

Understanding the Work of a Professional Learning Community



**Cherokee Bend Elementary School
Mountain Brook, AL**

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Agenda

1. Welcome and Getting Connected
2. Are We a Professional Learning Community?
3. Shifting the Focus from Teaching To Learning
4. Changing Practices to Improve Student Learning

Norms—The standards of behavior by which we agree to operate while we're in this group.

Different Teams Need Different Norms

- Are there particular behaviors that get in the way of being successful?
- Norms should be focused on the behaviors we expect from each other and should be few in number.
- Norms should be reviewed 2 times a year and whenever the team is experiencing difficulty.
- Should include a group agreement about how to handle violations.

Less Effective	More Effective
We will come to the meetings on time.	We will actively contribute and come prepared to each meeting.
We will take turns so that everyone has a chance to talk.	We will work toward consensus and honor the different perspectives in the group.
When we don't agree, we'll agree to disagree.	When we disagree we will seek research on best practices to resolve our differences.
We will avoid comparing one teacher's results to the others' on the team.	We will value data for what they tell us to do next and will not make excuses for them.

Care Enough to Confront

- Don't let violations of norms go unnoticed.
Resolve to confront them when they occur.
- Move on quickly from the issue to continue the work.

What is a Professional Learning Community?

An **ongoing process** in which educators work **collaboratively in recurring cycles** of collective inquiry and action research **to achieve better results for the students they serve.**

Professional Learning Communities operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous **job-embedded** learning for educators.

What is the right work?

Team #1

In Happy Elementary School the principal has asked each of the teachers to choose from 5 different books on Professional Learning Communities. She encourages them to choose the book that they are most interested in. These book groups will meet once a week to discuss what the participants are learning and to consider how they can apply their new learning in their classrooms and with their collaborative teams.

- Right Work
- What's Missing?

Team #2

As a part of their SMART goal, the team in 5th Grade math team in Hopeful Elementary School is studying how to make stronger connections to the math practices (e.g., critiquing the reasoning of others, reasoning abstractly and quantitatively, attending to precision). For each unit, they study the standards being taught and determine which of the math practices should be emphasized in the lessons in this unit. While the team members are excited about how they've changed their instruction to emphasize the processes, they have been struggling with how to assess students in both the content they are teaching and the math processes in a short common formative assessment. They have agreed to look for questions on-line at their next meeting to see if they can find samples of good items that will help them over this hurdle.

- Right Work
- What's Missing?

Team #3

The leadership team from Nirvana School asks for volunteers to form a committee to study how they can build a new master schedule that will support intervention time where no new instruction is taking place. The committee has been asked to have a possible schedule ready by April 1 so that the staff can vote on it in time to start the process for developing a master school schedule for the upcoming school year.

- Right Work
- What's Missing?

Team #4

The school intervention team meets to discuss Sam Smith's needs. The team includes the principal, the general education teachers who work with Sam, a special education teacher, a speech/language therapist, a reading teacher and a school psychologist. The classroom teachers are concerned about Sam's behavior when assigned reading tasks. He either acts out or refuses to engage in the activity. The principal decides to keep track of the number of detentions and referrals. The special education teacher offers to loan some materials to the general education teachers. The speech/language therapist doesn't see a concern in speech or language. The reading teacher is willing to add Sam to a reading support group, so the psychologist writes an intervention plan for direct service from the reading teacher. The team will reconvene in 6 weeks to assess Sam's progress.

- Right Work
- What's missing?

Team #5

The 4th grade team at Big Apple Elementary School divides the work of planning among the three collaborative team members. Each teacher takes a turn at planning reading and writing lessons and materials, math lessons and materials, and science/social studies lessons and materials. When they meet at their weekly meetings, the team members go over the upcoming lesson plans and answer any questions their colleagues have.

- Right Work
- What's Missing?

Team #6

The kindergarten team at We've Always Done It This Way Elementary School assesses students on letter sound recognition and numbers every three weeks. Because these assessments take so much time, they rarely finish their assessments at the same time so each teacher plans his/her response based on the results from his/her students. They believe it's a common assessment because they use the same assessment protocol.

- Right Work
- What's Missing?

Team #7

The 4th grade team at We Care Elementary School is working on writing Common Formative Assessments for their essential standards. In the past, they've always used multiple choice questions because these are the types of questions students most often see on high stakes tests. This past summer they attended some training specifically around the use of Common Formative Assessment data and learned that constructed response questions often provide better insight into student misunderstandings or misconceptions. They've agree to try this idea out to see if it positively impacts their work.

- Right Work
- What's Missing?

Three Big Ideas

1. Focus on Learning
2. Collaborative Culture
3. Results Orientation

Fundamental Assumptions about Students

- All students don't learn the same way.
- All students don't learn at the same speed.
- Some students lack academic behaviors.
- Some students have a home life that is counterproductive to academic success.
- Some students lack prior skills and knowledge.

Fundamental Assumptions about Teachers

- Virtually all educators start each day with honorable intentions, work tirelessly on behalf of their students, and utilize the best strategies they possess.
- No teacher has the skills, knowledge, and time necessary to meet the needs of all students assigned to his/her class.
- Ensuring that ALL students learn requires a **systematic** process that guarantees every child receives the additional time and support needed to learn at high levels.

Types of Schools

School 1: Charles Darwin School—At this school teachers believe that there are smart kids and “not so smart” kids and that the smart kids will always be successful and the “not so smart” kids will likely not be successful. They provide higher classes and have higher expectations for the smart kids and remedial classes for the “not so smart” kids.

School 2: Pontius Pilate School—At this school it is the teachers' job to teach and the kids job to learn. The teachers will provide students with the opportunity to learn and some students will choose to do so, but others will not. If a kid chooses to fail, they will get a bad grade and will likely feel so badly that they will want to try harder the next time.

School 3: Chicago Cubs School—At this school teachers believe that they should create a warm and pleasant atmosphere for their students. They believe that when students feel good about themselves they remain motivated to learn. If a student does not learn, the teachers help them feel good so that they will not give up. Remember, there is always next year.

School 4: Henry Higgins School—At this school the teachers do whatever it takes to make kids feel successful. When kids don't learn, the teachers find ways to give them more time and support around the areas they are having difficulty with. Teachers keep track of student learning and make sure that each student is given whatever is needed to be successful.

Two Proven Ideas

- If students don't learn the schools didn't blame them. They took complete responsibility.
- When something they were doing in class didn't work, they stopped doing it and tried something else.

Understanding the Compelling Research

Factor Affecting Student Learning	Standard Deviation
High quality teacher in the classroom	.40
Parent Involvement	.49
Home environment	.52
Socio-economic status	.52
Formative Assessment	.90
Response to Intervention	1.07
Student Involvement in Assessment	1.44
Collective Teacher Efficacy	1.57

Collective Teacher Efficacy—The collective self-perception that teachers in a given school make an educational difference to their students over and above the educational impact of their homes and communities.

How Much Autonomy Should a Teacher Have?

- | | |
|----------------|--------|
| 1. Instruction | __Some |
| 2. Assessment | __None |
| 3. Curriculum | __All |

Critical Questions Teams Ask

- What do we want students to know and be able to do?
- How will we know if they can?
- What will we do if they can't?
- What will we do if they already can?

Essential Standards

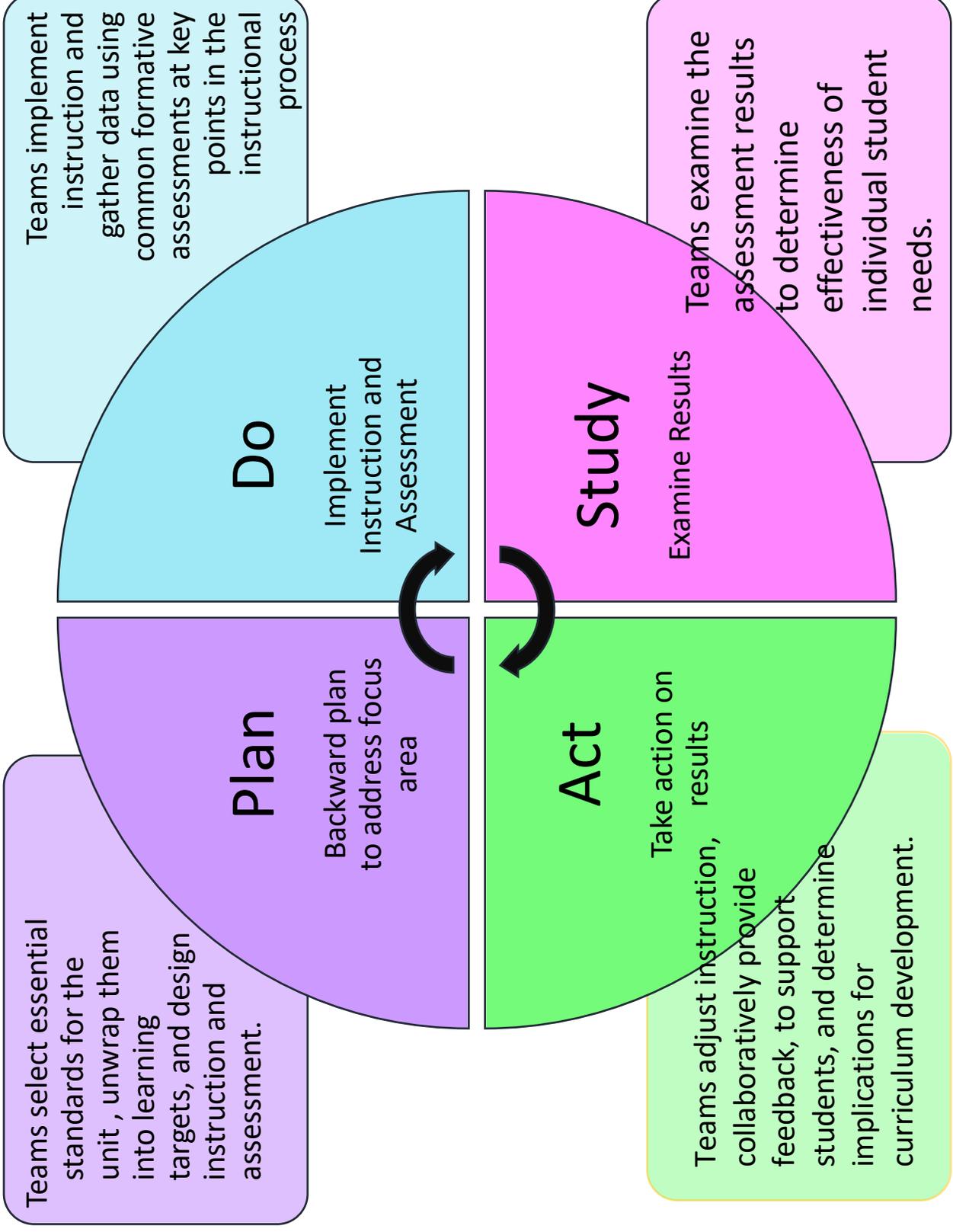
Essential standards are ones that all students must know and be able to do by the end of the year. Common formative assessments are based on these standards. (They often are called power or priority standards.) You guarantee that students who do not **(yet)** master these standards receive **time and support**.

“Our students need us to know their experiences over the course of time. They need us to know what's really going on in their daily classes as they move among teachers and subjects. They need us to know and give credence to their work from year to year.”

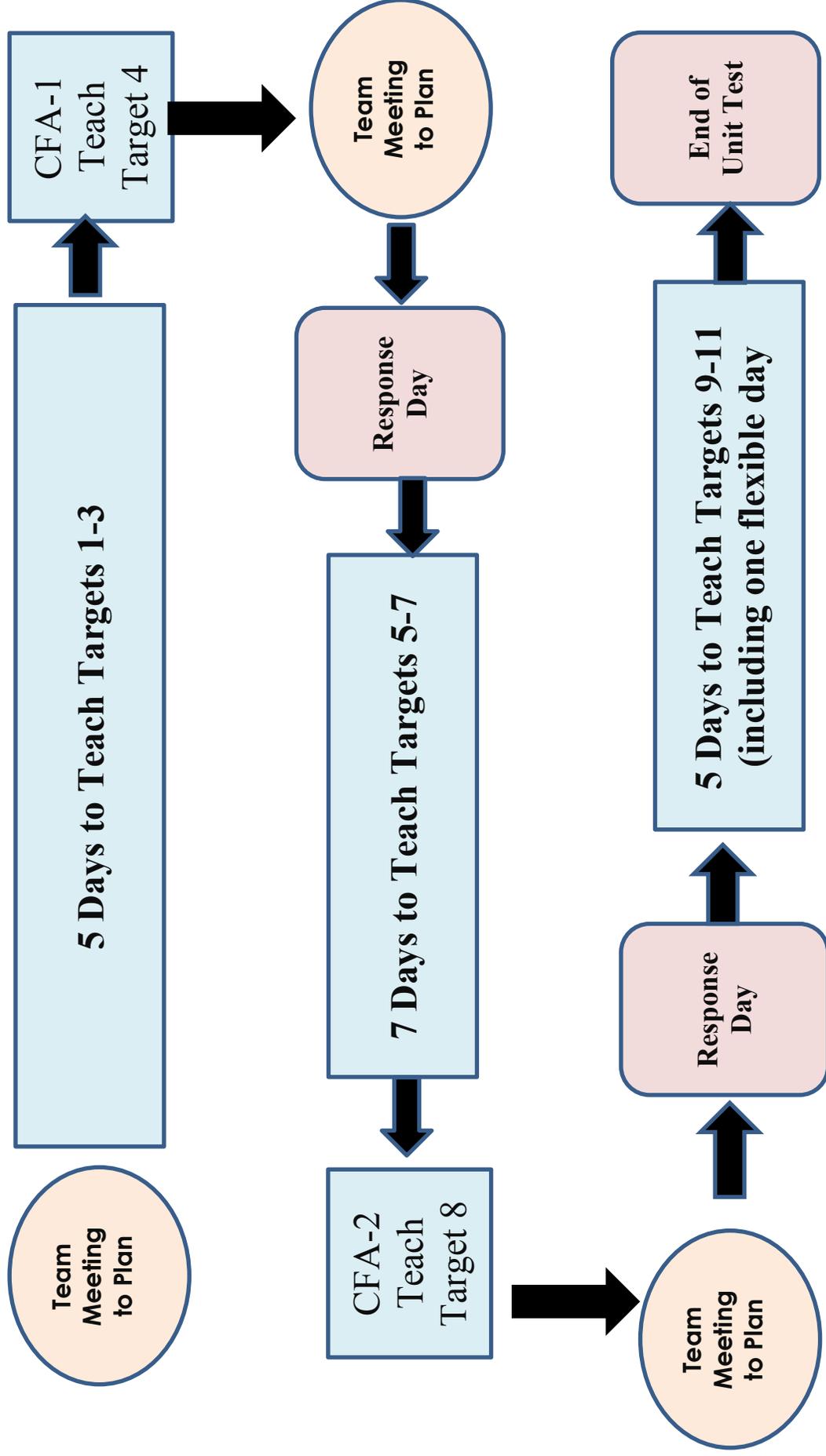
-Jacobs, 1997

Using the Essential Standards

- Choosing essential standards must impact pacing. A team needs more time to teach, assess, and reteach these essential standards.
- Teams must then compact or eliminate lessons for “nice to know standards.”



Developing a Unit Plan to Include Common Formative Assessments



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Change in a Professional Learning Community

#	Moving From...	To...
1	Sharing Opinions	Using Results
2	Focusing on Essential Standards	"Covering the Curriculum"
3	These are MY Kids	These are OUR kids
4	Differentiation Based on Ability	All kids learn at high levels
5	Common Planning	Common Pacing
6	Teacher Autonomy	Team Collaboration
7	Focus on Teaching	Focus on Learning