Professional Learning Communities Handbook & Toolkit

Created to support staff in developing strong PLCs by members of the D24 PLC Guiding Coalition

Dr. Lind, Superintendent
Mr. Walshire, Principal MES
Mrs. Parrish, Assistant Principal MMS
Melissa Lowrance, Instructional Coach
Don Perusich, 7th Math
Ana Bibian, MS Special Education
Angie Richardson, 3rd Grade
Erin Michel, 4th Grade
Sue Stone, MES Interventionist

Background on the Guiding Coalition

OUR BELIEFS

★ All students can thrive when provided an environment that is stimulating, challenging, and engaging, with opportunities for creative, collaborative and meaningful learning experiences.

★ We believe in developing well-rounded life-long learners, and providing them with the tools and relevant skills needed to reach their fullest potential in a rapidly changing world.

★ We strive to continuously attract, develop, and retain highly qualified and committed instructional leaders and staff who are supported by the community.

★ All students, staff, and families should whole-heartedly feel like they belong and add value to the Millburn community.

OUR MISSION

To create a culture of learning that inspires & empowers students to enrich our community

Purpose: The guiding coalition will provide insight and feedback on staff learning aligned to district vision for collaborative teams, focused on student learning.

21-22 Outcomes for Guiding Coalition:
- Build awareness for strong teaming and the 4 Questions for a PLC
- Explore progression of becoming a team
- Contribute to district examples of how teams create norms, explore personalities, create a

shared purpose and structure
- Co-constructs feedback tools to solicit input from staff
- Co-constructs timeline for implementation district-wise with leadership team
- Consistently uses feedback from staff to determine learning needs (i.e. assessment literacy, creation of formative assessments, use of formative assessments, instructional strategies, etc.)
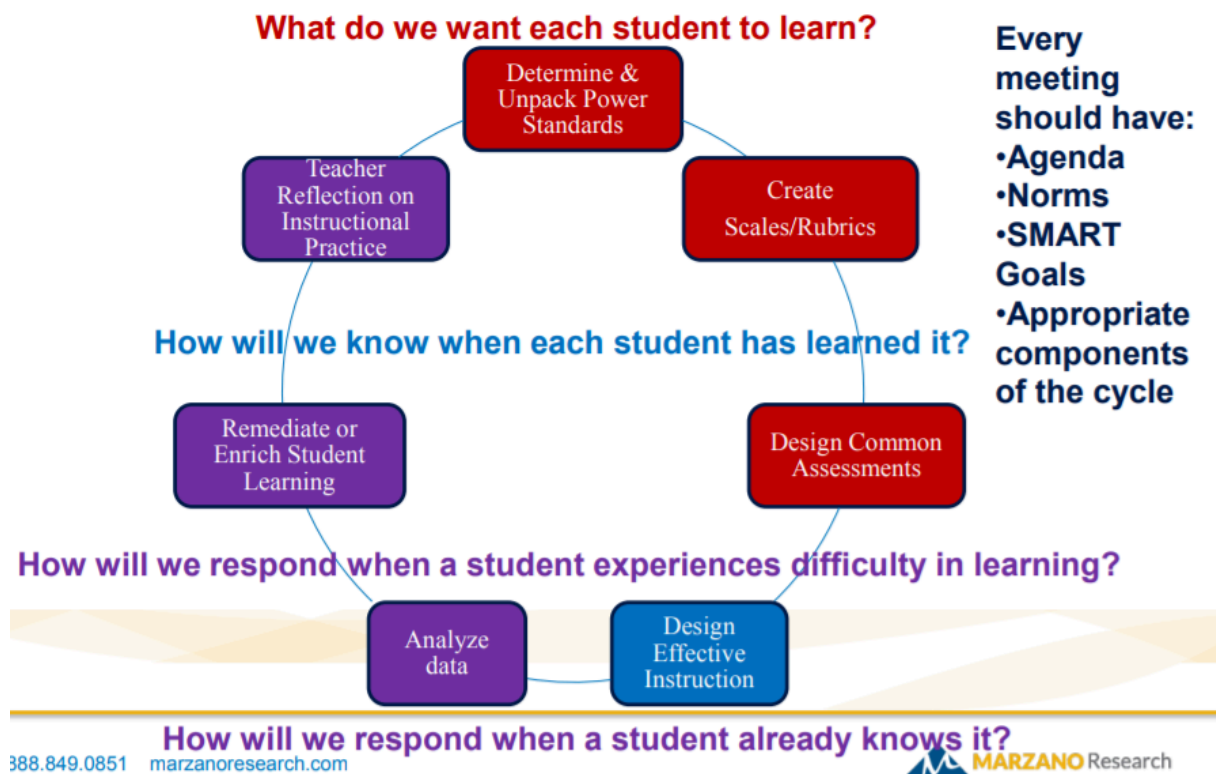
D24 Collective Commitments

Mission: Millburn CCSD #24 exists to create a culture of learning that inspires and empowers students to enrich our community

(created in 2015, affirmed in 2020)

PLC Commitments

Members of a professional learning community follow a predictable cycle focused on achievement for all learners:

Members of a professional learning community are tight about their commitment to the **three** big ideas of a PLC:

Focus on Learning (reference PLC cycle above)
- The fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure high levels of learning for all students. This focus on learning translates into four critical questions that drive the daily work of the school. In PLCs, educators demonstrate their commitment to helping all students learn by working collaboratively to address the following critical questions:
  - What do we want students to learn? What should each student know and be able to do as a result of each unit, grade level, and/or course?
  - How will we know if they have learned? Are we monitoring each student's learning on a timely basis?
  - What will we do if they don't learn? What systematic process is in place to provide additional time and support for students who are experiencing difficulty?
  - What will we do if they already know it?

Build a Collaborative Culture

- When teachers work collaboratively, all students can achieve higher levels as compared to when teachers work in isolation.
- Schools improve when teachers are given the time and support to work together to clarify essential student learning, develop common assessments for learning, analyze evidence of student learning, and use that evidence to learn from one another.

Focus on Results

- PLCs measure their effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions.
- All programs, policies, and practices are continually assessed on the basis of their impact on student learning.
- All staff members receive relevant and timely information on their effectiveness in achieving intended results.
- Support for struggling students and instruction both improve when members of a PLC focus on learning results.

Definition of a PLC

A Professional Learning Community (PLC) is a group of people who participate in 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 are integral to the school district's efforts to achieve its strategic plan. PLCs meet regularly as a team to identify essential and valued student learning, develop common formative and summative assessments, analyze current levels of achievement, set SMART goals, share strategies, research best instructional practices, and plan instruction that meets students' individual needs. The expectation is that this collaborative effort will produce ongoing improvement of student achievement.

The purpose of PLCs in District 24:
- Common time to focus on student learning through curriculum design, discussion of instructional strategies, assessment data, and use of interventions and extensions to meet student needs.
- Demonstrating a commitment to providing time and space for educators to focus on student growth and achievement.
- Ensure the success of each student through collaboration that is creative, systematized and focused on problem-solving.
- To maximize student learning through teacher collaboration and focusing on where we want students to be.

The purpose of creating an established PLC handbook for District 24 is:
- To provide a common resource to help provide needed scaffolding in order to grow highly functional and effective PLCs.
- To provide a consistent resource that aligns efforts of D24 staff in the interest of individual student achievement.
- To create a resource that allows for teacher potential and clarity of the process, expectations and beliefs.

Adapted from A Big Look at Professional Learning Communities Brochure.

Members of a professional learning community follow a predictable cycle focused on achievement for all learners:
1. What do we want each student to learn?
2. How will we know when each student has learned it?
3. What will we do if they don't learn it?

4. What will we do if they already know it?

PLCs can be any of the following groups of people who are collaborating around students:

Group	Description
Grade Level/Same Course	teachers who teach the same course or grade level
Vertical Team	teachers who teach the same content above and below their grade level; teams cut across schools that work together to clarify the essential outcomes for students across grades and take collective responsibility for each other's students during a common block of time designated for enrichment or intervention
Interdisciplinary Team	Teachers who share grade level students; the focus must be on the knowledge, skills and dispositions that students work to achieve in that grade level; answers questions such as: ● What criteria will we use to assess the quality of student writing across our content areas? ● How will we know if we are applying the criteria consistently? ● What strategies will we put in place for students who struggle with non-fiction writing?
Global Team	Art/PE/Cross District/ for the purpose of enhancing student learning experiences

Culture of Collaboration: Components of a PLC

Build a Collaborative Culture
- When teachers work collaboratively, all students can achieve higher levels as compared to when teachers work in isolation.
- Schools improve when teachers are given the time and support to work together to clarify essential student learning, develop common assessments for learning, analyze evidence of student learning, and use that evidence to learn from one another.
- Making time for Collaboration (Learning by Doing Pg 65-67)
  - Provide common preparation time
  - Use parallel scheduling
  - Adjust start and end times
  - Shared Classes
  - Schedule Group Activities, Events and Testing

- Use in-service and faculty time meeting time wisely

ITP Component or Element of Planning	*What is tight?*	*What is flexible or loose?*
Priority Standards	The priority standards will be established within the district. Grade Level/Content Level Team agree on what students will need to know. Example: 4-8 Math Continuum	School teams have flexibility to add additional targets and standards to their year long planning as appropriate to their students' learning needs.
Scales	Scales for the priority standards will be created/adjusted collaboratively within the district using the following guidelines set by the district. All scales will be built from a common D24 Scale Template. Resources from ROE: Moving Towards SBG System Resources from Belvidere District 100	School PLCs can create scales as needed for additional identified targets. Teams should collaborate on how they will identify Level 4 or 3 student performance. Teams may identify additional Level 2 skills that students are demonstrating as gaps. School teams may wish to create student work plans from the district scale.
Resources	6 Year Instructional Resource & ITP Review Cycle; (will insert one when developed)	Grade Level Teams can identify supplemental needs and request additional resources.
Year Long Curriculum Unit Guides	As curriculum guides shown on the course overview will include any state mandated learning, teams should minimally review them when planning units of instruction	School PLCs can plan their own units of instruction but must include any state-mandated learning. These mandates are predominantly found in science, social studies, and health.

	to ensure these mandates are included. Mandates are being added to the overviews as well. Example: ELA Unit 2 (still a work in progress)	
Pacing (by week? Or quarters/trimesters?)	Any pacing documents that are linked on course overviews are there as guidance on what is typical and are meant to support teams with planning their year. 5th Grade ELA Example	School PLCs can adjust their team's pacing as needed to meet student needs. Teams are encouraged to consider the impact of making changes to sequencing recommendations. (continuous improvement)
Lesson Planning		Teachers have full flexibility with designing student engagement experiences. As we continue our growth toward student-centered learning, teachers are encouraged to involve students in designing what learning looks like.

Components of a PLC

NORMS

What Are Norms And Why Do We Need Them?

Norms are the framework from which team members commit to conduct business. Attention to their development and adherence to them ensure the success of the group and facilitate the members' ability to deal with critical issues. Norms are comprised of several components that clarify team dynamics.

Norm Elements To Address (Suggested)

TIME: When and where will we meet? Will we start on time?

LISTENING: How will we listen to our peers? Are there any bad ideas? How will we discourage verbal interruptions when others are speaking?

CONFIDENTIALITY: What content is to be held in confidence? What can be shared after the meeting?

DECISION MAKING: How will we arrive at a decision? What if everyone doesn't agree with the group decision?

PARTICIPATION: Is participation optional? Will we have an attendance policy? What will we do if a member consistently misses meetings?

EXPECTATIONS: What do we expect from team members? Do we need a method for ensuring each member comes to the meeting prepared with appropriate data or other items?

VIOLATIONS: What do we do as a team when norms are not followed? How do we let a team member know they are not abiding by team norms?

Possible Examples Of Team Norms

Norm	Example	Non Example
Demonstrate respect for one another and our mutual learning be open to new ideas.	Team members are supportive of others trying new instructional strategies	Team members are disrespectful of the group by resisting new ideas.
Share responsibilities by having all members contribute In a productive manner	Assigning roles, Sharing ideas, and activities.	One person does all the work or work is not getting completed on time.

How To Lead Your Team With The Development Of Team Norms

1. All team members must be present.
2. Ask members to verbalize things that they have seen, heard or experienced in a meeting that they did not like. Examples: People interrupting each other, members showing up late, etc. Construct a list of their responses on chart paper.
3. Ask members to verbalize elements of a good meeting. Examples: People listen to each other, all ideas are open for consideration, stakeholders treat each other with respect, etc. Construct a list of their responses on chart paper.
4. From these lists, agree on items to put in the appropriate areas of the Norms Development Template.

5. Fill out the team norms template. Include examples and nonexamples.
6. Distribute a copy of the finalized document to each member at your next meeting/ include the norms on the agenda for each meeting.

Norms Development Template

Team Norms Document

Tips To Ensure The Team Norms Are Successful
- Teams develop their own norms.
- Less is more.
- Read the norms at each meeting.
- Norm violations should be addressed.*
- Ask a team member to read the Norms at the beginning of each meeting.
- Post the Norms during each meeting.
- Review the Norms monthly, or as needed, to ask members if the norms are effective or if they need revision.
- Don't use the Norms as a rule book. They are guides that are meant to evolve.
- If a new member joins the team, review the Norms and offer an opportunity for their input.

Give some thought to the development of a means to address how to ensure adherence of the norms . If a team member consistently breaks the norms, how will the team respond to that?

Agenda/Minutes for PLCs

Each PLC agenda should have the following:
1. Created and agreed upon norms
2. Identified participants & roles
3. Current focus on learning (reference Marzano Cycle)
4. Documented Discussions & Decisions

Each PLC agenda might have the following:
1. Time limits
2. Next steps/deadlines
3. References to data and resources

Sample agendas are provided as a reference for teams to build from:
Example 1- High School

Each school determines their process and expectations for PLC to submit agendas/minutes to school leadership and for peer access.

Grade Level Team - A team comprised of core teachers, SPED teachers, and specials teachers (as the schedule allows) that all teach the same grade level of students.

Specials Team - A team consisting of the PE, art, technology, foreign language, health, and music teachers.

Vertical (Content) Team - A team of teachers that teach the same content across the different grade levels.

SPED Team - A team of special education teachers, speech and language specialists, behavioral interventionists.

Interventionists/ELL/AIM Teachers Team - A team consisting of teachers that provide additional services for students.

Electronic Teams (Outside Professional Learning Network) - A team that uses technology to create powerful partnerships with colleagues across the district, state, and world.

Interdisciplinary Teams - A team in which members work interdependently to achieve an overarching curricular goal that will result in higher levels of student learning.

What is a Team?
A group of teachers that
- Focus on student academic and social/emotional learning
- Work collaboratively, takes collective responsibility, and clarifies the commitments to each other
- Work interdependently to achieve common goals for which all members are mutually accountable
- Establishes a guaranteed and viable curriculum
- Develops common assessments to frequently gather evidence of student learning
- Provides a system of interventions and extensions to differentiate instruction for students
- Uses evidence of student learning to inform and improve the instructional practices

What do the teams do to get established every year?
- Teams are formed by the school's administration team
- At the first team meeting, engage the entire team in reviewing the school's mission, vision, value, and goals
- Create norms for our team meetings
- Roles and responsibilities are determined by the the team (leader, note taker, time keeper, etc)
- Review the PLC Continuum and consider the Critical Issues for Team Participation (p.69 of Learning by Doing)
- Activities to get to know each other's personalities and learning styles
- Team building activities to strengthen camaraderie (marshmallow activity, etc.)