June 21, 2011

Dear Faculty Members,

Thank you for sharing your feedback and asking questions regarding Professional Learning Communities (PLC's) for the upcoming year. The majority of the feedback revolved around two major questions:
- What is expected of teachers during PLC time?
- How do PLCs tie in with the district initiatives?

This letter is a basic map of what we expect to happen in PLC's, specifically addressing what should occur during the meetings and how this work ties in with our district initiatives of Response to Intervention, balanced assessment, using data to inform instruction and sharing best practices.

I.   The first action of every PLC is to establish or re-establish norms. These norms should include the basic rules that all members of the PLC agree to follow – they are the keys to keeping the meetings productive and focused on teaching and learning.

II.   Once norms are established, the next action of the PLC is to define the learning for the upcoming unit. All PLC members must agree that these are *the essential learning targets* for which every student must be proficient. Note that the learning targets should be *measurable* and the students should be aware of the learning targets.

        Examples of Learning Targets
                - I can <u>find</u> the common denominator of fractions correctly given 9 out of 10 problems.(skill)
                - I can <u>write</u> a non-fiction essay using all five components at Level 3 or above. The five components are spelled out in the rubric. (skill and product)
                - I can <u>write</u> a clear topic sentence. (product and knowledge)
                - I can <u>list</u> three supporting ideas related to the topic sentence. (knowledge)
                - I can use appropriate mechanics in the development of the essay as defined in the rubric. (skill)
                - I can <u>prioritize</u> the importance of my ideas in an organized way to defend my idea or opinion. (reasoning)
                - I can <u>write</u> in the appropriate voice for a non-fiction essay. (skill and product)

III.   The next action is to develop a common assessment that would prove that the students learned the targets*. Linking the learning targets to the assessments is the key to this assessment practice.* All students should be given the same assessment.

IV.   Once the assessment has been developed, PLC members should clearly define measurable levels of work that are proficient for the assessment. This is very important so every teacher on the team will have similar grading practices and expectations.
        Example: Students will be able to find common denominator of two fractions 9 out of 10 times.
        Example: Students will achieve at least a Level 3 on all parts of the non-fiction writing rubric.

V. Once the learning is identified and agreed upon and the assessments are linked to the learning, the next step is to develop models of work from very poor to very good to great. This will help students know in advance what a 1, 2, 3, 4 or F-A work looks like. These models can often be collected and used for the next year, but it is very useful for students to read models of both strong and weak work and even be able to grade them correctly <u>before</u> they start their assigned work.

VI. Teachers teach the unit addressing the learning targets, give models, and give assignments at or about the same time within 1 or 2 days difference <u>at most</u>.

Notes:

- This does not mean that all teachers have to teach the targets the same way, but the outcomes or learning <u>must be</u> the same.
- Math is the <u>only</u> subject where it is expected that everyone follow the materials, procedures, lessons, and assignments in a systematic way as defined by the math series consultant; however, the assessment results will still be compared and used to personalize learning.

VII. Once the learning targets are taught, the common assessment is given at or about the same time (within a day or two). The results should be brought to PLC, put on a spread sheet, examined and compared (see Attachment A). As you can see on the attachment, you can quickly identify which students have and have not met proficiency in main idea/supporting detail (80/100 was the proficiency score).

Teachers can use the results on the spread sheet in several ways:

1) Teachers can identify individual students' specific needs so prescriptive interventions can be put in place to help them reach proficiency.

2) Teachers who did a good job of getting students to proficiency in a specific area can be identified so they can help the other team members. The important question here to ask in PLC's is "What did you do to get such good results?" For example, in Attachment A, teachers #2 and #3 did a good job at getting their students to proficiency in Main Idea /Supporting Details. One suggestion might be that the students identified as not proficient go with teacher #2, and teacher #4 watches what she does…the same will happen in other lessons where we can learn from each other's successes.

3) Teachers in PLC's can use data to share the work. For example, one math unit may address four skills:

1) Finding common denominator
2) Finding common denominator of mixed fraction
3) Adding fractions
4) Adding mixed fractions

The PLC can then organize the assessment by skill (i.e. - *You Be George*):
Questions 1-7 on common denominator
Questions 8-14 on finding the common denominator of mixed fractions
Questions 15 – 21 on adding fractions
Questions 22-28 on adding mixed fractions

Teachers could then break up the remediation with each teacher providing remediation in one of the areas with one or two teachers providing enrichment to increase rigor for those students who achieved proficiency.

4) Teachers can also use student work to ensure inter-rater reliability. For example, consider a non-fiction essay. One teacher could bring in 5 or 6 samples of student work and everyone could score the samples using the agreed upon rubric. Teachers can then compare results to be sure that all teachers are scoring the papers the same way. This helps to ensure that all grade level teachers are on the same page with a writing assignment. Teachers could then score their class's essays, break down the results on a spreadsheet, determine students' individual needs and address them accordingly. Comparing and sharing results should happen often, as sharing practices is the best professional development and one of the best uses of PLC time.

In conclusion, we are looking for a few basic but <u>very important</u> actions to take place during PLC time:
1) Focus <u>only</u> on teaching and learning during the time
2) Define the essential learning targets of the unit
3) Link the learning targets to a common assessment
4) Define *measurable* proficiency levels
5) Use assessment results to identify students who have not reached proficiency
6) Use assessment results to identify teachers who are doing an outstanding job in a specific area and have them share with the team what they did to get those results
7) Plan and organize interventions to help students reach proficiency and activities for reinforcement or enrichment
8) Divide the work to make everyone more efficient and focused

We hope this letter is helpful in addressing your individual and grade level needs. We encourage you to ask questions and provide feedback, as this is how we can continue to improve teaching and learning – our main goal as educators.

Respectfully,
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Donna Basting
Catherine Alvarez
Herman Harmelink

P.S.: Attachment B can be used as reflection exercise to be used by PLC's. In essence, each of the 18 considerations is a research-proven activity that can increase the effectiveness of the work completed in Professional Learning Communities. Please use this attachment as a reference in PLC meetings.