

The Governor's Expanding Excellence Competitive (Mentoring) Pilot Grant
2014



District:	Franklin Regional School District www.franklinregional.k12.pa.us		
Superintendent:	Dr. Gennaro Piraino; gpiraino@franklinregional.k12.pa.us		
District Enrollment:	3512		
School:	Franklin Regional Middle School http://franklinregionalms.ss4.sharpschool.com/		
Principal:	Mr. Andrew Leviski		
Principal Contact Information:	aleviski@franklinregional.k12.pa.us 724-327-5456 x2003		
School Enrollment:	847	Title I School: No	Aid Ratio: .4081
Economically Disadvantaged: 15%	English Language Learners: Less than 1%	Special Education: 14%	
Lead Grant Contact:	Mary Catherine Reljac; mreljac@franklinregional.k12.pa.us		
PLC Moderator	Mary Catherine Reljac; mreljac@franklinregional.k12.pa.us		
SPP Indicator:	Mathematics/Algebra I – Percent Proficient or Advanced on PSSA/Keystone		
Strategy:	Using Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to evaluate student needs and learning and to determine appropriate instructional responses.		

Professional Learning Communities: A Pathway to Purposeful Progress in Mathematics

Franklin Regional Middle School uses Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to evaluate student needs and learning and to determine appropriate instructional responses. Using PLCs for multiple years directly contributed to improving the Mathematics/Algebra I – Percent Proficient or Advanced on PSSA/Keystone. Not only did this strategy support achievement in Mathematics/Algebra I, it also supported achievement in Science, Writing, and Reading.

PLCs begin with groups of teachers who meet regularly using agreed upon norms to guide their interactions. During these meetings, teachers identify essential learning and develop common assessments to guide and measure the learning. PLCs study current levels of achievement, set learning targets, share strategies, and create lessons collaboratively. Regular, focused dialogue on student response and professional practice provides the mechanism for reflection and action planning.

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The very essence of a PLC is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student. PLCs in Franklin Regional deal with four essential guiding questions:

- 1) What is it we want/expect our students to learn?
- 2) How will we know when they have learned it?
- 3) How will we respond when they don't learn it?
- 4) How will we respond when they already know it?

Although simple, these questions are powerful if used thoughtfully and consistently for professional growth. Through focused dialogue using these questions, teachers at Franklin Regional Middle School align their math curriculum to better reflect Pennsylvania standards and district values. PLCs develop common assessments and regularly study student assessment data to adjust instructional practices. Students are routinely placed in smaller groups for additional intervention or enrichment based on the data. These smaller groups frequently occur outside of core curricular instruction time, thus providing a “double-dose” of content exposure and learning time for students.

Franklin Regional Middle School teachers leverage the middle school house system and the PLC structure to learn about their students and work collaboratively to meet their academic, social, and emotional needs. Through a strong and aligned curriculum, common assessments, and teacher leadership the school has been able to be nimble in adjusting to student needs each year. Through dedicated time, strong structures, and collaboration, our teachers have consistently helped our students to achieve at high levels.

Goals

- Identify and learn the key concepts of a PLC
- Organize professional development, adjust schedules, and establish PLC teams focused on mathematics
- Identify the school's data story in mathematics using data analysis strategies
- Implement PLCs to collaboratively identify what students need to learn, how it will be measured, and how to respond when students learn it or already know it

Change in Culture

To implement PLCs, a school system needs to believe that focused professional dialogue is a vehicle to improve instructional practices and student achievement. The school needs to embrace a culture of continuous growth, where learning is individualized to help all to grow. At the same time, a school needs to structure a system of safety nets to either catch students

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when they falter or propel them upward when they need enrichment. By constantly seeking to improve and being flexible in addressing student needs, PLCs can make a difference in student achievement.

Traditional school structures tend to isolate staff members and limit collaboration. By implementing PLCs, a school can define a structure that supports dedicated time for defined groups to collaborate on identified needs. Through PLCs, a school commits to professional dialogue and elevates the importance of teachers working together. With sustained commitment and consistent implementation, PLCs have the potential to radically change the culture of a school and create additional tangential rewards such as increased job satisfaction, better camaraderie, and additional collaborative efforts.

Prerequisites

To implement this strategy effectively, a school needs to have dedicated meeting time for groups of teachers. This may take place during common planning time, before school or after school meeting time, or at other times during the day.

To be effective, PLCs should meet regularly. Please note that teachers may be members of multiple PLCs. For example, a teacher may be a member of a house team PLC, a grade level department PLC, and a multi-grade level department PLC. Meetings may occur weekly for the house team, bi-weekly for the grade level team, and monthly for the multi-grade level team. Before implementing PLCs, schools should thoughtfully consider what configurations of PLCs would best serve their needs.

If possible, schools will benefit from having intervention and enrichment time for students built into the schedule. This may occur during the school day, or in before-school or after-school programs. Although this is not required to implement PLCs, providing time for teachers to work with students who need intervention and enrichment propels the process forward.

Rationale

The concept of professional learning communities exists throughout the educational research literature. Multiple researchers espouse that structured teacher collaboration done well improves student achievement and teacher practice. In *On Common Ground* (DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour 2005), a list of multiple supporters of the PLC model includes Michael Fullan, Robert J. Marzano, Douglas B. Reeves, Mike Schmoker, and Rick Stiggins (pp. xv-xvi). The same text includes organizations that support PLCs and their elements including the National Board

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for Professional Teaching Standards, The National Education Association, The American Federation of Teachers, and the National Staff Development Council (p.8).

In 2008, Franklin Regional School District embarked on a journey to improve collaboration and instructional practice using the PLC model. Funded by Federal stimulus money, administrators and teachers attended national conferences with Rebecca DuFour, Richard DuFour, and Robert Eaker and their team to learn about PLCs, the research supporting them, the guiding principles, and key concepts. District teams returned to Franklin Regional School District and shared information with colleagues during staff meetings and professional development sessions. Administrators revised the master schedules in all buildings to allow significant PLC time during the school week and organized PLCs in all buildings/departments. Additionally, all schools in Franklin Regional District carved out time for students at all levels to receive what they need (intervention or enrichment) during the school day. This district initiative and its basic structures continue to this day.

Franklin Regional Middle School's historical student achievement data shows growth in both the PSSA Mathematics and the Keystone Algebra I data. Although Franklin Regional Middle School has consistently had rather high student achievement, a more detailed analysis shows that over the years, student scores have consistently improved. As a result, more students have moved from below basic to basic, basic to proficient, and proficient to advanced levels.

When looking at longitudinal PSSA data, grades 6, 7, and 8 have increased the number of students scoring advanced on the PSSA Mathematics exam almost every year since 2006 (for grades 6 and 7) and 2002 (for grade 8). For example:

- In grade 6, the advanced students made up 47.3% of all students in 2006 compared to 75% of all students in 2014.
- In grade 7, the advanced students made up 69.1% of all students in 2006 compared to 72% of all students in 2014.
- In grade 8, the advanced students made up 42.7% of all students in 2002 compared to 80% of all students in 2014.

Longitudinal Keystone data for students enrolled in Algebra I at Franklin Regional Middle School shows a similar increase in the number of students scoring proficient and advanced.

- In Spring 2013, the proficient students made up 39.6% and advanced students made up 45.8%.
- In Spring 2014, the proficient students made up 27.5% and the advanced students made up 69.2%.

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This summative assessment data rather consistently shows more and more students scoring at higher and higher levels each year. The number of students who do not meet the academic standards in Mathematics/Algebra I has decreased almost every year. Considering these are different cohorts of students, the achievement scores indicate better curriculum alignment, instructional practices, and effective reflection on the teaching and learning process.

The quantitative achievement data is supported by the qualitative data. PLCs at Franklin Regional School District record minutes of their meetings to share with others and with the administrative team. When reviewing the minutes of past meetings, there is evidence of sustained discussion regarding the curriculum, its alignment to Pennsylvania standards, and instructional practices.

For example, a recent PLC meeting for 6th grade math included discussion regarding the scope and sequence and changes that the team decided to make in the order of presentation of the material. By carefully considering the concepts in each unit, the team decided to move a unit to earlier in the year because the skills from that unit can be included more directly in subsequent units, allowing for additional practice. At the same meeting, the teachers designed a new common assessment after they clarified with each other what they wanted the students to be able to do at the end of the unit. The team continued their work by designing a real-life math performance task to include in an early unit and examining PSSA data for their students from previous years. A similar meeting of the geometry department yielded a change in the approach to the content and agreement on the use of similar supplemental materials for instruction. These discussions are consistently echoed in other grade level meetings.

Franklin Regional School District also employs teachers to be Curriculum Coordinators and Assistant Curriculum Coordinators in many subject areas. This structure provides defined teacher leadership for the mathematics department and a conduit for communication across grade levels. Teachers report satisfaction with being given leadership in the district and appreciation of their role in determining directions and what to focus on during meetings.

References

DuFour, R., Eaker, R. @ DuFour, R. (2005). *On common ground: The power of professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: National Educational Service.

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Action Steps with Timeline

This timeline is organized to last approximately 12 months. Depending on a school's situation, this timeline may be compressed or elongated for success. In the PLC Toolkit associated with this strategy, a single page timeline with this information exists, as does a blank timeline graphic organizer that a school may use for planning purposes.

Action Steps to Implementation	
Time Frame	Action
Month 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the core PLC implementation team
Month 2/3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Immerse the team in the educational literature on PLCs including the book <i>On Common Ground</i> (DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour, 2005) and other resources as necessary for the school
Month 4/5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore professional development resources and the PLC toolkit provided through the SAS community Use and adapt these resources for implementation
Month 6/7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify PLC teams and develop norms Review achievement data and review curriculum Create reporting process and set team goals
Month 8/9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Begin PLC teams, focusing on data, common assessments, and instructional strategies
Month 10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reconvene the PLC leadership team to refine the process
Month 11/12	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue PLC team meetings
Future Months	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue PLC teams and use of the SAS resources

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Personnel Engagement

Personnel Engagement		
Role	Responsibility (ies)	Degree of Engagement High/Medium/Low
Principal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review implementation plan and consider strengths and needs of his/her school • Organize the core PLC implementation team • Lead the exploration of literature and core team discussions • Provide professional development regarding PLCs to the teaching team • Adjust teacher schedules to permit meeting time for PLCs • Engage in continuous dialogue with teachers • Adjust PLC implementation as necessary 	High
PLC Core Implementation Team <i>(Suggested members include principals, assistant principals, teacher leaders, guidance counselors, a special education/gifted support teachers, instructional coaches, etc.)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immerse in the literature on PLCs and collaborate to develop the school's implementation plan • Use the professional development resources in the PLC Toolkit and adjust them for the school's needs • Develop suggested norms for PLC teams • Create reporting processes for PLC meetings 	High to begin the strategy; Medium to Low after strategy is implemented

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<p>Teaching Staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participate in professional development regarding PLCs • Learn and accept the norms for PLC teams • Develop a professional relationship with assigned PLC team • Participate in PLC meetings, coming prepared with materials, talking points, and suggestions • Complete necessary documentation for meetings • Be open to changing practice and hearing ideas 	<p>High</p>
<p>District Administrative Team <i>(May include the Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Director of Special Education, Assistant Superintendent, Superintendent, etc.)</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support the principal with developing the implementation plan for the school • If possible, provide professional development resources such as books, time, etc. • Support the PLC core team and, if possible, participate in their work • Address the teaching staff to lend support to the initiative • Drop in on PLC meetings after they are established to reinforce positive behaviors and interactions 	<p>Medium to Low, depending on district structure and leadership team</p>

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Professional Development Timeline

PD Timeline		
Date	Description	Delivered by
Month 1	Provide the PLC core implementation team with basic information on PLCs, perhaps sharing this implementation plan	Principal
Month 2/3	Immerse the PLC core implementation team in studying the literature on PLCs including the book <i>On Common Ground</i> (DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour 2005) and other resources	Principal with assistance from PLC Core Implementation team <i>(The principal may appoint a teacher leader to assist in this work)</i>
Month 4/5	Begin dialogue with teaching staff, providing information about PLCs and rearranging schedules/structures to support implementation	Principals with assistance from PLC Core Implementation team
Month 6/7	Use resources from the PLC toolkit and provided through the SAS moderator to provide professional development to the teaching staff	Principal with PLC Core implementation Team
Month 10	Review implementation benchmarks and adjust plan or provide more professional development if necessary	Principal with PLC Core Implementation Team

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Benchmarks to Guide and Measure Success

Teams can focus benchmarking on four key questions of the PLC team:

What is it we expect our students to learn?

CULTURAL SHIFTS:

- Align all curricula to the PA Core Standards and identify eligible content
- Define the essential learning for every unit
- Prioritize mastery of skills for every course

EVIDENCE:

- Weekly mathematics PLC meetings for small teams
- Larger bi-monthly school mathematics PLC meetings
- Regular mathematics departmental PLC meetings

How will we know when they have learned it?

CULTURAL SHIFTS:

- Use of common formative and summative assessments to guide instruction

EVIDENCE:

- Analyze data at PLC meetings
- Focus on research-based “best practices”
- Develop flexible “cluster groups” for intervention/enrichment

How will we respond when they don't learn it?

CULTURAL SHIFT:

- A visible and systematic approach to interventions

EVIDENCE:

- A “Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII)” model

How will we respond when they already know it?

CULTURAL SHIFT:

- Use collaborative planning to assist in extending, enriching and engaging high achieving students.
- Diversify course learning activities for enrichment

EVIDENCE:

- A “Response to Instruction and Intervention (RTII)” model
- Additional course offerings or modified assignments to provide challenge

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Questions to Ask to Measure Success:

- Have we collaboratively established acceptable norms for PLC meetings and followed the framework to support learning for ALL students?
- Have we identified the mythology (the performance status quo) and dealt with the reality that we have students who are not achieving their potential?
- Have we established SMART goals and worked to meet them?
- Have we taught the intended curriculum and focused on the essential learning?
- Do we believe that every student will learn and have we created second chances through additional time and/or instruction?
- Have we used data to make instructional decisions?
- Have we created a systematic and sustainable approach to help all students to achieve?

Data/Evidence Used to Substantiate Student Achievement:

Summative assessment data (PSSAs, Keystones, common assessments) and growth data (PVAAS, CDTs, AIMSweb, etc.)

Estimated Cost to Replicate the Strategy

Implementation Expenses			
Date	Description	Delivered by	App. Cost
Month 2/3	Purchase the book <i>On Common Ground</i> (DuFour, Eaker, and DuFour, 2005) and any other necessary resources	Principal	Approximately \$25.00/book
As necessary	Professional development days for PLC Core Implementation Team or other purposes	Principal	Approximately \$100.00/day/teacher plus fees
As necessary	Ancillary costs from system implementation	Principal	May include materials such as binders, copying fees (if applicable), etc.

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Implementation Challenges

Like any new strategy, Franklin Regional School District experienced some bumps when implementing PLCs. Initially, teachers were concerned that working in a PLC and using common assessments would take away their autonomy. There were misconceptions that PLCs meant doing everything exactly the same way. With continuous dialogue and professional development support, teachers soon realized that PLCs still allowed for individuality, but provided structure for common thinking.

Realistically, not every teacher is comfortable collaborating with colleagues. Some are unwilling to share information and others are afraid of admitting areas of need. To overcome these feelings, teachers and administrators worked collaboratively to develop trust and solidify relationships. Even so, every PLC is different and some still struggle with a member or two who are less than excited about the process.

Because teachers, especially at the secondary level, may teach different levels of courses (ex: Grade 10 Literature, Grade 11 Literature), it is challenging to provide PLC time with each group of teachers who teach similar subjects. These teachers often share PLC time with multiple groups and, at times, feel pulled in different directions. Because of the nature of secondary schedules and teaching assignments, this is difficult to overcome. Franklin Regional has accepted that implementation in this case is not ideal, but continues to work in creative ways to maximize success.

Franklin Regional still struggles with providing enough time for everyone to meet with PLCs. Some elective subjects do not have PLC meetings as frequently due to scheduling needs. Small departments may not have many people to collaborate with on a regular basis. Sometimes other meetings, such as IEP meetings, may interfere with a scheduled PLC time. Franklin Regional offers time at multiple points during the year on professional development days for PLCs to meet to try to provide everyone with focused collaboration in meaningful ways.

Current Status/Looking Ahead

Although Franklin Regional School District and Franklin Regional Middle School have worked with PLCs for many years, our journey is still far from complete. The current PLC meeting groups established in grades K-12 in all schools are being reimaged for the future. By

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restructuring some norms, providing new data for consideration, and focusing curricular approaches, PLCs in the district are evolving to serve our current needs.

Technology is opening opportunities for district PLCs to collaborate remotely through video conferencing and other online tools. By expanding the use of technology, Franklin Regional plans to increase collaboration time by eliminating travel time between buildings for PLC meetings. Additionally, teams that may not regularly collaborate will now have opportunities for connecting in new ways.

Franklin Regional School District sees PLCs as a nimble vehicle for school improvement and one that can be repurposed to tackle future needs. By setting clear goals, defining tasks, and providing meaningful engagement for professionals, PLCs will continue to serve our needs far into the future.



Resources on the SPP Portal: User Guide

PLC Toolkit Contents

A – Implementation Plan for Franklin Regional School District

- Describes the strategy of using PLCs and implementation information (this document)

B - PLC Sample Implementation Timeline

- Provides a one-page handout with a suggested timeline for implementing PLCs

C - PLC Sample Implementation Timeline Blank

- Provides a blank implementation timeline that a school may use to plan for beginning PLCs

D – PLC Professional Development PowerPoint

- PowerPoint that a school may use for professional development purposes

E – PLC Meeting Video

- Video showing a sample PLC meeting (approximately 13 minutes)

F – Interviews #1 – Successes Video

- Video of teacher interviews asking “What are some successes that you’ve experienced as a result of working in a PLC?” (approximately 5 minutes, 30 seconds)

G – Interviews #2 – Challenges Video

- Video of teacher interviews asking “What are some challenges that you’ve experience as a result of working in a PLC?” (approximately 5 minutes)

H – Interviews #3 – Common Assessments Video

- Video of teacher interviews asking “How are common assessments used to inform the work of the PLC?” (approximately 4 minutes, 20 seconds)

I – Interviews #4 – Data Video

- Video of teacher interviews asking “How do you use data during your PLC meetings?” (approximately 5 minutes)

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J – Interviews #5 – Instructional Strategies Video

- Video of teacher interviews asking “How has working as a part of a PLC impacted the instructional strategies that you utilize? (approximately 6 minutes, 20 seconds)

K – PLC Guiding Questions Handout

- One page handout articulating the guiding questions for a PLC

L – Sample PLC Norms

- Sample norms for a PLC team

M – Sample Elementary PLC Minutes

- Example of minutes from an elementary PLC meeting

N – Sample Middle School PLC Minutes

- Example of minutes from a middle school PLC meeting

O – Blank PLC Meeting Minutes Template

- Provides a blank meeting minutes template to record minutes from PLC meetings

P – Sample PLC Yearly Schedule

- Example of a yearly schedule for PLC meetings for elementary teachers in different buildings

Q – Sample Elementary Bell Schedule

- Example of an elementary schedule outlining intervention/enrichment time for students

R – Sample Middle School Bell Schedule

- Example of a middle school schedule outlining intervention/enrichment time for students

S – Sample High School Bell Schedule

- Example of a high school schedule outlining intervention/enrichment time for students

T – Thoughts on PLCs from the Principal's Perspective

- Provides a quick reference for principals to consider when implementing PLCs