INDIANA Principal Leadership INSTITUTE

Back to the "Classroom"

Increasing capacity as an instructional leader

Justin Holmquest
New Prairie Middle School
justinholmquest@npusc.k12.in.us

Background Leading to My Inquiry

Entering my second year as principal at New Prairie Middle School and my fourth overall in the district as an administrator, I started to realize that professional development opportunities during the school year were not going to be an option. Due to limited resources for hiring subs and for travel to professional development, I wanted to focus on my capacity as an instructional leader and begin creating a culture where our teachers participated in, and led, professional development based on our building level and district goals. I feel that one of my roles as principal is to create an environment where teachers can learn from one another and tap into each other's expertise.

The Purpose of My Inquiry

The purpose of my action research was to increase my capacity as an instructional leader and to create opportunities for professional development within my building. I also wanted to focus on our district goals and initiatives, while also using the expertise of my teachers and put that to work to create a collaborative structure and culture.

My Wondering

I wondered how I could become a better instructional leader and facilitator of professional development/learning within my building.

My Actions

Our school district is heavily invested in developing PLCs. One of the first adjustments I wanted to make to my leadership approach was converting my traditional staff meetings to a professional learning network (PLN). I felt that this would allow me to build the collaborative capacity of my staff, while also giving me the opportunity to become a stronger instructional leader. We had monthly staff meetings scheduled, so my first course of action was to change the name of those meetings and explain that rationale to my teachers. If information needed to be shared with them, I would save it for an email, a quick video, or my weekly bulletin. This time would now be devoted to helping them grow professionally and would be called a "PLN".

I used a couple of books to guide my development of this time. One was Alison Rodman's *Personalized Professional Learning: A Job-Embedded Pathway for Elevating Teacher Voice.* I also used *10 Mindframes for Visible Learning* by John Hattie and Klaus Zierer. With *10 Mindframes,* I focused specifically on collective teacher intelligence and professional development, and the impact both can have on student achievement.

Another action I took was finding the right content for professional development. Given the goals of my district and our own goals as a building, I focused on using Solution Tree's Global PD, which we have subscriptions for as part of our district initiative to implement PLCs. I used a mini-course they offer that is about Common Formative Assessments (CFAs). There are eight chapters that focus on the implementation of CFAs. Those eight chapters became my eight PLN topics for the school year.

The monthly PLNs were about preparation. Prior to the PLN, the teachers had to watch the videos for the chapter that would be the focus of the PLN. I created an agenda for each PLN and developed activities to facilitate teacher collaboration. I also provided teachers with the opportunity to lead the PLNs, particularly over some of the specific chapters where teacher leaders were ahead of others in implementing common formative assessments.

Data Collection

My data collection began with a review of the agendas and the setup of my staff meetings from my first year as principal. Based on that information, I was able to see how little collaboration was happening in that time during my first year. It was mostly set up as a means for me to disseminate information to my staff. I knew I had to create more opportunities for collaboration during this time and be less of a "sage of the stage" and more of a facilitator.

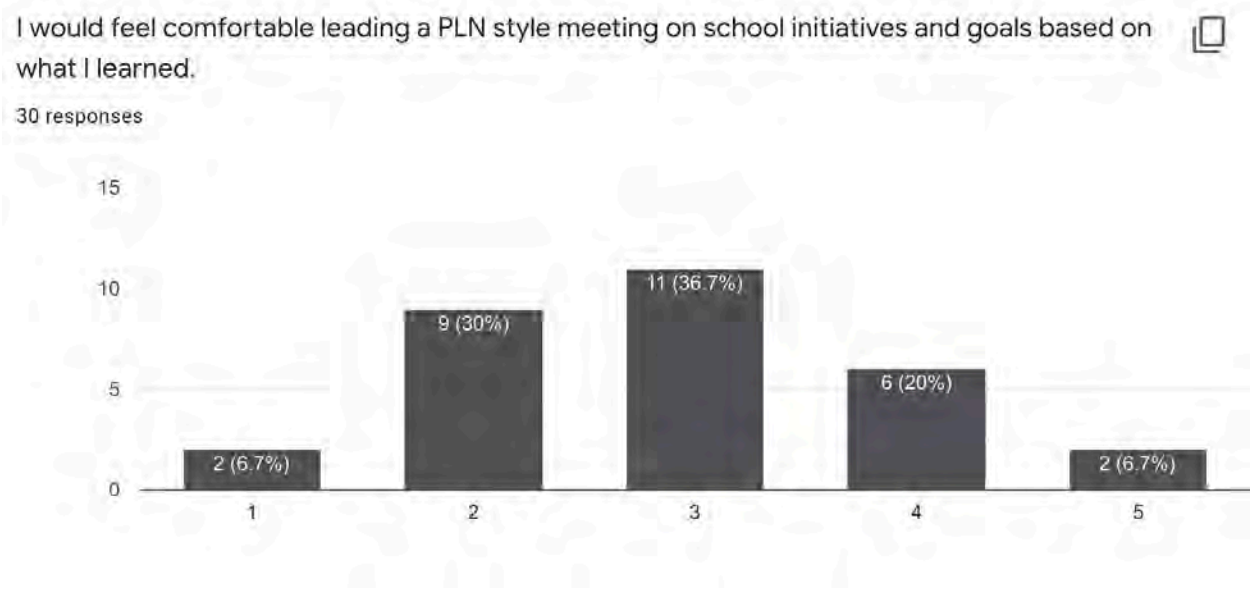
In November, I sent out a survey to get a pulse in the PLN style that was implemented. I used this information to gauge whether or not my staff found value in the PLN, and also looked for suggestions for improvement as we made our way through the year. I also sent out an end of year survey in May about the PLNs. Some of the questions were similar, but there were also some new questions about the overall effectiveness of the PLN and an opportunity for teachers to provide feedback on where they would like to see us go next year with this time.

My Data

My first survey in November yielded positive results about how my staff viewed traditional staff meetings versus PLNs. I have 45 certified teachers in my building, but only 22 responded to the survey. There has been some hesitancy to respond to surveys because past administrators had used survey info against teachers. I assured them it was anonymous and in order for me to improve, I needed their feedback. Of those 22, 16 (72%) responded that they preferred the PLN style. 17 of those teachers agreed or strongly agreed that this format was helping them implement our CFA initiative. 19 felt the time was spent well and more valuable than a traditional meeting. Some of the open-ended feedback and ideas for improvement had mixed

responses. A majority of the teachers liked collaborating and learning from others, but a couple stated they preferred the traditional staff meetings.

After making some adjustments to make the time even more teacher centered and driven, we made our way through most of the chapters of the Global PD, until we had our year cut short due to COVID-19. I sent a final survey in May and received 30 responses. 23 of the 30 teachers responded that they felt the PLN style was beneficial. 21/30 felt that the PLN allowed them to implement the CFAs, 22/30 responded that it increased collaboration, and 23/30 responded they wanted to continue PLNs for next year. The one question that I will still work on was teachers feeling comfortable leading a PLN. That chart is below.



My Discoveries

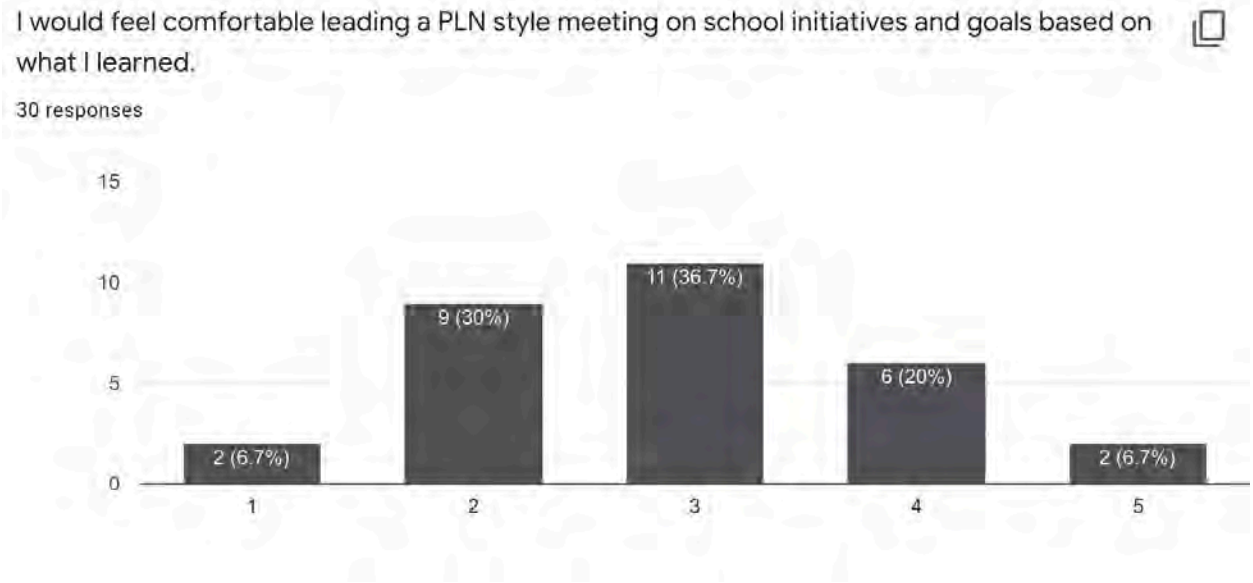
- Teachers want to collaborate; they just need the time and structure to do so.
- Even though I am now a principal, I am still a teacher, and I can continue to grow as an educator and in my own teaching practice.
- There is still work to do to empower teachers to be leaders of PD; it is okay to be good at something and to share that with others.

What I found during this school year is that teachers want to collaborate, but they needed to be provided with the structure and time to do so. The monthly PLN is not the only time we have for collaboration; my staff was able to continue these conversations during late start Wednesdays and their common plan times during the school day. I also provided my teachers with specific outcomes that I wanted and gave them those ahead of the PLN, so they knew what needed to be covered to be prepared for participation.

On a personal note, I felt like I came into my own as a teacher again. When I first became an assistant principal, I felt that I was constantly stuck in a role where I only dealt with discipline

and putting out fires. This experience has been one of the first times since becoming an admin where I felt I was able to work with my teachers and lead them to become stronger educators. I know I can still improve, but it felt great to be up there teaching again and planning for the next PLN.

I still have work to do in order to empower my teachers to be leaders. While a few of them rose to the top, I still have a large percentage of teachers who disagree or are neutral when it comes to opportunities to lead PD based on our PLN focus. The bar graph below shows this hesitancy from the survey I sent out at the end of the year.



Where I am Heading Next

With everything going on with COVID-19, my next steps have changed slightly. I do not want to add anything new to their plate. My goal is to simplify, so my plan it to revisit the CFA process to make sure all of my teachers have mastered this process and understand how to do it. This will also give those who have it mastered and opportunity to lead, if they would like.

I also want to begin thinking about how using CFAs and leading PLNs can happen from a distance. I am planning on working on a virtual format to lead my PLN for next school year if the circumstances call for it. I am looking at a few options to do this, including using Schoology to create a course for the teachers to join. As for CFAs, we made great progress this year with using the data from CFAs to remediate students to get them to mastery of essential standards. I do not want to lose momentum on this, so continuing to learn how to do that from a distance is a priority for the fall of 2020. The collaboration can still happen from a distance, and I want to model that for my teachers as we move forward into this uncharted territory.

I also plan to continue to grow in my capacity as an instructional leader. While the duties of managing a school are still going to be a part of my day, I want to continue to devote time to being an effective teacher for my teachers and staff. Given these unprecedented times, I need to remain flexible and continue to grow in that capacity to make the learning experiences for

my students and teachers as worthwhile and effective as possible. One of my teachers suggested mid-month check-ins between PLNs to check teacher understanding and implementation to provide feedback on the PLN topic. This is a great suggestion and one I plan to implement next year.

Bibliography

Global PD. (2020). Retrieved from http://www.globalpd.com/

Hattie, J., & Zierer, K. (2018). *Ten Mindframes for Visible Learning*. Corwin Sage.

Rodman, A. (2019). *Personalized Professional Learning: A Job-Embedded Pathway for Elevating Teacher Voice*. ASCD.

BACK TO THE "CLASSROOM"

INCREASING CAPACITY AS AN INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER

Justin Holmquest
New Prairie Middle School
justinholmquest@npusc.k12.in.us

BACKGROUND LEADING TO MY INQUIRY

Context

- 45 teaching staff
- Newly designed master schedule
  - Common plan time and late start Wednesday
- District initiative to implement PLCs
  - ID essential standards
  - Develop common formative assessments
  - Remediate students who do not master essential standards

The Issue

- Lack of PD opportunities during school year due to sub shortage/finances
- Built in time for collaboration – how best to use it
- Mundane staff meetings
  - Creating opportunities for teachers to collaborate
  - Increasing my capacity as an instructional leader

MY WONDERING

- I wondered how I could become a better instructional leader and facilitator of professional development/learning within my building.

MY ACTIONS

- Converted monthly staff meetings to professional learning networks (PLN)
  - Alison Rodman's *Personalized Professional Learning: A Job-Embedded Pathway for Elevating Teacher Voice*
  - John Hattie and Klaus Zierer's *10 Mindframes for Visible Learning*
    - Rodman's book offered guidance on designing a PLN, while Hattie's research offered insight into the effect professional development and collective teacher efficacy has on student achievement
- Focused on development of common formative assessments (CFA) as our PLN topic for the school year
  - Used Solution Tree's Global PD mini-course on CFAs as my guide for the year
  - The mini-course is broken down into 8 video chapters; each chapter became the monthly PLN topic
- Front loaded the PLN with an agenda with action items teachers should complete prior to us collaborating

DATA COLLECTION

- Compared agendas from my traditional staff meetings to the agendas created for my PLN
- Staff surveys about the PLN format mid-year and end of year

MY DATA

- Agenda from traditional staff meeting during 2018-2019
  - More of a checklist of things we needed to cover with staff
  - Information could have been out into a video/email that would have taken less time
  - Not a true PD

Staff Meeting Agenda
January 15, 2019
2:20-3:20 - **Library**

1. Welcome
2. Norms
   a. Start on time and end on time
   b. Focus on what is in our control
      i. Focus on big picture
      ii. Stay positive
   c. Have an agenda sent prior to the meeting
      i. Stick to the agenda
   d. Be respectful of each other
      i. Open dialogue
      ii. One speaker at a time
      iii. Fair air time/take turns
   e. Allow for questions/debriefing at the end of the meeting
   f. Stay focused
      i. No side conversations or work
      ii. Purpose driven
3. NWEA - Growth
   a. 90% of the student body increased on one or both tests
4. Statewide Readiness Test - January 23
   a. Between 9-Noon
   b. AIR Secure Test - In portal
   c. 30 minutes
5. Raptor Reunification App Follow Up
   a. Feedback on the lockdown app use
6. Semester 2 Tech Sessions
   a. Two Late Starts
   b. Two After School - March 12 and April 16
7. Suicide Threat Awareness and Bullying
   a. Forms and Procedures
8. Questions/Concerns?

MY DATA

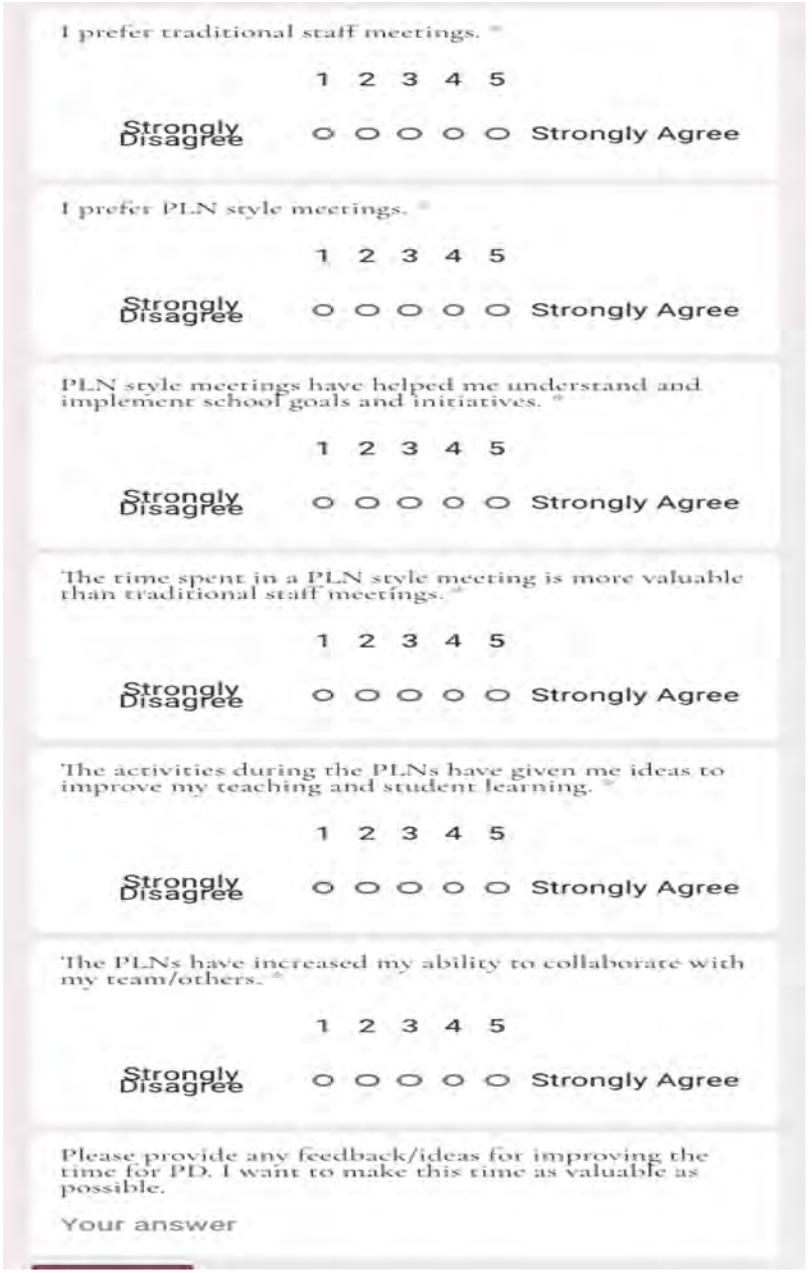
- Agenda from PLN in 2019-2020
  - Aligned to our district initiative of implementing CFAs
  - Time was given to teachers to collaborate together on unwrapping standards into learning targets
  - Global PD videos were watched prior to PLN – time to act on what was learned and practice/collaborate with others
    - Provide feedback and clarity on our expectations

Staff PLN Agenda
December 2, 2019
2:20-3:20 - **Library**

1. Welcome
2. Review Norms
   a. Start on time and end on time
   b. Focus on what is in our control
      i. Focus on big picture
      ii. Stay positive
   c. Have an agenda sent prior to the meeting
      i. Stick to the agenda
   d. Be respectful of each other
      i. Open dialogue
      ii. One speaker at a time
      iii. Fair air time/take turns
   e. Allow for questions/debriefing at the end of the meeting
   f. Stay focused
      i. No side conversations or work
      ii. Purpose driven
   g. Snacks :)
3. Where We Are Headed
   a. Essential Standards Identified
      i. Begin unpacking standards throughout semester 2
         1. If you have a template you have already used, and it works for your team, continue using it
         2. Updated template is also an option - it is simplified and easy to transfer info
      ii. Use late starts to complete this work
      iii. If you get stuck or have questions, Justin and I are more than happy to help
   b. CFAs
      i. Collect CFAs that you are creating and file them away in Google Drive
   c. Organize Folders
4. Global PD - CFA Chapter 4 - Unwrapping Standards Procedure
   a. Bring one standard to the PLN
      i. If it is not complete, that is okay. This is what today's PLN is for.
   b. Updated chart and reasoning will be shared with the staff
   c. Work through unpacking process
      i. What do I want students to do? - Verbs
      ii. With what knowledge? - Nouns/Direct instruction
         1. Skills being taught - The "plays" or "drills"
      iii. CFAs
         1. The "scrimmages"
      iv. Assessment - One big assessment
         1. The "Game"
5. Chapter 5 - Designing Quality Assessments
   a. January 9
   b. Six Videos
      i. Chris Jakicic
6. Questions/Concerns?

MY DATA - NOVEMBER

- November Survey
  - 22 teachers responded
  - Mid year check-in to see what teachers thought of the PLN compared to traditional staff meetings



I prefer traditional staff meetings. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

I prefer PLN style meetings. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

PLN style meetings have helped me understand and implement school goals and initiatives. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

The time spent in a PLN style meeting is more valuable than traditional staff meetings. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

The activities during the PLNs have given me ideas to improve my teaching and student learning. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

The PLNs have increased my ability to collaborate with my team/others. *

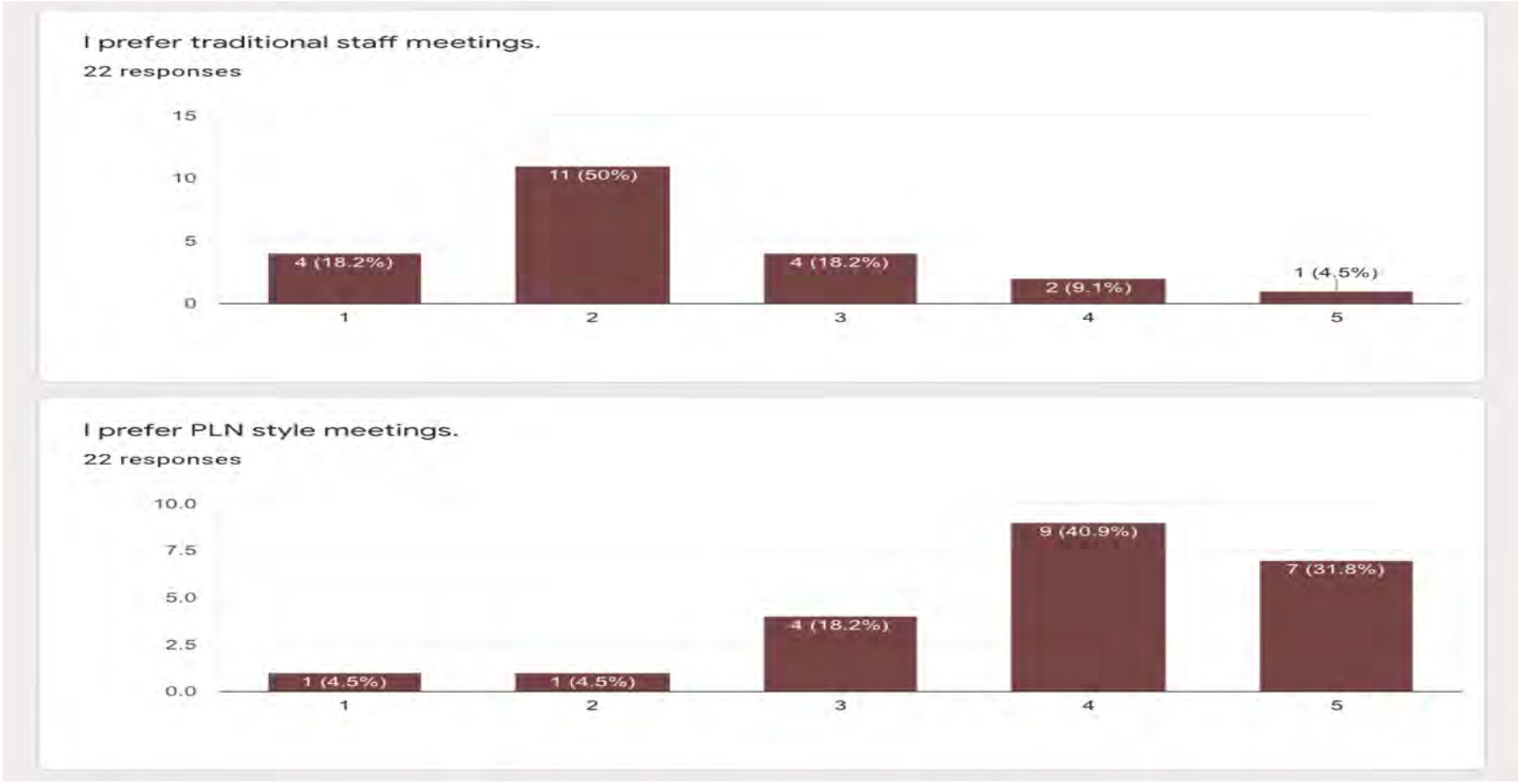
1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

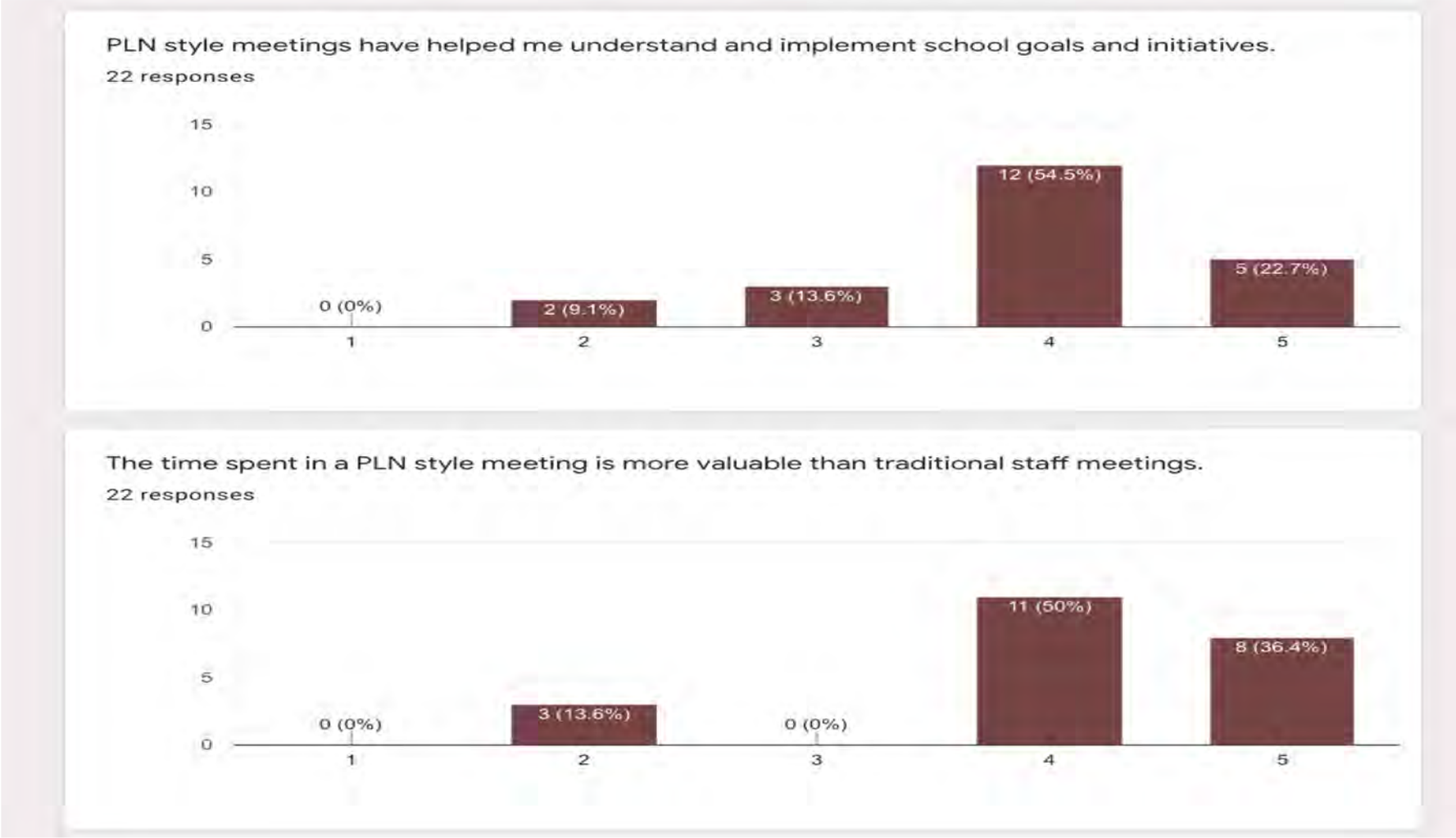
Please provide any feedback/ideas for improving the time for PD. I want to make this time as valuable as possible.

Your answer

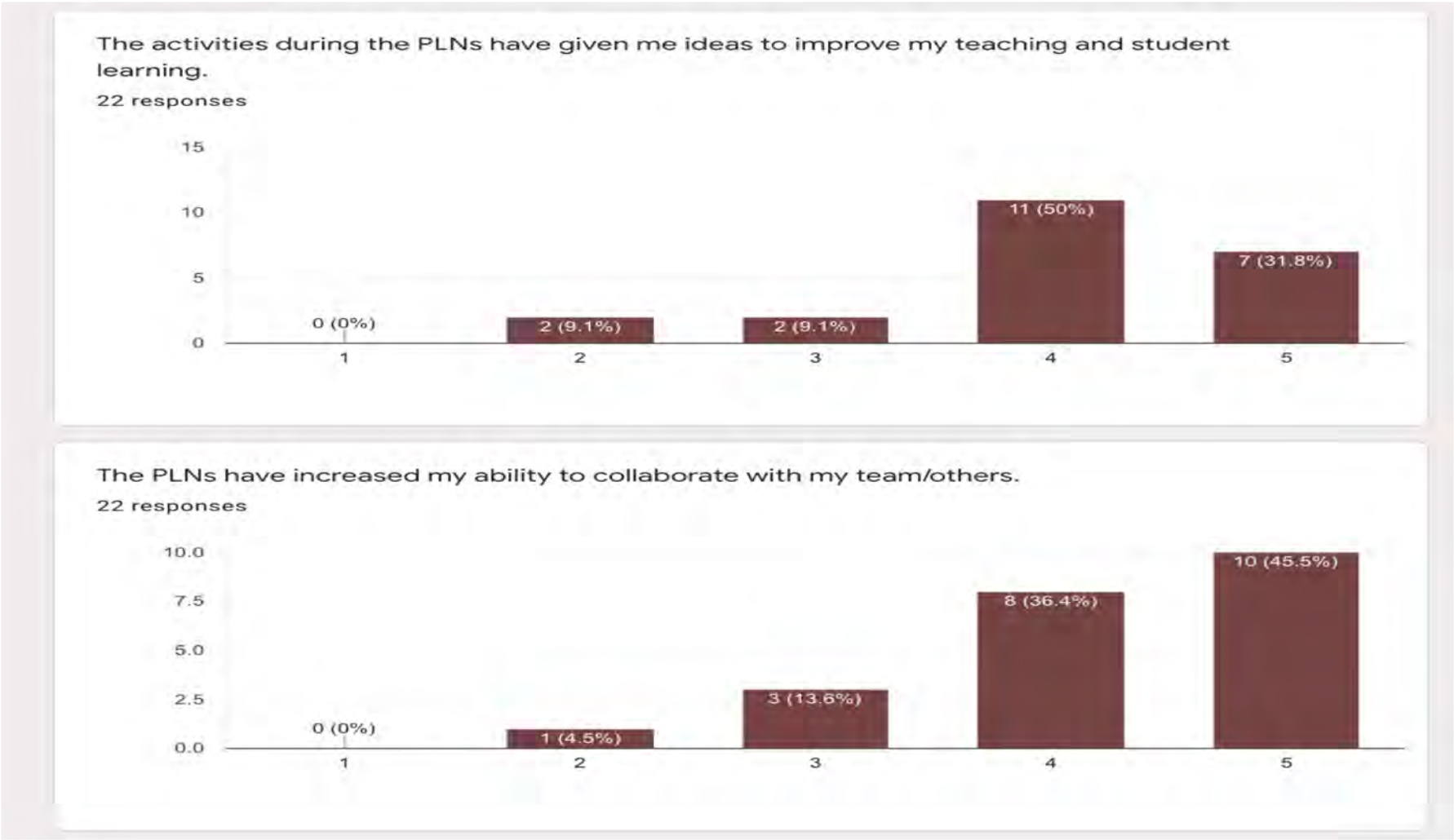
MY DATA - NOVEMBER



MY DATA - NOVEMBER



MY DATA - NOVEMBER



MY DATA - MAY

- May Survey
  - 30 teachers responded
  - End of year check-in to see what teachers thought of the PLN overall and suggestions for improvement in 2020-2021

The PLN style meetings were beneficial. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

PLN style meetings helped me understand and implement CFAs (focus for 2019-2020). *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

I would feel comfortable leading a PLN style meeting on school initiatives and goals based on what I learned. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

The PLNs increased my ability to collaborate with my team/others. *

1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

I would like to continue PLN style meetings in 2020-2021. *

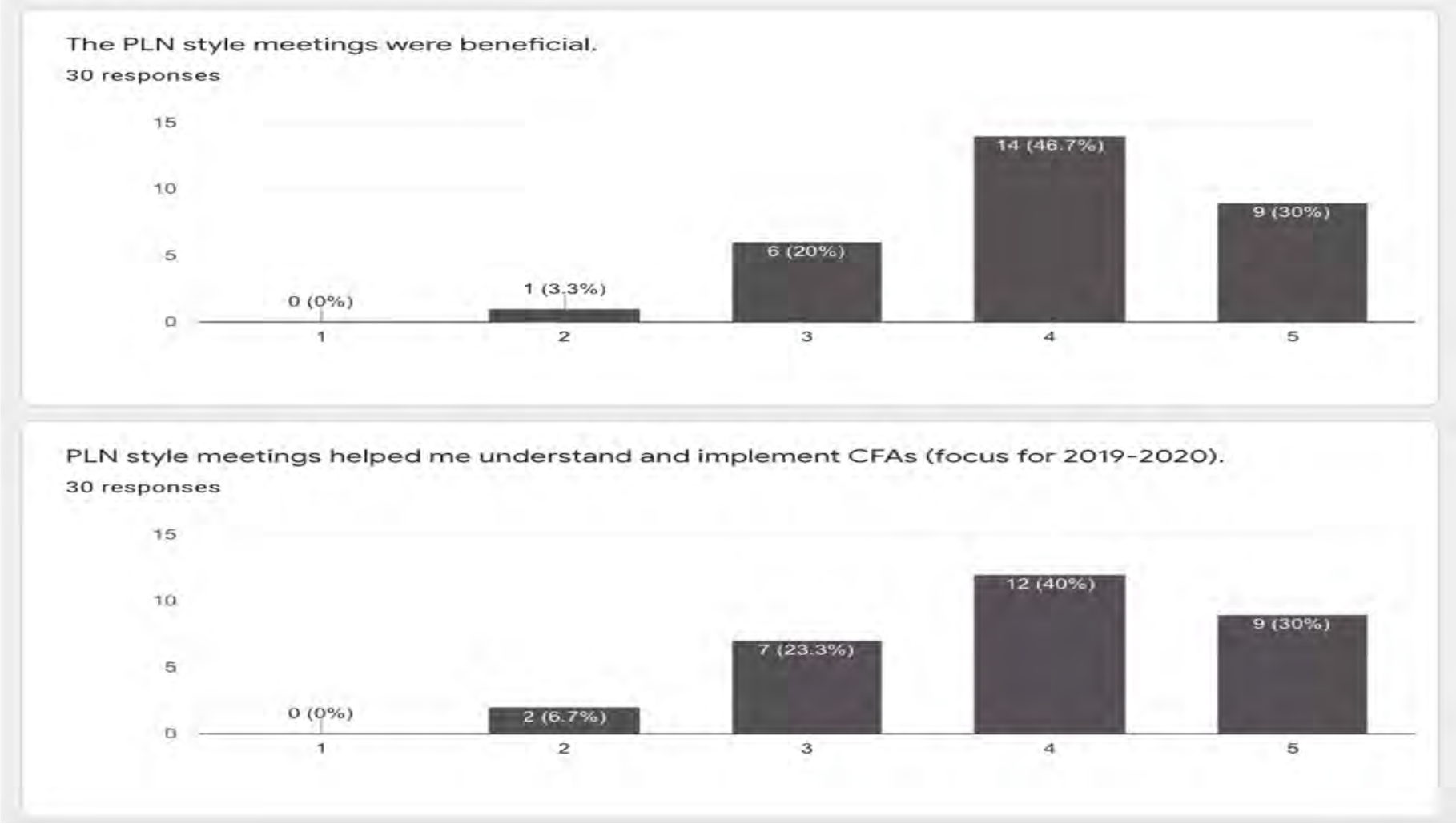
1 2 3 4 5

Strongly Disagree ○ ○ ○ ○ ○ Strongly Agree

Please provide any feedback/ideas for improving the time for 2020-2021. You could include possible topics as well for 2020-2021.

Your answer

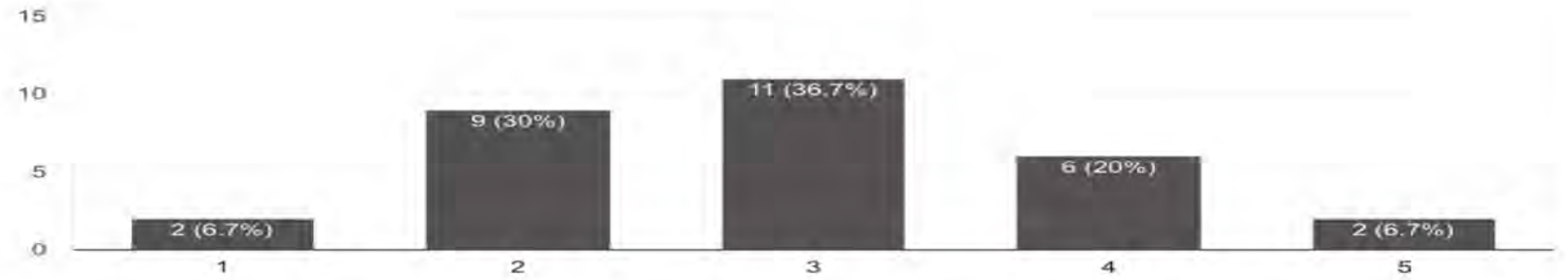
MY DATA - MAY


The PLN style meetings were beneficial.
30 responses
15
10
5
0
0 (0%)
1 (3.3%)
6 (20%)
14 (46.7%)
9 (30%)
1
2
3
4
5
PLN style meetings helped me understand and implement CFAs (focus for 2019-2020).
30 responses
15
10
5
0
0 (0%)
2 (6.7%)
7 (23.3%)
12 (40%)
9 (30%)
1
2
3
4
5

MY DATA - MAY

I would feel comfortable leading a PLN style meeting on school initiatives and goals based on what I learned.

30 responses

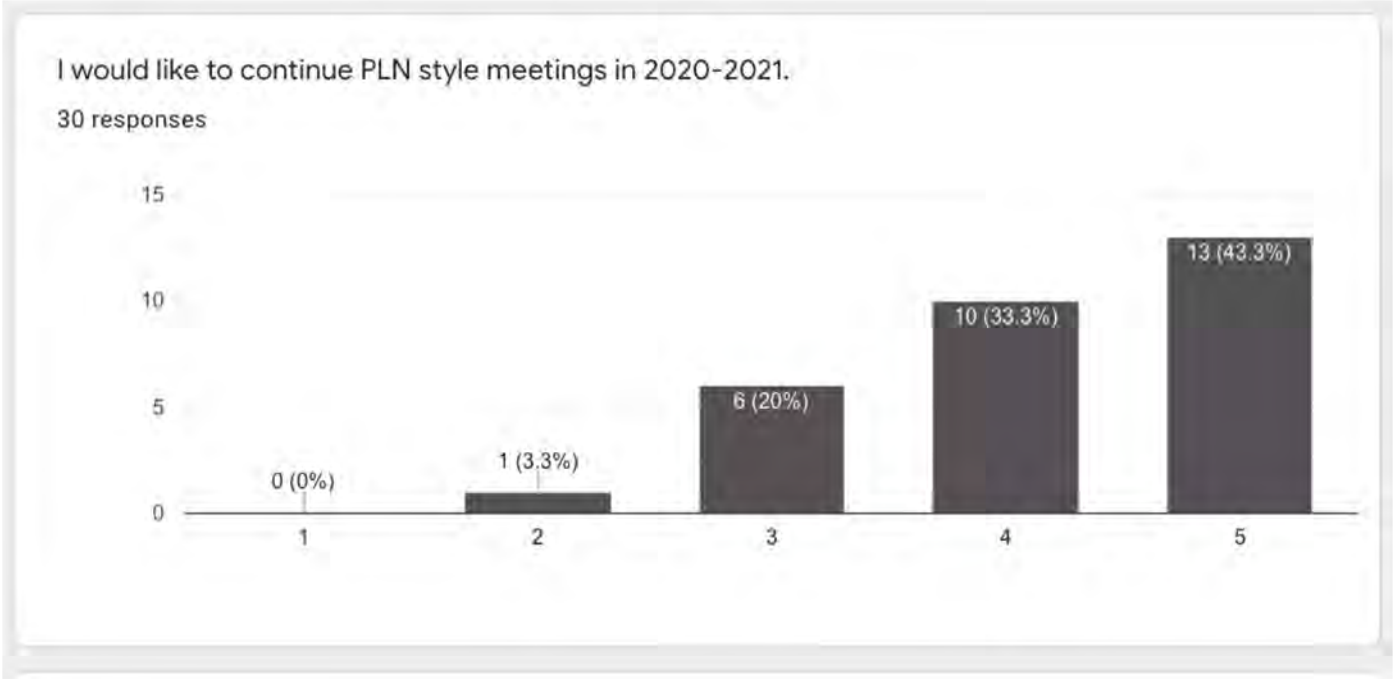


The PLNs increased my ability to collaborate with my team/others.

30 responses

Copy chart

MY DATA - MAY


I would like to continue PLN style meetings in 2020-2021.
30 responses
15
10
5
0
0 (0%)
1 (3.3%)
6 (20%)
10 (33.3%)
13 (43.3%)
1
2
3
4
5

MY DISCOVERIES

- Teachers want to collaborate; they just need the time and structure to do so.
- Even though I am now a principal, I am still a teacher, and I can continue to grow as an educator and in my own teaching practice.
- There is still work to do to empower teachers to be leaders of PD; it is okay to be good at something and to share that with others.

WHERE I AM HEADED NEXT

- Simplify goals for 2020-2021
  - Focus on CFA mastery for all teachers
  - Give those who have mastered CFAs an opportunity to lead their peers
- Leading PLNs and continued CFA development from a distance
  - Adjusting to COVID-19 limitations and leading PLN/PD during uncertain times
  - Keep momentum going with CFA development and implementation
- Continuing to grow as an instructional leader
  - Take feedback from teachers in final survey to grow as an instructional leader
    - More periodic check-ins after PLN to check for understanding and provide timely feedback
    - Empower teachers more to become instructional leaders

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Global PD. (2020). Retrieved from http://www.globalpd.com/
- Hattie, J., & Zierer, K. (2018). *Ten Mindframes for Visible Learning*. Corwin Sage.
- Rodman, A. (2019). *Personalized Professional Learning: A Job-Embedded Pathway for Elevating Teacher Voice*. ASCD.