increase student engagement, alignment, and rigor. However, they also indicated they engaged in the other desirable PLC activities (e.g., sharing and discussing student work, analyzing student data, and/or developing common assessments) with little frequency. The variation in teachers' conceptual understandings about the nature, participant roles, and objectives of their PLCs appeared to influence the activities in which they engaged within their PLC groups. *It is recommended that principals and PLC leaders received ongoing training and support to assist PLCs on their campuses in determining what kinds of activities would help them work collaboratively to improve instruction and student learning.*

Overall, the majority of teachers highly valued the time spent and the work conducted in their PLCs. They reported their experiences within these groups to be collegial and collaborative. Teachers highly rated the PLCs when the groups were organized according to and working in their content areas. However, 35% of the teachers rated their PLC experiences as *fair* or *poor*, indicating a need for improvement in more than a third of the groups.

NEXT STEPS

Since PLCs have been established across the district and many of them appear to embody the desired characteristics of high-functioning groups, the following questions may be explored in future evaluations or research studies.

- Does the type of PLC (high functioning/low functioning or content-focused/interdisciplinary) influence teachers' confidence levels and/or excitement about teaching?
- Does the type of PLC (high functioning/low functioning or content-focused/interdisciplinary) influence a school's climate?
- Does PLC participation increase teacher retention on a campus or within the district?
- To what degree are PLCs focused on student learning rather than teacher practice?
- Does teacher participation in a PLC increase levels of student engagement and performance?

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