



## **“A Common Language and Clear Vision”: The Beginning Steps of a PLC**

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### **Background Leading to this Inquiry (Slide 2)**

Our action research project was created in response to two pieces of observable evidence: 1. Structured PLCs do not exist, 2. data retrieved from the HRS: Level 2 survey administered to our teachers. In fact, the data presented five areas within our building in which the teacher leaders and myself decided to take action:

- **Leading Indicator 2.1:** The school leader communicates a clear vision as to how instruction should be addressed in the school.
  - **2.1.3:** I can describe the major components of our schoolwide model of instruction (34.38% of staff disagree or strongly disagree)
  - **2.1.4:** School leaders limit the number of new initiatives, prioritizing those related to our schoolwide model of instruction (42.04% of staff disagree or strongly disagree)
- **Leading Indicator 2.3:** Predominant instructional practices throughout the school are known and monitored.
  - **2.3.1:** Data from walkthroughs at our school are aggregated to show our school’s predominant instructional practices (35.82% of staff disagree or strongly disagree)
- **Leading Indicator 2.6:** Teachers have opportunities to observe and discuss effective teaching
  - **2.6.2:** I have opportunities to view and discuss video examples of effective teaching (37.64% of staff disagree or strongly disagree)
  - **2.6.6:** We regularly view and discuss video examples of effective teaching at faculty and department meetings (46.31% of staff disagree or strongly disagree)

With the mentioned lagging indicators/evidence, we decided that change was needed in an effort to increase collaboration, teacher efficacy, all in the sake of student achievement.

### **The Purpose of This Inquiry (Slide 3)**

Therefore, the purpose of our action inquiry was to create and implement a professional development program as the building block of our PLC implementation process. This professional development program will focus on developing common instructional language, school-wide vision, coaching and collaboration of best practices, and creating an online platform providing examples of highly effective instructional strategies at Portage High School.

### **Our Wondering (Slide 4)**

With this purpose, we wondered if implementing a monthly challenge focusing on a targeted instructional strategy would align our common language, increase teacher efficacy, garner usable data/feedback for more specific professional development, and increase collaboration as we begin implementing PLCs within the framework of Portage High School.

### **Our Actions (Slide 5-6)**

To gain the best insights into our wondering, we utilized the data collected from the HRS level 2 survey to create a collaborative approach to instructional practices in an effort to increase collaboration, teacher efficacy, and the alignment of the instructional practices which define Portage High School. The following is a list of implemented actions we have utilized to collect data:

- Defining and focusing on the essential elements within the “Art and Science of Teaching” framework
- Developing common checklist for school administrators to collect data from instructional pop-in’s
- Compiling and sharing data with teachers and administrators
- Teacher interviews
- Gathering evidence/artifacts of instructional practices
- Purchased “The New Art and Science of Teaching” for every staff member (150)

### **Data Collection (Slide 7)**

The following are ways we collected data:

- Classroom walk-throughs (Pop-in’s)
- Teacher interviews
- Gathering evidence/artifacts of instructional practices
  - Creating a Portage High School virtual library

### **Our Data (Slides 8-20)**

#### **Quantitative data:**

- Administrative checklist: Data collection
- Data sharing

#### **Qualitative data:**

- Teacher interviews
- Gathering evidence/artifacts of instructional practices

## Our Discoveries (Slide 21)

- Learning Statement One: “Rome wasn’t built in a day.”
- Learning Statement Two: “It’s all about the sale.”
- Learning Statement Three: “What gets monitored---gets changed.”

### **“Rome wasn’t built in a day”**

As an action-research team, we were humbled after the first few months of work. Our original project was to design pilot PLCs within the math and social studies department. These two departments would focus on a book study, implement best practices, and monitor their progress throughout the course of the school year. We would then use these two departments to mentor/coach the rest of the building during the 2021-2022 school year. The framework for our PLC implementation would focus on: philosophy of PLCs, aligning instructional strategies, sharing instructional best practices, and reviewing student data. All of which addressed the survey data as presented in the “Background Leading to this Inquiry” section. We knew this was a big project, however, we were hopeful and ambitious---then came synchronous learning...

Synchronous learning changed the dynamic of our project in its entirety. Teachers became more anxious and stressed, prep time became more valuable to plan, and I wanted to respect my two teacher-leaders and avoid observing two highly effective individuals succumb to being overworked. So, we decided to create a “plan b.” Plan b consisted of the following changes: pausing our book study (Collaborative Teams that Transform Schools), slowing down the pilot PLC program, and focusing on deliberate instructional collaboration between administration and teachers. By scaling back and focusing on one small step of our PLC approach, we were able to create a project that became meaningful, observable, all while addressing the level 2 survey results. Rushing and/or forcing the implementation of PLCs would have been neglectful and we recognized that in doing so, we would have lost all credibility for future implementation.

### **“It’s all about the sale”**

We recognized that another “administrator-driven” practice would have been met with some resistance in pockets throughout the building. So, it was important for us to sell this as a collaborative practice with buy-in from our site-based team, department chairs, and administration team. In order to do so, we discussed in full transparency how/what our “monthly challenges” would look like while garnering teacher feedback during the following meetings:

Site-Based: 11/04/2020, 12/02/2020, and 02/03/2021

Department Chair: 11/05/2020, 12/01/2020, 01/12/2021, 02/09/2021, and 03/09/2021

PHS faculty: 01/26/2021 and 03/02/2021

After listening to teacher feedback, we were faced with the fear of creating “gotcha” moments for our teachers. We collectively agreed that our pop-ins would hold no weight in the summative evaluation process, in fact, the pop-ins would only be used for data collection purposes to help drive future professional development and/or capture highly effective

practices to share within our own professional development library. Through informal interviews, my teacher-leaders have received 56/62 (90%) positive feedback referencing our focused monthly challenges.

### **“What gets monitored---gets changed”**

Every year, those in education are asked to jump through different hoops in an effort to increase student achievement. Within my short 10 years, I have seen programs come-and-go, I have also had the opportunity to see some programs come-and-go-and come again. With that being said, we knew that we needed to be deliberate, purposeful, and consistent as we rolled out our project. We began by discussing the level 2 survey data results and explained that we were going to be proactive about what we learned and intended on addressing five of our lowest areas. This discussion was important for many reasons, one of which was to empower teachers that their voices were heard and changes were being developed on accord of the feedback.

Since our implementation, administrators have been able to get into 92% of our teachers’ classrooms for a total of 130 pop-in’s on top of the short and formal observations required. Data has been compiled monthly and shared with our staff in a deliberate matter to celebrate success as well as to bring to light reflection and best practices that can be utilized in areas with low data. We also purchased 150 “The New Art and Science of Teaching” books for our staff to utilize at the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year as well as to be utilized during our new teacher induction training and throughout the new teacher mentorship program.

### **Where Are We Heading Next (Slide 22)**

From this experience, we learned that many of our teacher-leaders appreciated the transparency within our monthly focus as well as the strategies presented to effectively implement the best practices. While we had teachers, who supported the initiative---we also had a small cohort who thought that our “monthly challenges” would come-and-go like so many other implemented strategies in the past. Consistency and creativity will be the foundation in sustaining this effort put forth through the AR project. The importance of this collective buy-in is referenced by Grift, Heflebower, Hoegh Marzano, and Warrick (2016), “the individuals who make up the organization must buy into a common vision and be willing to devote energy to the cause, communicate with others, relinquish some personal control, and set positive examples for others” (p. 5).

To continue with this practice, we have incorporated several proactive measures for the 2021-2022 school year to sustain our project and vision. These measures include: purchasing “The New Art of Science in Teaching” for all of our current and future teachers, incorporating these strategies into our new teacher induction and mentorship programs, piloting iObservation as an evaluation tool (aligns instructional strategies within the evaluation framework), scheduling common plan times for several content areas within a few departments, and requesting two e-learning days a month at the high school to allow for dedicated time to roll-out PLCs.

Incorporating PLCs will be a deliberate and delicate endeavor. Grift et al. (2016) stated, "One of the major problems hindering successful PLC implementation is a lack of clarity about the concept" (p. 6). Additionally, "if a PLC is to effect change, collaborative efforts must be structured and purposeful" (p. 7) In doing so, PLCs will become a practice which will increase teacher efficacy, teacher collaboration, reflective practices, and as a result, will increase student achievement. We are looking forward to the future of Portage High School.

### **Bibliography (Slide 23)**

Grift, G., Heflebower, T., Hoegh, J. K., Marzano, R. J., & Warrick, P. (2016). *Collaborative teams that transform schools: The next step in plcs*. Bloomington, Indiana: Marzano Resources.