

Maximizing Professional Learning Communities for School Improvement

New Haven Middle School

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Background Leading to this Inquiry

After being introduced to *Marzano's A Handbook for High Reliability Schools*, our action research team strongly felt the techniques could be implemented at New Haven Middle School. In order to work through the process of high reliability schools as outlined by Marzano, we started with Critical Commitment Level 1- *Implement the professional learning community (PLC) process*.

New Haven Middle School had an existing structure of Professional Learning Communities that was lacking in productivity. These PLCs were formed of whole staff, grade level and department teams. Each team met monthly on a rotating schedule. Whole staff met twice a month; grade level and departments met once a month.

Purpose of This Inquiry

The purpose of our action inquiry was to evaluate the effectiveness of our current PLCs and how they inform our work as a leadership team.

Our Wondering

How can evaluating the effectiveness of our current PLCs inform our work as a leadership team?

Will we see positive changes from setting new group norms?

Can evaluating the effectiveness allow us to make better informed decisions?

Our Actions

First, our action research team conducted a survey to evaluate the current PLCs. The survey was given to the department and grade level PLCs asking the team members to rate their individual views of their current norms, protocols, and goals.

Survey on Team Norms- Department 9/11

Use the following ratings to honestly reflect on your experience as a member of a collaborative team:

Strongly Disagree - 1

Disagree - 2

Agree - 3

Strongly Agree - 4

I know the norms and protocols established by my team.

1

2

3

4

Our Actions

Our action research team then trained the staff on professional learning communities during a whole school meeting. The presentation explained the importance of professional learning communities for students and teachers and provided examples of group norms.

Examples of Group Norms

- Bring your best self
- Be professional
- Be respectful
- Speak one at a time
- Be on time
- Do what is best for the student(s)
- Be present - Device lite
- Be accountable

OUTCOMES OF LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Benefits for Teachers

- ✓ Decreased isolation
- ✓ Shared commitment
- ✓ Collective responsibility
- ✓ Higher morale

Benefits for Students

- ✓ Better understanding
- ✓ Smaller achievement gaps
- ✓ Decreased absenteeism
- ✓ Increased academic success

Our Actions

The existing subject and grade level PLCs were given the task of creating team norms. Norms were initially written on chart paper and displayed for a gallery walk. Staff members were able to view the norms established by other PLCs and make adjustments to their own subject and grade level norms.

Social Studies

- Do what's best for students
- Be on time
- Share strategies
- Work toward positive solutions
- Be professional

Norm violations will be addressed verbally.

Unified Arts

- Be on time. End on time.
- Stay on task.
- Equal contribution.
- Provide opportunity for additional feedback/thoughtful questions.
- Express professionalism + respect.

ELA NORMS

- * Have fun
- * Avoid ^{groupthink} ~~group think~~ - speak your mind
- * Respect different opinions
- * Share best practices
- * Norm violations will be addressed with a gavel...

Math Norms + Protocols

- ① Being respectful.
- ② Listen to each other.
- ③ Share best practices.
- ④ Be on time.
- ⑤ Stay on task.

Deviation from the above norms/protocols will be met with the ringing of a cowbell. #Need more cowbell!

Sixth Grade Norms

- Be on time and begin promptly.
- Come prepared.
- Share ideas.
- Stay off "side streets"
- Follow through.
- Stay positive.

Our Actions

The action research team provided the PLC leaders with a template for a meeting log. The new meeting log replaced an existing form that was not being utilized correctly by grade and subject PLCs. Newly created grade and team norms were placed at the top of each log to be a reminder at the start of each meeting.

Indiana Principal Leadership Institute Meeting Log

Meeting date: *9/10/18*

Members present:

Member name	Signature
Chad Houser	<i>Chad Houser</i>
Lyndsey Miller	<i>Lyndsey Miller</i>
Hillary Braden	<i>Hillary Braden</i>

Norms:

- Have fun
- Bring your best self
- Confidentiality
- Communicate openly
- Be professional
- Be on time
- Make meetings a priority

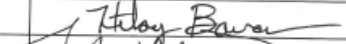

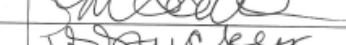
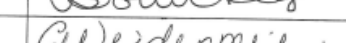
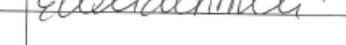
****Verbally address when a norm has been broken, then move on with the meeting.**

Discussion:

- *Action Research Mini-Cycle, Option 5*
- *Survey creation*
- *Slides presentation adjustments*
- *Next meeting set for 9/13/18*

Meeting date: 3/8/19 (6th Period)

Members present:

Member name	Signature
Hilary Bowman	
Jacob Rose	
Mandy Schenk	
Sarah Stuckey	
Erika Weidenmiller	
Others Present	

Norms

- Be on time and begin promptly
 - Come prepared
 - Share ideas
 - Stay off "side streets"
 - Follow through
 - Stay positive
- **Beep-beep' as a reminder and then move on

Discussion

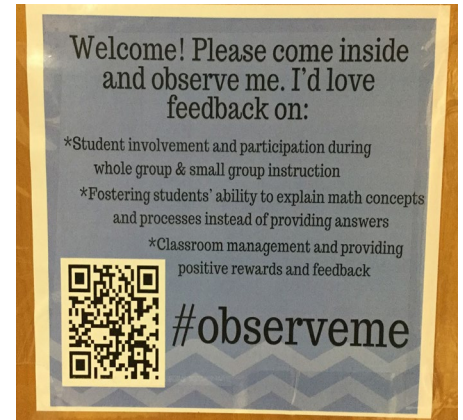
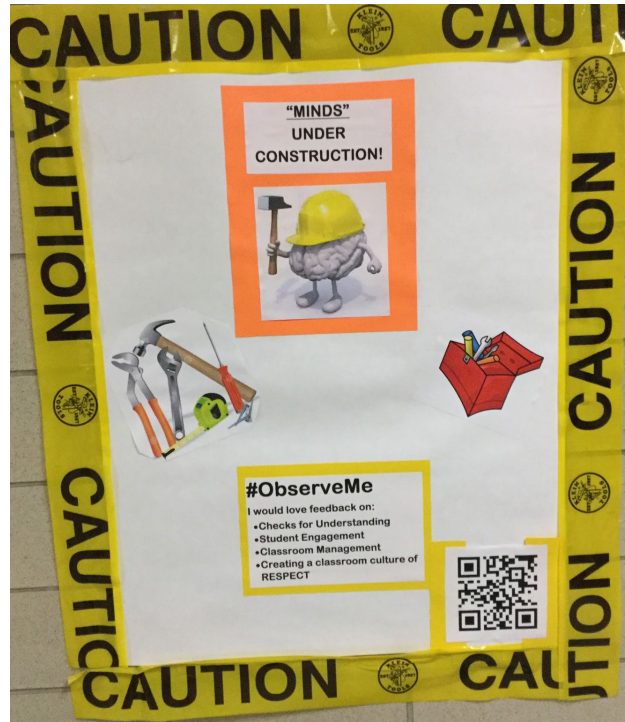
- Misc. Items Discussed
 - 'F' policy for athletics
 - Social media posting and eLearning
 - First day of 2019-20 school year
 - Awards
 - Will these be in our classrooms this year?
- Field Trip
 - Do we want to take one? (behavior, already getting field day, time)
 - Proposed Idea
 - Go to park in the AM
 - Return to NHMS for normal lunch
 - Regular sixth period class
 - Activity for 7th Period (Different activities in each classroom. Students would select their preferences and then would be assigned a room.)
 - Date: 5/10 or 5/17?

Our Actions

The new PLC meeting logs have put a focus on team norms. Group members are required to sign the log for further accountability. The discussion outline helps increase productivity.

Our Actions

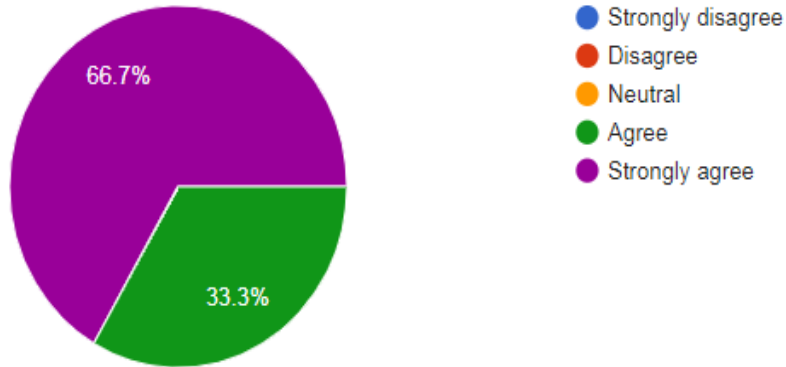
Our action research team wanted to implement *#observeme*. Teachers were given information about *#observeme* during a whole staff training. Examples of door signs were displayed and teachers were provided with a template to create a Google Form for gathering feedback. Groups of 3 were organized and assigned for a first round of observations. These groups were based on years of teaching experience (0-5, 6-10, 15+). Teachers were responsible for two additional observations of their own choice for the second round.



Our Actions

The directions were presented in a verbal and visual way that students could understand.

3 responses



Feedback was provided through survey questions that could easily be answered from the observer's iPad. Using a Google Form allowed data to be easily reviewed in charts and graphs.

Our Actions

What should I keep doing? (Nailed it!)

3 responses

Keep being a happy and nice teacher

Your students clearly knew the routines/expectations at the beginning of class. Students were very respectful towards each other.

Students felt comfortable asking questions to clarify. I love how kids could just go up to the board and to make corrections on the editing paragraph. They were having fun!

Thanks for letting me come in!

Teachers were able to give more feedback through open response questions. Many observations led to the adoption of new techniques and practices. This process provided valuable peer feedback.

Our Data Collection

An initial survey of our teams was given on September 11, 2018 for department and September 12, 2018 for grade level via Google Forms. Staff took a follow up survey via Google Forms on January 2, 2019. Once staff completed the January survey, their responses were evaluated and later compared to September's responses.

The survey was an adaptation of the *Survey on Team Norms* provided at the July 12, 2018 training as a part of the “Try It” Mini-Cycle. Further adaptations were made for the January 2, 2019 survey to gather follow-up data on the PLC norms and *#observeme* initiative.

Our September Data

Grade Level					
	I know the norms and protocols established by my team.	Members of my team are living up to the established norms and protocols.	Our team maintains focus on the established team goal(s).	Our team is making progress toward the achievement of our goal(s).	The team is having a positive impact on my classroom practice.
Number of Responses	17	17	17	17	17
Strongly Agree	5	5	5	5	4
Agree	10	11	11	11	11
Disagree	2	1	1	1	2
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	0

Department					
	I know the norms and protocols established by my team.	Members of my team are living up to the established norms and protocols.	Our team maintains focus on the established team goal(s).	Our team is making progress toward the achievement of our goal(s).	The team is having a positive impact on my classroom practice.
Number of Responses	28	28	28	28	28
Strongly Agree	10	7	8	7	7
Agree	17	18	18	18	17
Disagree	1	3	2	3	2
Strongly Disagree	0	0	0	0	2

Our January Data

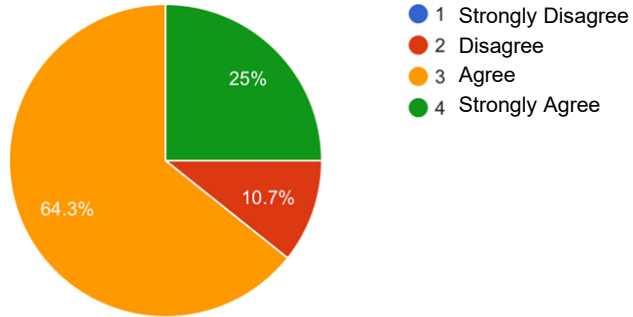
January Follow-up Survey					
	The norms and protocols established by my team have increased productivity and effectiveness.	Members of my team are living up to the established norms and protocols.	Our team maintains focus on the established team goal(s).	Our team is making progress toward the achievement of our goal(s).	The team is having a positive impact on my classroom practice.
Number of Responses	28	28	28	28	28
Strongly Agree	7	9	6	9	8
Agree	19	14	20	18	16
Disagree	1	4	2	1	3
Strongly Disagree	1	1	0	0	1

Our Data

Members of my team are living up to the established norms and protocols.

28 responses

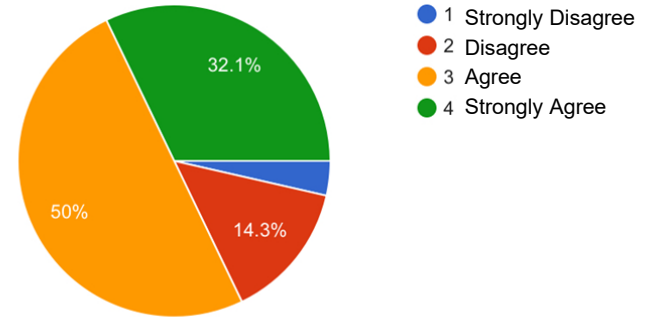
September



Members of my team are living up to the established norms and protocols.

28 responses

January



Our Discoveries

- **Learning Statement One:** A higher percentage of staff reported “no positive impact” from PLCs on their classroom practice in department PLCs than grade level PLCs at 14% and 11% respectively.
- **Learning Statement Two:** After the collection of the January data, the action research team hypothesized that teachers were more aware of the norms and protocols.
- **Learning Statement Three:** When examining the effectiveness of the #ObserveMe initiative, 80% of the staff members found the experience to be beneficial.

Where We Are Heading Next

- Evaluate PLCs on an ongoing basis
- Share PLC evaluation process with high school
- Implement new groupings with a focus on cross-curricular math and literacy

Bibliography

Fichtman Dana, N., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2016). *The PLC Book*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin.

Marzano, R., Simms, J., & Warrick P. (2014). *A Handbook For High Reliability Schools: The Next Step in School Reform*. Bloomington, IN.: Marzano Research.



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Principal Name: Chad M. Houser

School Name: New Haven Middle School

Team Members' Names: Lyndsey Miller, Hillary Braden

Principal's Email Contact: chouser@eacs.k12.in.us

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norms established by other PLCs and make adjustments to their own subject and grade level norms.

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Our Data

The initial survey given to the department and grade level PLCs in September showed our action research team that most of the staff felt comfortable with the norms and procedures of their PLCs. When asked if they were aware of the norms and protocols of their given teams, 88% of the staff stated that they knew the norms and protocols of their grade level team and 96% for the department teams. The committee members were asked about their fellow members living up to the previously established norms and protocols. Out of the 28 staff members questioned about their department PLC, 64% agreed and 25% strongly agreed that their team members were meeting expectations. This shows 89% of the staff felt their other team members were following the norms. The grade level teams with 17* staff members surveyed (*the 6th grade team completed the survey for only the department as their PLC does not change for department and grade level) reported similar numbers with 64% (agreed) and 29% (strongly agreed), which is a total of 93%.

The survey continued by asking team members if the PLC maintains focus on the established goal(s). Our staff answered positively that 64% agreed and 28% strongly agreed for the department; similarly, 64% agreed and 29% strongly agreed for the grade level that the focus of the group was working towards the team goals. This shows a combination of 92% and 93% agreed or strongly agreed for the department and grade level respectively.

Additionally, the survey asked if the PLC was having a positive impact on classroom practice. This question yielded similar results to the first two questions, with a total of 24% strongly agreed and 64% agreed for grade level and 25% strongly agreed and 60% agreed for department. In the department survey four staff members disagreed (2) and strongly disagreed (2) which resulted in 14% of the staff members with the positive impact of their PLC on the classroom.

On the follow-up survey given in January, staff members were asked questions based off the initial survey. The staff members were also asked additional questions that allowed more feedback. When asked whether the norms and protocols of the PLC meetings have increased productivity and effectiveness, 93% of the 28 staff members surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed. There was only one staff member who disagreed and one strongly disagreed. When asked if their team members were living up to the established norms and protocols, 82% of the staff agreed (14) and strongly agreed (9). The survey showed that 4 staff members (14%) and 1 staff member (3%) disagreed and strongly disagreed.

The staff members were then surveyed about their team maintaining focus working towards and meeting goals. The survey showed 21% strongly agreed, 71% agreed, and 7% disagreed. Of the 28 staff members surveyed 27 felt that their committees were making progress towards the common goals. The staff members were asked again if their team was having a positive impact in the classroom practices they use. Overall, 29% strongly agreed, 57% agreed, 11% disagreed, and 3% strongly disagreed.

The January survey also included written response questions. The first question the staff was asked was, "What norms do you feel are not being met?" The staff responses included that their norms were being met, that some members started the year without following the norms, but through positive discussions they have started following the norms, and various response of wanting to hold each other more accountable. Each committee was able to meet their goals throughout the year and created new goals moving forward. The committee members surveyed also showed that the committees have allowed more discussion on classroom practices and strategies to work with difficult students.

The final survey question was related to the *#observeme* initiative and the staff members' views and feedback. Many of the staff members showed positive views toward the challenge and expressed interest in doing it again. The staff indicated that they would like to have more opportunities to watch and observe other staff members. Some of the staff indicated that they found different ways to work with difficult students, use various visuals, and other strategies of the different settings that they observed.

Our Discoveries

- Learning Statement One: A higher percentage of staff reported “no positive impact” from PLCs on their classroom practice in department PLCs than grade level PLCs at 14% and 11% respectively.
- Learning Statement Two: After the collection of the January data, the action research team hypothesized that teachers were more aware of the norms and protocols.
- Learning Statement Three: When examining the effectiveness of the #ObserveMe initiative, 80% of the staff members found the experience to be beneficial.

When asked about the positive impact PLC collaborations have on classroom practices, a large number of staff reported “no positive impact” from PLCs on their classroom practice. The data showed that 14% of department PLC members saw no positive impact from collaboration with department PLC members. In comparison to 11% of grade level PLC members answering the same question. The data showed a need for a set collaborative goal that would benefit all team members in a way that would have a positive classroom impact. We can also hypothesize that the 6th grade team had a higher percentage of staff members not finding a positive classroom impact from PLC collaboration meetings. This may be due to the fact that 6th grade meets for every PLC collaboration (department and grade level).

Teachers were more aware of norms and protocols after the September training which resulted in 15% of the staff members reporting that their team members were not meeting the norms and protocols in January. This may be a more accurate reporting of team norms being met. The September data showed 89% of staff members agreed or strongly agreed that team members were living up to established norms and protocols, with 11% disagreeing and no staff strongly disagreeing. This contrasts with the January data in which 82% of staff agreed or strongly agreed that team members were living up to established norms and protocols, with 15 of staff disagreeing or strongly disagreeing. Our action research team hypothesizes that staff members reported more negatively about awareness of norms and protocols in January due to a heightened awareness.

During the first semester teachers performed two observation of their peers using teacher created feedback forms. Teachers provided their peers with honest feedback of the lesson observed. Each teacher was able to create their own form allowing the observer to provide feedback in the area of the observed teacher’s choice (i.e. Classroom management, student engagement, positive rewards, exit slips, use of visuals/technology). Of the 29 teachers polled, 23 teachers enjoyed the experience and expressed positive statements about the initiative. Statements included wanting to observe other staff members, seeing the benefits of being observed, and wanting to find a way to incorporate additional observation opportunities in the future.

Where We Are Headed Next

Professional Learning Communities are not new to us, however, evaluating their effectiveness is. We will renew the focus on PLCs at the start of each new school year. Evaluating PLCs on an ongoing basis will be critical to maintaining relevant group norms and goals.

As we merge from an independent middle school building to a junior/senior high school next year, we plan to share the PLC evaluation process with high school team.

The implementation of new PLCs during the collaboration rotation is one of the biggest changes we want to implement next year. The existing PLCs are grade level, subject level, and whole staff. Through conversations with subject level PLC members, new group configurations have been proposed. These groups would allow for cross-curricular conversations to take place on a regular and ongoing basis. English teachers would be paired with science and social studies teachers to discuss content literacy standards. Math teachers would be paired with unified arts teachers to discuss the incorporation of math standards into unified arts classes.

Bibliography

Fichtman Dana, N., & Yendol-Hoppey, D. (2016). *The PLC Book*. Thousand Oaks, CA.: Corwin.

Marzano, R., Simms, J., & Warrick P. (2014). *A Handbook For High Reliability Schools: The Next Step in School Reform*. Bloomington, IN.: Marzano Research.