

Establishing PLC's in Blind Brook Schools

Update on PLC's
DuFour Conference Summary
November, 2009

Education Research

- “If schools want to enhance their organizational capacity to boost student learning, they should work on building a professional community that is characterized by shared purpose, collaborative activity, and collective responsibility among staff.”
(Newmann & Wehlage, 1995, p. 37)

Education Research

Louis and Marks (1998) found that when a school is organized into a professional community, the following occurs:

1. Teachers set higher expectations for student achievement.
2. Students can count on the help of their teachers and peers in achieving ambitious learning goals.
3. The quality of classroom pedagogy is considerably higher.
4. Achievement levels are significantly higher.

Education Research

“We support and encourage the use of professional learning communities (PLCs) as a central element for effective professional development and a comprehensive reform initiative. In our experience, PLCs have the potential to enhance the professional culture within a school district.”

(Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004, p. 3)

Education Research

“[In the most successful schools] leadership ensures there are integrated communities of professional practice in the service of student academic and social learning. There is a healthy school environment in which student learning is the central focus. . . . Research has demonstrated that schools organized as communities, rather than bureaucracies, are more likely to exhibit academic success.”

(Goldring, Porter, Murphy, Elliott, & Cravens, 2007)

The National Association of Elementary School Principals has clarified the essential responsibilities of principals in its publication *Leading Learning Communities: Standards for What Principals Should Know and Be Able to Do (2001)* in which it states:

“If adults don’t learn then students won’t learn either. . . . The school operates as a learning community that uses its own experience and knowledge, and that of others, to improve the performance of students and teachers alike. . . .

They must be a place where learning isn’t isolated, where adults demonstrate they care about kids but also about each other. In such places, learning takes place in groups. A culture of shared responsibility is established, and everybody learns from one another.” (p. 5)

The **National Association of Secondary School Principals** (NASSP) calls upon high schools to engage in an improvement process that will ensure success for every high school student.

1. In *Breaking Ranks II (2004)*, the NASSP urges principals to focus on the development of a professional learning community within each school as a primary improvement strategy.
2. In *Breaking Ranks in the Middle (2006)*, the NASSP organizes 30 recommendations for improving middle schools into three general areas, the first of which calls for “collaborative leadership and professional learning communities” (p. 23).

Professional Organization Endorsements of PLC's

- American Federation of Teachers
- Annenberg Institute for School Reform
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Council of Chief State School Officials
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Center for Restructuring Education, Schools, and Teaching
- National Council of Teachers of English
- National Council of Teachers of Math
- National Education Association
- National Middle School Association
- National Science Education Leadership Association
- National Science Teachers Association
- National Staff Development Council
- Research For Better Teaching, Inc.

Blind Brook-Rye PLC Focus

- Continue its effort to create PLC's in the district; re-examine the before school model proposed earlier; consider other models for structured time.
- Continue focus on K-12 ELA; consider grade level and subject area PLC's with a focus on establishing essential outcomes for each grade level or course offered; incorporating character education, technology and 21st century teaching and skills into the instructional program.
- Administrators are facilitators with the responsibility to provide essential materials and time for the PLC's to operate effectively.
- Examine and create common and formative assessments for each of the essential learning outcomes identified above.
- Examine the data produced by the assessments to make instructional decisions on what is working, what is not effective, and share the information with colleagues; share best practices to improve teaching and learning.
- Alter the existing teaching schedule and student schedules in each of the three buildings in order to establish the necessary PLC time.
- Establish a mixed model of PLC time for the remainder of this year (starting in February) with the ultimate goal of building PLC time into the weekly schedules next year.

PLC Time Models

- *Common Preparation Time* (daily common prep periods)
- *Parallel Scheduling* (Assign special to a specific time each day for each grade level, and possibly schedule 2 back to back specials on each teams' meeting day.)
- *Adjust start and end time of Contractual Day* (This is the model that was proposed at the first PLC BOE meeting.)
- *Shared Classes* (Teachers combine students into one class so that the other teacher can go to their PLC meeting.)
- *Group Activities, Events, or Testing* – Teams of teachers schedule activities which require supervision by non-instructional staff.
- *Banking Time* – Over a designated period of days, instructional minutes are extended beyond the normal school day. After banking a desired number of minutes, teachers meet on a shortened instructional day. Students remain on campus to participate in clubs, enrichment activities; assemblies (sponsored by parent/ community partners and co-supervised by the school's non-teaching staff).
- *In-service / faculty meeting time* – extend time for teams to meet and work together on staff development days and during faculty meeting times.

What will teachers do?

1. Identify team norms and protocols to guide us in working together.
2. Establish core knowledge and skills (that is, the essential learning) that students will acquire as a result of our course or grade level.
3. Identify course content and topics that can be eliminated so we can devote more time to the essential curriculum.
4. Align the essential learning with state and district standards and the summative assessments required of our students.
5. Agree on how to best sequence the content of the course and have established pacing guides to help students achieve the intended essential learning.
6. Identify the prerequisite knowledge and skills students need in order to master the essential learning of each unit of instruction.
7. Identify strategies and create instruments to assess whether students have the prerequisite knowledge and skills.
8. Develop strategies and systems to assist students in acquiring prerequisite knowledge and skills when they are lacking in those areas.
9. Develop frequent common formative assessments that help us to determine each student's mastery of essential learning.

What will teachers do?

10. Establish the proficiency standard we want each student to achieve on each skill and concept examined with our common assessments.
11. Analyze student achievement data and establish SMART goals to improve the level of student achievement.
12. Use the results of our common assessments to assist each other in building on strengths and addressing weaknesses as part of an ongoing process of continuous improvement designed to help students achieve at higher levels.
13. Use the results of our common assessments to identify students who need additional time and support to master essential learning, and work within the systems and processes of the school to ensure they receive that support.
14. Agree on the criteria we will use in judging the quality of student work related to the essential learning of our course, and continually practice and apply those criteria to ensure we are consistent.
15. Teach students the criteria we will use in judging the quality of their work and provide them with examples.
16. Develop or utilize common summative assessments that help us assess the strengths and weaknesses of our program.
17. Established the proficiency standard we want each student to achieve on each skill and concept examined with our summative assessments.
18. Formally evaluate our adherence to PLC team norms and the effectiveness of our PLC team at least twice each year.

PLC S.M.A.R.T. GOALS

1. Review the existing curriculum with respect to state and district standards. Is the essential learning aligned with the summative assessments and will the teaching prepare students to demonstrate proficiency? Is this written curriculum the same curriculum we want students to learn in the 21st century? If not, we must change it.
2. Analyze individual, class, and district test data, student work, and teaching practices. Several questions to consider:
 - a) Are there any trends in the data which appear to be problematic?
 - b) What are the strengths and weaknesses in the data?
 - c) How can we change our programs to ensure all students are ready to move on to the next level of learning?
 - d) What interventions will we put in place for struggling learners?
 - e) Is the teaching practice appropriate for the developmental readiness level of the students?
 - f) What best practices are working and are appropriate to share with colleagues?
3. Research / read / analyze / share education literature and research for information leading to improved student learning and teaching practices in the academic areas. This may be obtained from various sources including: NYSED, ASCD, NCTE, NSTA, NCTM, etc.
4. Revise and edit existing curricula to meet the needs of the students entering the workforce and college. Develop new courses and or curricula incorporating 21st century skills. Eliminate redundancies in curriculum across grade levels.

PLC S.M.A.R.T. GOALS

5. Create common and formative assessments to be used in grade level or common courses. Establish benchmark criteria and indicators for proficiency of content and skills. Ask ourselves these questions:
 - a) What is the minimum number of common assessments to be used in the course?
 - b) Is each item in the assessment aligned to an essential learning outcome?
 - c) What are the conditions for administering the tests consistently?
 - d) Does proficiency on the formative assessments correlate to success on the summative assessments?
 - e) Are we assessing a few key concepts frequently rather than many concepts infrequently?
 - f) Are our assessments varied and include problem-solving and critical thinking components?
 - g) Do we have any performance-based assessments?
 - h) Have we established rubrics for all forms of assessments?
6. Create a viable curriculum with a seamless integration of technology.
7. Develop a systematic process of intervention to ensure students receive additional time and support for learning.
 - a) This intervention should be in a timely fashion – at the first sign they are experiencing difficulty.
 - b) The process should direct rather than invite students to devote the extra time and take advantage of the additional time until they are experiencing success.
 - c) Students should be guaranteed they will receive this time and support regardless of who their teacher might be.