

## Statewide Use of Professional Learning Communities

<b>Date</b>	March 21, 2014
<b>Request</b>	01141

A state department of education (SDE) served by the Southeast Comprehensive Center (SECC) at SEDL requested information regarding state use of schoolwide, large-scale professional learning communities (PLCs). Specifically, the SDE staff wanted to know the following with respect to PLC work in other states:

1. Are PLCs state-mandated through legislation, policy, or regulation?
2. What types of PLCs have been established, and are they part of other state-based initiatives?
3. Are PLCs established statewide, as stand-alones, or at the school or district levels?
4. What support does the state provide for its PLCs, such as training and resources?

A discussion follows of the procedure for selecting materials to include in this request, limitations of the materials, and information regarding statewide use of PLCs. This information includes reference resources from Learning Forward, Learning Point Associates, and the State Educational Technology Directors Association; several specific examples of states that have implemented PLCs; and resource summaries that delineate recommendations and findings regarding the quality and effectiveness of PLCs.

### PROCEDURE

To obtain materials for this request, the Information Request team took the following actions:

- Communicated with several PLC experts regarding states that may use PLCs in their school improvement work: Stephanie Hirsh and Shirley Hord, with Learning Forward; and university professors Jane Bumpers-Huffman, University of North Texas; Kristine Kiefer Hipp, Cardinal Stritch University; and Dianne Olivier, University of Louisiana at Lafayette. These professors collaborated to create the Professional Learning Community Assessment-Revised, which SEDL hosts as a fee-based resource on its website.

- Contacted SDE staff in 14 states—Alabama, Alaska, California, Colorado, District of Columbia, Georgia, Iowa, Minnesota, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Oregon, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas—and conducted searches of several states’ websites. The team selected these SDEs via resource reviews and contact with the PLC experts above.
- Conducted literature searches using several databases—Bing, EBSCO’s Academic Search Elite, ERIC, Google, and Google Scholar, using a combination of the following terms: statewide use of professional learning communities (PLCs), use of professional learning communities on state level, use of professional learning communities in schools and districts, state-level professional learning communities, and determining quality and effectiveness of professional learning communities.

Upon review of 19 resources, the team selected seven for inclusion in this request, based on these criteria: (a) publication date within the past 10 years; (b) content addresses state-based or general information on the use of PLCs; and (c) source is a national content or comprehensive center; research organization; or author with expertise in education advocacy, education policy, or professional learning. The selected resources consist of one peer-reviewed journal article; two papers from education organizations; three reports from an SDE, a research forum, and a professional learning organization; and one web page from a national comprehensive center.

In addition, the request team included information for three of the 14 states that were contacted—California, Florida, and North Carolina—whose staff responded to the communication regarding how PLCs are established, structured, and supported in their respective states.

## GENERAL LIMITATIONS

At present, the education field lacks a strong evidence base around state use of schoolwide, large-scale professional learning communities. Therefore, materials for this request were obtained through online searches, reviews of web pages and documents, and communication with personnel in the SDEs discussed previously.

Generally, the resources reviewed are best practices or lessons learned that included some type of evidence-based approach, such as surveys, focus groups, case studies, comparisons of student test scores between groups, or systematic literature review. The studies usually included some comparison group or looked across multiple sites implementing PLCs to understand changes. Many of the materials focused primarily on understanding the effectiveness of changing practices, but some examined the resources and supports needed for implementation. Regarding the strength of the evidence presented, most of the resources are not peer reviewed, and the methodological approaches detailed may allow for misattribution or confounding effects for the outcomes. However, the resources provide sufficient level of detail around the authors’ methodological approaches to understand how the studies reached their conclusions. The applicability of the resources reviewed is reasonable since the studies are fairly recent. Most of these focus at a statewide implementation level, even if the study occurred at a smaller district or school level, and a variety of PLC approaches were described.

The request team provides the above comments to assist stakeholders in making informed decisions with respect to the information presented. However, SECC does not endorse any guidelines, policies, or other resources discussed in this request.

## OVERVIEW

According to the Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement (CCSRI, 2009), “A PLC is an ongoing process used to establish a schoolwide culture that develops teacher leadership explicitly focused on building and sustaining school improvement efforts. Generally, PLCs are composed of teachers, although administrators and support staff routinely participate (Bolam, McMahon, Stoll, Thomas, & Wallace, 2005; Huffman, 2000).” CCSRI indicates that many definitions of PLCs exist, but most stress the collaborative work of educators to improve instruction and learning.

With respect to how PLCs function, Hord (2009) discusses six research-based elements:

- Shared beliefs, values, and a vision of what the school should be;
  - Shared and supportive leadership where power, authority, and decision-making are distributed across the community;
  - Supportive structural conditions, such as time, place, and resources;
  - Supportive relational conditions that include respect and caring among the community, with trust as an imperative;
  - Collective learning, intentionally determined, to address student needs and the increased effectiveness of the professionals; and
  - Peers sharing their practice to gain feedback, and thus individual and organizational improvement.
- (pp. 41–42)

A review of the literature by CCSRI (2009) reveals that there are several teacher benefits associated with PLCs: (a) reduced isolation, (b) increased commitment to a school’s mission and goals, (c) shared responsibility for student success, (d) higher job satisfaction and improved morale, and (e) lower absenteeism rates (Hord, 1997). In addition, CCSRI (2009) states that, “Sustained school improvement efforts also have been attributed to PLCs (DuFour & Eaker, 1998),” but acknowledges the difficulty of determining the impact of PLCs on student achievement.

Based on their review of resources, the request team found limited information about state use of schoolwide, large-scale PLCs. One relevant resource, the State Education Policy Center (SEPC), is a database of state policies related to education and technology that is hosted by the State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA). One of the topics that the center addresses is information by state related to statewide PLC initiatives. The SEPC database (2014) indicates whether a state hosts, manages, or is developing a PLC; individuals or groups served by a PLC; and hyperlinks to support, such as training and resources. However, the database does not address whether these PLCs are state-mandated.

According to SEPC (2014), use of PLCs in the six states served by SEDL’s Southeast and Texas Comprehensive Centers varies. SEPC indicates that Mississippi, South Carolina, and Texas are currently using PLCs; Alabama and Georgia do not have PLCs; and North Carolina is developing a PLC. See Table 1 for a summary of PLCs in other states, as provided by SEPC. In addition to the table data, the request team provides specific information below on how the states of California, Florida, and North Carolina are using PLCs in their school improvement work.

Table 1. SEPC Database Results for SDE Use of Professional Learning Communities	
AR	The SDE hosts a statewide PLC. For more information, visit <a href="http://ideas.aetn.org/">http://ideas.aetn.org/</a> .
AZ	The agency hosts and manages a statewide PLC. For details, visit <a href="https://www.ideal.azed.gov/p/">https://www.ideal.azed.gov/p/</a> .
IN	The SDE hosts and manages a statewide PLC. For details, see <a href="https://learningconnection.doe.in.gov">https://learningconnection.doe.in.gov</a> .
KY	The agency hosts a statewide PLC that it manages with a subcontractor. For more information, visit <a href="https://ciits.kyschools.us">https://ciits.kyschools.us</a> .
MA	The agency is developing a statewide PLC, which is managed by a subcontractor. This website allows districts to access and share curriculum resources: <a href="http://resources21.org/cl/default.asp">http://resources21.org/cl/default.asp</a> .
MI	The agency hosts a statewide PLC that is currently managed by subcontractor Michigan Virtual University (LearnPort). For details, visit <a href="http://www.learnport.org/">http://www.learnport.org/</a> .
MS	The agency's PLC is managed by a subcontractor; refer to this link for more information: <a href="http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/teacher-center/mstar_brochure.pdf?sfvrsn=2">http://www.mde.k12.ms.us/docs/teacher-center/mstar_brochure.pdf?sfvrsn=2</a> .
NH	The agency hosts a statewide PLC that it manages with a subcontractor. It also has a Digital Resources Consortium ( <a href="http://www.NHDRC.org">www.NHDRC.org</a> ) and an online professional education network ( <a href="http://www.opennh.org">www.opennh.org</a> ). For additional information, visit <a href="http://nh.eduplanet21.com/site/new-hampshire/">http://nh.eduplanet21.com/site/new-hampshire/</a> .
NY	The SDE hosts and manages a statewide PLC. As a part of its Race to the Top initiatives, the agency formed the Network Team Institutes to coordinate and deliver professional development to school leaders and lead teachers through the train-the-trainer model. For details, refer to <a href="http://www.engageny.org">www.engageny.org</a> .
OR	The agency hosts a statewide PLC that is managed by Partnership with the Organization for Educational Technology and Curriculum. For more information, visit <a href="http://teach.oetc.org/oregon">http://teach.oetc.org/oregon</a> and <a href="http://teach.oetc.org/questions">http://teach.oetc.org/questions</a> .
PA	The SDE hosts a statewide PLC that it manages with a subcontractor. Within its Standards Aligned System (SAS) portal, any state educator can create a PLC. PLC requests are approved at the state level. For details, visit <a href="http://www.pdesas.org">www.pdesas.org</a> .
RI	The SDE hosts and manages a statewide PLC.
SC	The SDE hosts and manages a PLC.
TX	The agency hosts and manages a PLC. For more information, visit <a href="http://www.projectsharetexas.org">www.projectsharetexas.org</a> .
UT	The SDE hosts a statewide PLC that it manages with a subcontractor. For more information, visit <a href="https://usoe.truenorthlogic.com/">https://usoe.truenorthlogic.com/</a> .
VT	The SDE hosts and manages a statewide PLC. For details, visit <a href="http://ve2.vermont.gov/">http://ve2.vermont.gov/</a> .

Source: Content is adapted by SEDL from Professional Learning Communities, State Education Policy Center (2014), with permission of the author, SETDA. According to Christine Fox, director of educational leadership and research for SETDA, states provided the information about their PLCs in Fall 2013. Please note that this information may have changed since it was published by SETDA.

## REFERENCES

Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. (2009). *Professional learning communities—What is a PLC?* Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/plc/program.html>

Hord, S. M. (2009). Professional learning communities: Educators work together toward a shared purpose—Improved student learning. *Journal of Staff Development*, 30(1), 40–43.

State Education Policy Center (SEPC). (2014). *Professional learning communities*. Glen Burnie, MD: State Educational Technology Directors Association (SETDA). Retrieved from <http://sepc.caktusgroup.com/topic/professional-learning/prof-learn-comm/>

## RESPONSES FROM STATES THAT ARE USING PLCs IN THEIR WORK

On February 11, 2014, the Information Request team contacted staff in 14 state departments of education to obtain responses to the following questions, which are repeated from page 1:

1. Are PLCs state-mandated through legislation, policy, or regulation?
2. What types of PLCs have been established and are they part of other state-based initiatives?
3. Are PLCs established statewide, as stand-alones, or at the school or district levels?
4. What support does the state provide for its PLCs, such as training and resources?

Three states responded to the request team's query—California, Florida, and North Carolina. Below is a summary of the information provided by the SDEs' staffs in addition to materials that were gleaned from the agencies' websites.

### California State Department of Education

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California includes communities of practice as one strategy in its curriculum frameworks but does not include the strategy as part of any state-based initiative. California is a locally controlled state. The establishment of PLCs as a strategy would only be implemented by school districts or at a school site. Communities of practice can be part of a local educational agency plan submitted by a district to the state for approval. Any explicit support is typically monetary only via formula and/or competitive grant awards.

## Florida State Department of Education

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In Florida's *Professional Development System Evaluation Protocol: Reviewer's Guide, Third Cycle 2010–14*, the state discusses learning communities in its professional development system protocol for professional development:

Learning communities are groups of faculty who meet regularly to study more effective learning and teaching practices. They share common learning goals that align with school and/or district goals for student achievement. Learning communities can be effective methods for infusing scientific and evidence based research programs into classrooms. [ ] This method for encouraging and developing expertise in our professional educators is encouraged throughout the state. Adults learn more effectively when they are engaged in the learning and relate learning to their job responsibilities. (p. 3)

The reviewer's guide is available at <http://www.fldoe.org/profdev/pdf/pdsreviewers.pdf>.

Districts in the state establish PLCs. For example, the Osceola School District provided information on its use of Lesson Study as the approach for helping its teachers be exemplar educators participating in professional learning communities. The district has provided Lesson Study training to each of the elementary schools for designated grade levels and for some middle and high schools in the district. The district promotes the use of PLCs as a means for groups of educators to collaborate and engage in reflective conversations that result in shared values around student learning and helping all students succeed in learning.

The district provides resources through its website to help teachers in PLCs establish and maintain their group and group processes and to help collect and examine data. Articles, team building ideas, templates for meeting minutes, and archived newsletters are some of the resources provided. Resources also include a guidebook for facilitators and members to better understand how a PLC works and ideas for building an effective PLC. Training materials (e.g., presentations, graphics, goal-setting sheets, etc.) are also available through this website: <http://www.osceola.k12.fl.us/depts/ResearchEvalAcct/ProfessionalLearningCommunities.asp>.



## North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

Provided by: Content located on the NCDPI website  
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The 2009 *North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process* manual recommends that professional learning communities should be implemented as a component of the educator effectiveness model (<http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/effectiveness-model/ncees/instruments/teach-eval-manual.pdf>). The manual recommends PLCs that are teacher lead as stand-alones at the school level. The state provides training on the educator evaluation system but no additional training on the implementation of PLCs. The following information is reprinted from the manual.

Teachers demonstrate leadership in the school.

Teachers work collaboratively with school personnel to create a professional learning community. They analyze and use local, state, and national data to develop goals and strategies in the school improvement plan that enhances student learning and teacher working conditions. Teachers provide input in determining the school budget and in the selection of professional development that meets the needs of students and their own professional growth. They participate in the hiring process and collaborate with their colleagues to mentor and support teachers to improve the effectiveness of their departments or grade levels.

- Work collaboratively with all school personnel to create a professional learning community
- Analyze data
- Develop goals and strategies through the school improvement plan
- Assist in determining school budget and professional development
- Participate in hiring process
- Collaborate with colleagues to mentor and support teachers to improve effectiveness (p. 8)

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North Carolina's Formative Assessment Learning Community's Online Network (NC FALCON) (<https://center.ncsu.edu/nc/course/category.php?id=10>) consists of formative assessment professional development modules that support the implementation of formative assessment in classrooms. Each of the five modules features an online PLC in which educators can voluntarily share successes and challenges through positive collaboration. Participation in any PLC is voluntary, and participants may post a discussion thread or respond to threads posted by other educators. The PLC for each module provides participants with the opportunity to reflect on information found in the module and to share lessons learned, strategies, and insights with North Carolina educators.

## RESOURCE SUMMARIES

**APQC Education. (2009). *Best practices in evaluating professional learning communities (PLCs): Benchmarking report*. Houston, TX: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.apqceducation.org/index.php/knowledge-base/download-documents/doc\\_download/113-01-9300-final-report-evaluating-professional-learning-communities](http://www.apqceducation.org/index.php/knowledge-base/download-documents/doc_download/113-01-9300-final-report-evaluating-professional-learning-communities)**

This APQC Education report examines best practices of how professional learning communities work in districts and schools so that other participating schools and districts can measure themselves against the practices and procedures that are used by the best practice organizations. The report describes the responses to the site visit framework questions by these organizations.

The project team first interviewed and surveyed learning experts and practicing PLC districts and schools to develop 30 questions to be used in this benchmarking project. The project team then selected 10 best practice organizations to further study. Both a quantitative survey and qualitative survey were developed to obtain PLC practice information from all participants in the project. Site visits were conducted, and data artifacts were collected from the best practice sites and documented in case studies for each site. Other participating districts were given detailed benchmark reports allowing them to see how their school or district matched up to the PLC processes used at the best practice organizations.

The site framework questions used to drive the data collection efforts and to structure the report were divided into three categories or scope areas. The first scope area, design and planning, covered nine questions with items, such as how the organization defined PLC, how the organization initially became interested in a PLC, and the core characteristics that made the organization a learning community. Questions about models that were considered for developing their PLC and how the PLC evolved over time also were included. For example, a question about whether participating organizations mandated or encouraged PLCs showed that 57% of best practice districts and 62% of participating districts mandated that staff participate in some type of learning team. On the school level, 83% of all schools indicated that they mandated staff participation in some type of learning team. Although many of the districts and schools indicated that they had no systemic plan to establish PLCs, highlights from the case studies indicated that a desire to build capacity and trust were key focus areas as organizations gradually implemented PLCs and provided the support, training, and resources needed to guide the processes.

The second scope area contained 13 questions about implementation of PLCs. Questions about implementation ranged from initial establishment of PLC decisions and costs, to central office support, use of technology, leadership structure for PLCs, and technology use to support PLCs. In response to questions about which components of PLC work are mandatory and which are left to the teachers to decide, best practice organizations spoke of specific topics they required the PLC to address (e.g., curriculum design, instruction, literacy) or PLC processes they expected them to use (e.g., goal setting, measurable results). Schools gave flexibility within the structure of a PLC (e.g., number of times to meet each week) but allowed the groups to determine the specifics (e.g., when to meet).



In response to another item about how the central office supported the PLC work in schools, the report summarized the findings, emphasizing the importance of team collaboration and taking advantage of every opportunity to communicate that message on every level (e.g., school, parent, teacher) and through every means available. In addition, emphasis was placed on helping the teachers and administrators to value team collaboration time and to keep that time sacred (e.g., guarding meeting times, not scheduling competing district events during that time). The last seven questions were contained in the third scope area: evaluation and monitoring. Most questions in this area had to do with defining, documenting, and sharing successes in PLC work.

Specific data elements used to evaluate PLCs and systems used to track and report this information were some of the questions for this area. Best practice organizations and participating schools also had the opportunity to describe their successes and challenges. In response to the question about how they know when their PLCs are successful, best practice organizations described indirect evidence (such as teacher or parent feedback) and more direct evidence (such as sustained and continuous growth of PLCs within the district or schools or PLC goal attainment). Student achievement improvements also were cited as evidence of a change in teacher practice, school culture, and student performance.

The report contained five appendices. The first appendix, Appendix A, detailed the framework of questions used for the site visits. It listed 30 questions in the three scope areas of design and planning, implementation and support, and evaluation. Appendix B contained profiles of eight of the best practice organizations that included specific descriptive information and highlights of exemplary practices used in the organization. Appendix C listed the 31 references for the sample of literature reviewed in the study.

Appendix D provided graphics of the demographic details of the participating organizations that included a graph of the 44 districts and 19 schools, and a breakdown of the ethnicity of the districts (primarily White and African-American) and schools (primarily Hispanic and White) participating organizations. A number of graphs of the district and school NCES local information also were provided, with most of the participating organizations being in large suburban areas. Appendix E provided information about APQC Education, a nonprofit organization, and contact information.

**Belton-Kocher, E., Gray-Akyea, S., & Thompson, M. (2007). *Implementing high school level professional learning communities in SPPS*. Retrieved from [https://datacenter.spps.org/uploads/SOTW\\_12-21-07\\_Implementing\\_HS\\_level\\_PLCS\\_in\\_SPPS.pdf](https://datacenter.spps.org/uploads/SOTW_12-21-07_Implementing_HS_level_PLCS_in_SPPS.pdf)**

This white paper from the Education Resources Strategies (ERS) group was provided as a report to the St. Paul Public Schools (SPPS) as a result of the agency's recommended PLCs model.

The focus of the professional development model was entirely geared toward high schools through a *Focused Inquiry* method. The *Focused Inquiry* effort began with nine groups of high school teachers from six high schools. During the first year, teachers volunteered to work in school teams and shared a common goal selected by the teachers. External coaches were brought in to work with each team. During the second year of implementation, Harding High

School implemented the PLC model created by DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker (2006). During this time, a program evaluation was outlined for the *Focused Inquiry* process.

By the third year, the PLC process expanded to 31 teams with structures established by the district. The district required approved topics and an action research model. Teams also were required to report data about improvement/effectiveness. SPPS began planning for districtwide implementation of PLCs based upon recommendations of ERS for all high schools. It was recommended that each school have a coach in literacy and mathematics.

By the end of the third year, the following findings were made.

#### District findings:

- The DuFour model does not provide enough guidance/structure for school or district leaders.
- District support models are critical for the establishment of PLCs.
- PLCs are not clearly understood by all high schools.
- Central support is necessary for consistency and coherence in PLCs.
- Coaching support needs to be continuous and ongoing for all staff involved.

#### School-based findings:

- For PLCs to be successful a clear model is vital.
- The building leader must be actively involved.
- The school leadership team also must be engaged in the process.
- Quality varies within schools' learning communities.
- Stakeholders see a need for continued support from the district.
- Successful teams focused their efforts on student achievement based on common assessments.
- Larger high schools with administrative involvement experienced the most widespread implementation of PLCs.
- Finding a common planning time was one of the challenges for high schools.

#### Recommendations:

- Establish a model for PLCs that is supported by the school district.
- Establish a model for PLCs for alternative schools.
- Develop PLC training for administrators and leadership teams with specific topics: facilitation skills, common formative assessments, and review of student work.
- Implement districtwide PLCs for building administrators.
- Build and train PLC coaches for ongoing training and school support.
- Provide professional development for coaches and building leaders.
- Aid schools in adjusting their schedules for common planning time.

For PLCs to be effective, the authors recommended that the district must work to find the right balance between district structures and site-based systems. This will ensure that both groups are able to establish a PLC initiative that will address the learning community structure, use of assessments, and common time for planning.

**Carmichael, D. L., & Penney Martens, R. (2012). *Midwestern magic: Iowa's statewide initiative engages teachers, encourages leadership, and energizes student learning. Journal of Staff Development*, 33(3), 22–26. Retrieved from <http://learningforward.org/docs/jsd-june-2012/carmichael333.pdf?sfvrsn=2>**

This article provides a description of the authentic intellectual work (AIW) Iowa statewide professional learning communities initiative. The Iowa Department of Education, upon review of its state assessment results for students in grades 3 through 11, required that all teachers take part in AIW as their main professional development for at least a year prior to the next state test administration. Data was compared from similar schools based upon identified demographics.

The framework was designed by the Center for Organization and Restructuring Schools at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. The researchers wanted to determine if students were exposed to AIW-promoted instruction and assessments would their performance improve on state assessments and other curriculums.

The components of Authentic Intellectual Work Teams were (a) four to six people per team; (b) four to six meetings a month; (c) sharing of student work samples or instruction clips; (d) scoring of student work, using established tools and protocols; and (e) job-embedded work.

The Iowa Department of Education evaluated the process in 2010–2011. The agency reviewed four pieces of data:

- Focus groups of 27 administrators
- Case studies of four AIW high schools in their fourth year of implementation
- Original and revised assignments of the AIW Iowa teachers
- Comparisons of student achievement results of students in AIW Iowa schools and similar students in non-AIW Iowa schools

The findings showed that schools that implemented the AIW had significantly higher scores in mathematics on the Iowa Test of Basic Skills. The focus groups and the case studies agreed that the teacher became a facilitator of learning as opposed to a provider of facts. Assessments were shown to be significantly more authentic in the areas of mathematics, science, and social studies. The AIW also caused a major shift in the professional culture of schools due to the level of collaboration between teachers and administrators. The students also benefited from richer and meaningful classroom discussions, which challenged them in their problem solving.

For AIW to be successful, the following keys were identified:

- AIW Iowa started small.
- The learning comes from the conversation, not from being right.
- Capacity is built at the local and regional level.
- The focus is on the school as the unit of change.
- Authentic intellectual work is used to course-correct and to provide critical feedback.
- The informal networks drive the reform's pace.
- AIW Iowa professional learning transforms student learning.

**Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. (2009). *Professional learning communities—What is a PLC?* Washington, DC: Learning Point Associates. Retrieved from <http://www.centerforcsri.org/plc/program.html>**

This web page summarizes the literature related to professional learning communities through 2009. Included in the content are the following sections:

- What is a PLC?
- Defining elements of a PLC
- Literature and emerging research
- School use of the PLC approach
- Necessary supports
- References
- Websites

The introduction reflects the distinction of the PLC as a process used to establish a schoolwide culture based on the belief of teacher leadership in school improvement rather than a data-based, decision-making meeting. The web-based resource was intended to provide an overview of then current information and resources particular to PLCs. Funding for the project ended in 2009, and the information is archived but no longer updated.

The Necessary Supports section is divided between needed supports for leadership and structures. Principal supports include the need to expand leadership among teachers, providing the fiscal resources needed for training and coaching, creating communication strategies, ensuring access to data for decision making, establishing a trusting environment in which the work can be successful, and providing teacher-determined professional learning. Districts support effective PLCs by (a) establishing a clear vision and priority while allowing for development within the school context, (b) making resources available, (c) working out agreements when teachers are asked to take on new responsibilities, (d) embedding PLCs in policy, and (e) linking PLCs with existing program requirements and expectations.

Structural supports at a minimum require sufficient time and space for meetings. Strategies to provide sufficient time include scheduling classes to allow for common planning time, banking time through particular extended school days, freeing teachers through “special” scheduling, utilizing monthly faculty meeting times and district professional development days, combining classes, and occasionally adjusting the daily schedule. This resource includes references.

**Delaware Department of Education Teacher and Leader Effectiveness Unit. (2012). *Delaware Department of Education Professional Learning Community Participant Survey report (2011–2012)*. Dover, DE: Author. Retrieved from [http://www.doe.k12.de.us/tleu\\_files/PLCSurveyReport\\_2012.pdf](http://www.doe.k12.de.us/tleu_files/PLCSurveyReport_2012.pdf)**

Selection of Delaware as one of the first two Race to the Top recipient states was the impetus for local education entities in the state to agree to implement 90 minutes of weekly collaborative planning time for PLC participation by all core teachers in grades 3–12. This agreement also required each school to implement the *Taking Action with Data (TADa) Framework* in conjunction with the Data Coach Project as part of this effort. The Delaware Department of Education (DDOE) created this initiative to provide 2 years of job-embedded support for PLC implementation.

The 2012 statewide implementation of a PLC survey invited over 8,000 teachers and administrators to provide input on the first year of implementation. The results were included in the document and were to be used to improve services in the 2012–2013 school year.

The survey questions were developed to collect information around the following areas:

- Structure and implementation of PLCs
- Perceptions of the PLC experience
- Preparedness of and support for PLC facilitators
- Impact of PLCs on data usage
- Effectiveness of data coaches

A summary of findings is provided (p. 8) and includes:

- Data coaches were perceived to have appropriate skills and to be responsive to needs.
- Most teachers reported their confidence increased around their ability to make instructional decisions based on data.
- PLC sessions across sites varied as to the time spent on instructional planning and sharing instructional strategies.
- When administrators were present in PLC sessions, there was more time spent on reviewing and analyzing assessments.
- Administrators were more likely to be present in PLC sessions at the elementary level.

Recommendations from the study included adjustments of the model to increase time spent directly with teachers by the coach; alignment of project goals with school and local educational agency vision and priorities; support for the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS); offering support to schools and districts having difficulty providing the 90-minute meeting time for teachers; and providing training for building principals' skills in coaching, using data, and the CCSS.

This publication contains an appendix, which includes the PLC survey that was administered.

**Mindich, D., & Leiberman, A. (2012). *Building a learning community: A tale of two schools*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. Retrieved from <https://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/603>**

This study, published by Learning Forward and the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE), is based on survey data from 33 New Jersey schools involved in a state-sponsored PLC training program and two case studies on participating schools that focus on factors associated with the implementation of PLCs. This is the fourth part of a series of reports by SCOPE, in conjunction with Learning Forward, on policies and practices that support high-quality professional learning for teachers.

The authors identified variables that impacted the establishment of PLCs in the two schools—vision, community, resources (including time and teacher expertise), and process. These variables seemed to be connected to the development of collegial professional practice but were influenced by principal leadership and the presence of shared leadership in the school. They continued to see challenges in finding time for teacher shared work time and the use of data to support high-quality teaching.

The What Can We Learn section provides challenges and supports to successful PLCs. Topics include the role of context, training in the use of PLCs, necessary conditions, scheduling dilemmas, group focus, multiple levels of leadership, catalyst for change, autonomy, and norms of collegiality.

Key findings were as follows:

- Positive staff relations may provide a foundation for PLCs or may promote the notion that collaboration is unnecessary.
- State training supports successful PLC implementation but requires that resources and expertise be distributed successfully.
- Allocation of time can cause inequity and resentment among staff.
- Norms and goal setting keep groups focused.
- Use of data gives focus to teachers' work but can narrow the scope of teaching.
- Principals play a vital role in PLCs even when they are learning themselves.

This report includes references and four appendices. Appendix 1 describes the methodology that was used for the study. Appendix 2 lists the schools that were a part of the PLC Network. Appendix 3 provides the Standards Assessment Inventory Factors, and Appendix 4 provides the Quantitative Analysis: Standards Assessment Inventory Score Change.



**Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2006, January). *A review of research on professional learning communities: What do we know?* Paper presented at the meeting of the National School Reform Faculty Research Forum, Denver, CO. Retrieved from [http://www.nsrffharmony.org/research.vescio\\_ross\\_adams.pdf](http://www.nsrffharmony.org/research.vescio_ross_adams.pdf)**

The authors reviewed literature on professional learning communities that provided data that indicated changes in teaching practice or changes that led to improvements in student learning. The authors first discussed PLCs as a common school reform model and used Newmann and Associates' (1996)\* five characteristics of professional learning communities as the description for their paper.

The characteristics they used for professional learning communities were (a) communities of educators with shared values or norms about issues that concern student learning, (b) communities with a continuing focus on student learning, (c) communities that make use of dialogue among groups of teachers to reflect on issues that concern students and their learning, (d) communities that value making teaching both visible and open to other peers, and (e) communities where collaboration is valued and used.

The authors used research and publication links from the key professional learning community-based organizations and other literature they identified from searching for related terms on research-based search engines. From the 54 empirical studies their search produced, they narrowed their review to 10 studies that reported information on teaching practices and student achievement outcomes in connection with the PLCs. Generally, the authors found that all 10 studies reported changes in teaching practices and school culture due to teachers' participation in professional learning communities.

Although few of the studies reported specific teaching practices before teachers' participation in the PLCs, they did report changes in practices after participation, such as the use of more student-focused strategies, instructional formats, or teacher collaboration and motivation in specific content areas. Other studies simply reported teacher ratings that indicated changes or enhancement to their teaching practices as a result of participation in their learning communities. Changes in the school culture that resulted from teachers' participation in learning communities also were reported in the studies using teacher quotes (six studies) or survey data (four studies). The authors organized the reported findings into four categories: (a) teacher collaboration; (b) student-learning focus; (c) authority; and (d) willingness to continually engage in learning, which all positively affected teachers' approaches to their work.

Six of the 10 studies reported improvements in student achievement in connection with teacher participation in professional learning communities. Some studies reported improvements in terms of standardized achievement scores, with students in the schools moving from low grade-level test ratings to meeting grade-level testing standards. In another study, gains in student achievement for a subpopulation were compared with student scores in other schools without PLCs in the district. Results indicated greater gains for the students in the target schools than for the district schools.

The authors thought they had achieved their goal of finding empirical evidence for the common perception that professional learning communities benefited teacher practices in ways that positively influenced student achievement. For all reported results, the authors felt that the focus

on student learning through the teacher learning community was the key distinguishing factor for student improvement. Student-centered teaching and improved teaching culture were two of the benefits of having teachers participate in a PLC in which collaboration, continuous learning, and teacher empowerment were key characteristics. Studies also indicated benefits for students who had teachers engaged in deliberate practices that focus on student learning and achievement.

The authors included 27 references for their paper. An appendix included one-page summaries of each of the 10 reviewed studies discussed in the paper. The summary included the title, author, and bulleted information under each of the following headings: content, participants, nature of the data collected, and brief descriptions of the findings.

\*As cited in paper: Newmann, F.M. and Associates (1996). *Authentic achievement: Restructuring schools for intellectual quality*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

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