

PLCs General Information

1. What are PLCs?

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) are teams of teachers from like grade level or content areas meeting regularly as a collaborative team to analyze student learning and best practice. The teams focus on answering four critical questions about student learning: 1) What is most essential for students to learn? 2) How will we know when they have learned it? 3) How will we respond when they have not learned it? 4) How will we respond when they already know it?

As a team, they prioritize what is most important for students to know, understand and do in their content area; they collaboratively develop assessments to monitor student learning of what is most essential. They use data from the assessments to check student understanding and determine how to support those who need more assistance. They plan together to help students.

In essence, a PLC is focused on results. It is a team of teachers combining their expertise and knowledge to ensure that all the students they serve meet with success.

2. Why PLCs in Council Rock?

Put simply, we want every one of our students to reach high levels of learning. We want our students to graduate from Council Rock with the knowledge, skills and experiences necessary to be successful regardless of the path they choose after graduation--whether an Ivy League institution, a technical school, the Armed services, or a career.

The effectiveness of PLCs is supported in research. In a meta-analysis of educational research John Hattie (2009) found that teacher collaboration focused on the results of student learning and the exploration of effective instructional practices has a positive effect on student achievement. Further, Linda Darling Hammond and her colleagues (2017) suggest that PLCs implemented effectively improve student learning.

Council Rock has a long history of providing the best educational opportunities for students and of valuing the expertise teachers share with each other through collegial dialogue and professional development. Professional learning communities will enable us to realize our district vision as noted in the district's comprehensive plan:

- Excellence in learning and achievement for every student,
- Excellence in our collective performance as a school district.

The structure and focus of PLCs aligns to our vision and will enable us to support success for every student every day.

3. How long has Council Rock been investigating PLCs?

Council Rock started investigating PLCs in 2012. The district sent administrators and curriculum coordinators to conferences to learn more about PLCs. In 2014, some PLC teams started at the elementary, middle and high school level. Churchville Elementary implemented PLCs in every grade level. The Richboro Middle School English Language Arts teachers implemented PLCs, and the Council Rock South Algebra and Health teachers started teams. Since their start, the teams have provided feedback to administrators and helped other staff members learn about PLCs.

In 2016, all teachers in the district began work to identify the most essential learning--priority standards--in every grade and core course. In 2017, the district trained additional teacher teams so that every building had at least one PLC team during the 2017-2018 school year. Throughout the current school year, administrators and pilot teams have been training all teachers about PLCs and the work that teams do as a PLC. In 2018-2019 every teacher will work on a collaborative team.

4. What does research say about PLCs?

Experts in the field of education focused on improving student learning and high quality professional development endorse PLCs. This includes Michael Fullan, Doug Reeves, Mike Schmoker, Dennis Sparks, Judith Warren Little and Linda Darling Hammond. In a June 2017 report published by the Learning Policy Institute on effective professional development, Dr. Linda Darling Hammond and her colleagues found that professional learning communities, “when implemented with a high degree of quality, support improvements in practice, along with student learning gains. Well-implemented PLCs provide ongoing, job-embedded learning that is active, collaborative, and reflective.” (17).

Additionally, many organizations also endorse PLCs as a highly effective form of professional development for teachers that impacts student learning. This includes Learning Forward, the American Educational Research Association (AERA), National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM), the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the National Science Teachers Association (NSTA) and the National Education Association (NEA).

5. What other schools and/or districts use PLCs?

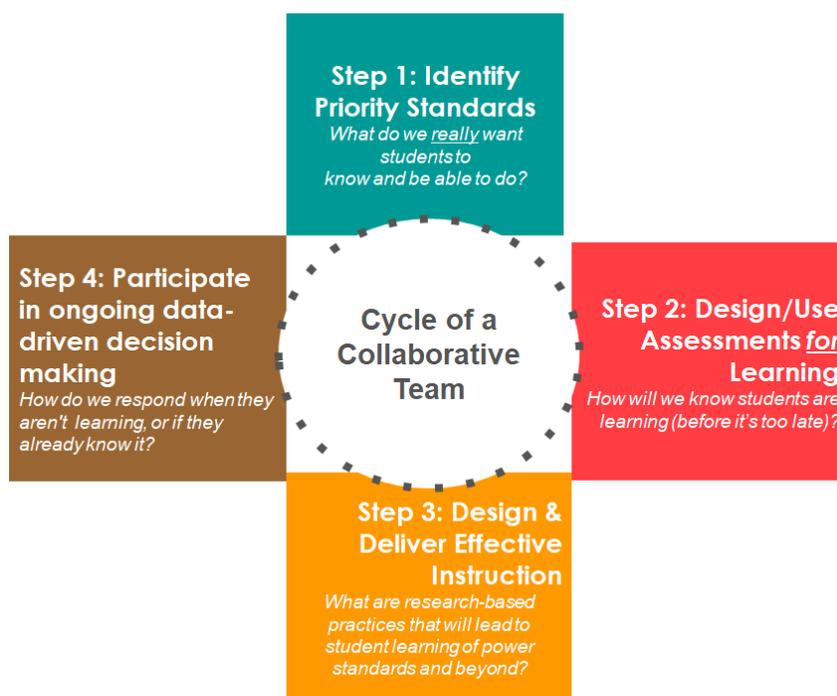
Many districts across the United States and globally have implemented PLCs. Regionally, Lower Merion School District and West Chester Area School District have been working as PLCs for several years. Additionally, via the <http://www.allthingsplc.info/evidence/> website, you can learn more about districts across the United States identified by Solution Tree as districts that have implemented PLCs.

6. What do teachers do during this collaborative PLC time?

PLCs incorporate two structural components to ensure high levels of learning for all students:

1) Regular collaborative time for teachers to meet; 2) Intervention time to support student learning.

When teachers meet, they engage in a collaborative cycle focused on student learning. First, they determine which priority standards or essential learning will be part of the next unit of instruction. Then, they review what mastery of those standards looks like. In essence, what must students know and do to show they have mastered or learned the particular content. They will talk about best instructional practices to help students learn the standards. Next, the teachers will determine how they will monitor student learning. They will develop common assessments to use as a tool to monitor student learning. The teachers will agree to give students this common assessment at a similar time. After they have given the assessment, they will meet together to review the results of that assessment. They will determine which students have learned the standard and which students need more support. They will develop a plan to provide both enrichment and remediation for students.



(Adapted from Capistrano SD)

Over the course of the school year, teachers will engage in the steps of the cycle multiple times. Each time they meet, they will focus on at least one of the steps of the cycle. They will not go through all four steps every time they meet.

7. Do PLCs change course content?

No. PLCs help teachers to prioritize standards and collaboratively focus on what is most essential for students to learn. Students will still learn the rigorous standards and content which comprise the curriculum in Council Rock. Through collaborative teams, teachers will work together to ensure that all students in a given grade or course master the essential content.

8. How will PLCs help students learn?

PLCs are focused on studying student learning and instructional practice using real time classroom data. As collaborative teams, teachers plan instruction to ensure students master the most essential learning. They work together to develop assessments to measure student learning. Teams collaboratively analyze the results of assessments and work together to determine how to support the students who need more help as well as how to enrich those who have mastered the learning.

As a PLC, teachers work as a team to plan, assess, and analyze assessment results to increase student learning. They support each other through their collaborative work.

Similar to a team of physicians, who study data on a patient to determine the best treatment, or a team of scientists, who collect and analyze data to test a hypothesis, PLC teams use their collective data and knowledge to understand student learning and instruction.

9. How will PLC work help my child be more successful in school?

Rather than one teacher working alone to plan and analyze assessment data, a team of teachers will combine their collective knowledge and expertise as they plan and study assessment results. This will lead to refined instructional practices across classrooms and deeper understanding of student learning, thus helping your child to be more successful in school.

10. Will my child have more than one teacher now that teachers will be working in teams?

Your child will still have one teacher for the course, subject or grade. However, from time to time, teachers may work together to flexibly group students to provide remediation and enrichment based on student needs across classrooms.

11. Why must the schedule change?

Three big ideas guide the work of PLCs. First, is the idea that all students can and will learn at high levels. Second, is the idea that all teachers engage as collaborative teams focused on student learning. Third, is the idea that teachers use the results of student assessments to drive their work. To ensure that we collectively commit to these three ideas, we must ensure two

structural components: 1) Regular time for teachers to collaborate about student learning; and 2) Regular time during the student day for teachers to provide remediation and enrichment.

Because the district is committed to the current length of the student day and teacher day, the Administration worked to find time within the current schedules for teachers to collaborate. The Administration is also working at each level to find time during the student day to provide remediation and enrichment. This required some changes in current practices. The administration worked with teacher leaders to find time in the schedule at each level while still maintaining sufficient time to support our rigorous curriculum and our focus on social, emotional and physical growth. **PLCs at Council Rock**

12. What are the schedule changes at each level?

Elementary School

At the elementary level, teachers will meet to collaborate either before school or when students are at specials. This required no changes to the schedule.

In order to find time for intervention and enrichment, we will slightly reduce instructional minutes in English Language Arts, Science and Social Studies to create a 25-minute intervention block in each grade. We were able to increase math instruction in the primary grades to bring the number of instructional minutes for math to the amount recommended by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). We reduced Morning Meeting from 25 to 20 minutes to find time for intervention. Further, the reduction of specials from 50 to 45 minutes at the intermediate level, helped find enough time for 25 minutes of intervention.

Lunch will remain 30 minutes at each grade level. Grades 1-3 will continue to have 45 minutes of recess daily. Grades 4-6 will continue to have 30 minutes of recess daily.

Middle School

At the middle level, teachers will meet to collaborate during the Resource/Activity (RA) period at the start of the day. This required no significant changes to the schedule for students. PLC teacher teams will meet once during the six-day cycle. Those teachers not meeting will be with students.

The middle level will continue to analyze the schedule during the 2018-2019 school year to find time for intervention. Currently, students can attend clinic after school to receive remediation. However, our district's goal is to embed intervention time during the regular school day so all students have access to remediation and enrichment.

High School

At the high school, teachers will meet as collaborative teams both before and after school. In order to find time before school, we will incorporate monthly 45 minute late starts throughout the year. This will be offset by eliminating two early dismissal days at the high school. K-8 students will still dismiss early on those designated days, but high school students will have a regular school day. High school students will have full days of school on October 10, 2018 and March 8,

2019. This shift will enable teachers to meet approximately three times a month--one session before school and two sessions after school. Students will still have a sufficient amount of instructional minutes in each course.

On the 45 minute late arrival days, buses will run a normal schedule. Students may arrive at the regular time and will be supervised by administrative staff to provide time for teachers to meet. On the 45 minute late arrival days, students may arrive to school 45 minutes late if they can arrange transportation.

Here are the monthly late arrival dates for high school students for the 2018-2019 school year.

- Monday, September 24, 2018
- Monday, October 22, 2018
- Monday, December 3, 2018
- Monday, January 7, 2019
- Monday, February 4, 2019
- Monday, March 4, 2019
- Monday, April 1, 2019
- Monday, June 3, 2019

Similar to the middle level, the high school will continue to analyze the schedule during the 2018-2019 school year to find time for intervention. Currently, students can attend clinic after school to receive help. However, our district's goal is to embed intervention time during the regular school day so all students have access to support. We will consult with a high school scheduling expert during the 2018-2019 school year to help us fully analyze the high school schedule and determine any changes we can make that will enable us to embed intervention as part of the student day, provide regular time for teachers to collaborate and afford our students a rigorous and rich academic program that enables them to take a variety of courses.

13. Will the intervention time be the only time my child with an IEP will get support?

No. The implementation of intervention time will not result in a decrease in any special education services being provided to a student.

Students with IEPs will also have the opportunity to participate in interventions during the intervention time as they also work to master the priority standards.

14. What will intervention time look like?

Although it will vary by level, the purpose of intervention time is to allow collaborative teams to provide both enrichment and remediation of priority standards based on the results of common assessments.

After reviewing the results of a common assessment, a team will determine which students need remediation and which students need enrichment. Enrichment is for any student who has

mastered priority standards and not just identified gifted students. They will determine an instructional plan for all students. The team may decide to flexibly group students across their classes to provide intervention. They may decide to keep their own students and use the strategies in their own classrooms. They may also tap into the expertise of other professional staff to support enrichment and remediation. This could include the IST teacher, literacy specialist, math specialist, counselor, special education teacher, speech therapist or gifted teacher. These professional staff may provide some help in planning interventions. They may even be available to help with interventions.

For example, a fourth grade team reviews the results of a common math assessment using place value to perform multi-digit computation. After reviewing the data of the assessment, the team identifies a group of students who have mastered the skill; a group of students who can multiply a four-digit number by a one-digit number but not a two-digit number by a two-digit number; and a group of students who seem to understand the concept but continue to make computational errors. The teachers review the instructional strategies they have used and also ask the math specialist for some suggestions. They develop a plan. During intervention block the next day, one teacher takes the students who have mastered the skill and extends their learning by asking students to use four number cards drawn at random to create two numbers whose product is closest to a target number. Another teacher takes the students who need more support with multiplying two-digit and two-digit numbers and reteaches the concept to those students using some instructional strategies involving place value strategies the team discovered are more effective. The third teacher takes the students who made computational errors to teach them some self-monitoring strategies such as error analysis where students find the mistakes in other's work, which focuses their attention on the steps of the algorithm.

The fourth grade team will monitor student learning and determine if they need to use more than one day of intervention to provide remediation and enrichment. At their next collaborative meeting, they will discuss the results of their intervention and begin discussing the next priority standards or continue with this current standard, if necessary.

15. How will we evaluate the effectiveness of PLCs?

Professional learning communities are focused on results. Ultimately, teachers will know that their work as a PLC is effective because their students have mastered the most essential learning for that course or grade. Throughout the school year, teachers will measure success through the results of the common assessments they administer to monitor student learning and inform next instructional steps. The results of these common assessments will help teachers determine the effectiveness of their work as a PLC. Basically, are students learning the priority standards?

Building administrators and the central office will gather feedback throughout the year to monitor the effectiveness of PLCs, to determine support that teachers need as they work collaboratively and to examine the impact of schedule changes. This feedback will include self-reflection of teams, observation data as well as some survey data.

Building administrators have established a leadership team at each building which consists of teachers from different grade levels or departments. The leadership team meets regularly to discuss implementation progress and works together to support teachers.

PLCs at the Elementary Level

16. How will the schedule change impact the gifted support my elementary child receives at the elementary level?

Currently, our elementary students receive gifted support as part of the Social Studies program. Identified students will continue to receive gifted instruction during the Social Studies block in the elementary schedule. Additionally, gifted students will receive additional enrichment during the daily intervention time built into the elementary student day. This additional enrichment may include content areas other than Social Studies. The schedule change will affect all students equally.

17. Is math enrichment at the elementary level going to change as a result of PLCs?

No. Elementary students who qualify for math enrichment will continue to receive this support during math instruction. Additionally, these students may receive some additional enrichment as part of the daily intervention block at the elementary level.

18. How is the intervention time different from the supports students already receive at the elementary level?

The intervention block will be a designated time in the day when no new instruction is happening so that teachers can provide students with what they need to reach high levels of learning. This includes both enrichment and remediation for all students. Currently, we provide remediation by pulling students out of an aspect of core instruction. Students who would benefit from enrichment but who are not identified as gifted do not typically receive enrichment. This time will allow teachers to provide both remediation and enrichment. It will support and not replace the current support students receive through special education, ELL, gifted education and math enrichment.

19. Why is the intervention time 25 minutes?

The research by Sharon Vaughn and her colleagues as well as recommendations by the Response to Intervention (RtI) network suggest that intervention time range between 20-45 minutes for students. For students needing remediation, research suggests daily intervention for at least 20 minutes.

PLCs at the Middle School Level

20. When will middle school teachers meet as collaborative teams?

The middle school teachers will meet as collaborative teams one time each six-day cycle during the Resource Activity period (RA). Different content areas will meet on different days so teachers can work with students to provide intervention, clubs and other activities typically occurring during RA period.

21. Will the interdisciplinary team structure be eliminated?

The middle school teachers value the interdisciplinary team structure as a vital team structure focused on student success. As an interdisciplinary team, teachers from different core content areas of Math, Science, Social Studies and Language Arts all teach the same group of students. They meet on a regular basis to discuss student needs and cross-curricular connections. They work as a team to support student success in middle school.

22. What is the difference between PLC teams and Interdisciplinary teams in the middle school?

Although both team structures focus on student success, the main difference is what the team shares or has in common. A PLC team teaches the same content. They target the most essential standards students must know for that grade level or course. The PLC team works together as content experts to make sure each student learns the critical content.

In contrast, an interdisciplinary team shares the same students. They focus on student success as a learner in middle school. The teachers on a team all teach different content areas. They meet to discuss student progress and development for the shared group of students they teach.

23. When will middle school students receive intervention?

The middle schools will continue to provide intervention--remediation and enrichment--during two opportunities of the school day. As they currently do, teachers will utilize the Resource Activity period to provide support to students on the cycle day they are not meeting as a collaborative team. Additionally, teachers can utilize the Thursday clinic after school as another opportunity to provide intervention to students. However, clinic occurs after the official end of the student day and is not required.

24. Will students still be able to participate in clubs, activities and music programs during Resource Activity (RA) period?

Yes. The various clubs, activities and music programs will continue during RA period. Middle school staff will work collaboratively to prioritize needs of students during the course of the school year. Thus, at times, a student may miss band practice because he needs intervention on an important Science concept, or a student may need to attend orchestra practice to prepare for the spring orchestra concert occurring in two weeks.

PLCs at the High School Level

25. What if my child cannot find a ride to school on the 45-minute late starts at the high school?

The buses will run at the normal time for high school students. If a student is unable to make arrangements to arrive 45 minutes late, he/she can ride the bus and arrive to school at the normal time. The high school administrators will provide supervision for those students arriving early.

26. If my high school student arrives at the normal time on the 45-minute late start day each month, what will she do?

The high school administration and support staff will supervise and provide activities for students who arrive at the regular starting time on the 45 minute late start dates. These activities may include special speakers, discussions of current trends and issues, grade level specific presentations, college/career counseling or club activities fair.

27. What are the dates of the 45 minute late starts at the high school?

The 45-minute late starts will occur on the same day at both high schools. Here are the late start dates for 2018-2019.

- Monday, September 24, 2018
- Monday, October 22, 2018
- Monday, December 3, 2018
- Monday, January 7, 2019
- Monday, February 4, 2019
- Monday, March 4, 2019
- Monday, April 1, 2019
- Monday, June 3, 2019

28. How will the 45 minute late start impact the students attending MBIT?

MBIT students will attend MBIT at their regularly scheduled time. The 45 minute late start has no impact on their day.