

Cultivating Teacher Leadership in Professional Learning Communities

FOR
TEACHERS
SCHOOLS
DISTRICTS



Practicing
Equity and Ethics



Building Relationships
and Partnerships



Fostering
Collaborative Culture



Advancing Instruction
and Student Learning



Driving
Initiatives

According to the Ohio Teacher Leadership Framework¹ the five key aspects of teacher leadership are:

- Fostering Collaborative Culture;
- Advancing Instruction and Learning;
- Driving Initiatives;
- Practicing Equity and Ethics; and
- Building Relationships and Partnerships.



Source: Pixabay

Professional learning communities (PLCs) may be used to cultivate teachers' leadership.

PLCs are a form of professional development that provide an opportunity for distributed leadership, knowledge sharing, and continuous improvement. Therefore, teacher leadership surfaces in PLCs in myriad ways. For example, teachers may lead meeting facilitation and team management, or accept responsibilities to disseminate knowledge and lead projects. Teachers may take on these leadership responsibilities through formal positions, informal roles, or additional activities without specific roles or titles.

PLCs may act as stand-alone communities of practice or may be embedded in department teams or other groupings. PLCs, however, are distinct from staff meetings and operational teams in that they are focused on professional development and teacher learning. Teachers might convene as a PLC during common planning times, contracted meeting times outside of the school day, or existing group (e.g., department, grade level team) meetings. Strong PLCs have consistency and continuity in its membership and focus throughout the school year.

This document outlines some tactical aspects of how PLCs facilitate components of Ohio's Teacher Leadership Framework and provides some relevant resources to help districts bolster their teacher leadership efforts via PLCs. The tables below additionally outline strategies PLCs can implement to reinforce the five aspects of teacher leadership.

¹ Ohio Department of Education. (2017). *Ohio Teacher Leadership Framework*, available at http://education.ohio.gov/getattachment/Topics/Teaching/Educator-Equity/Educator-Equity-in-Ohio/Local-Equity-Plan-1/Local-Equitable-Access-Strategies/Ohio-Teacher-Leader-Framework_508_compliant.pdf.aspx?lang=en-US.



Either the teacher leader facilitating the PLC or teacher members of the community can make use of these strategies. Building administrators may also find that this resource builds upon their knowledge and support of PLCs. Some of these tactics can serve as a springboard for teacher leadership activities, while others are specific to teacher leadership responsibilities. The appropriate use of each strategy is considered in the context of the PLC.

When you get the right combination of teacher leaders, you can totally change a building over time, where everyone plays off of each other, where one is weak, the other one is strong. — An Ohio teacher



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PLCs cultivate this element of teacher leadership by ...	Options to do this may include...
Having designated meeting roles to foster collaboration. Make sure that essential roles such as creating an agenda, timekeeping and recording are filled at every meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Setting a rotation among teachers for filling roles related to agenda facilitation, timekeeping and recording notes at each meeting. • Having informal teacher leaders volunteer to facilitate the team for the year. • Embedding the facilitation responsibilities in the role of a formal teacher leader such as a department chair.
Asking all teachers to prepare and share so all have an opportunity to demonstrate leadership.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing samples of student work (both performing and underperforming) for collective discussion and feedback. • Sharing lessons for peers to replicate, including the strengths of the lesson, its ability to address student needs and opportunities for improving the lesson.
Using facilitation techniques to engage all members in the meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Giving all members a chance to respond and ask questions about a topic. If someone has not participated in the conversation, the facilitator should ask the individual(s) specifically for their thoughts.
Setting reflective questions for teachers to acknowledge strengths and opportunities for improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Posing reflective questions to teachers before the meeting to consider for collective discussion of instruction, assessment, data, etc. • Gradually introducing reflective elements after establishing the rapport of the group.
Communicating the agenda before the meeting and making meeting notes available after the meeting.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collectively identifying topics for the next meeting at the end of every meeting. Some agenda items may be a part of the standard rotation. • Sending the agenda out via email to members a couple of days before the meeting and asking for any suggested updates to agenda topics. • Forwarding meeting notes to members via email within days of the meeting. • Posting agenda and meeting notes in online shared drives.
Including team-building elements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bringing snacks to share in meetings. The responsibility to bring snacks may rotate in the group, or there may be a potluck for the academic term. • Allocating a few minutes for “water cooler” moments or icebreakers for brief sharing of personal interests. Topics may range from discussing weekend plans to recounting your favorite moment of the week to sharing what you listened to on the way to work.



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PLCs cultivate this element of teacher leadership by ...	Options to do this may include...
Maintaining focus on professional development to enhance instruction and learning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicating administrative items in other formats (e.g., emails, written handouts, online drives/discussion boards, points of contact) and reminding people where to access that information outside the PLC meeting.
Incorporating data and evidence at multiple levels into the meeting discussions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Using a variety of data to focus on the needs of specific students and improvement opportunities in particular domains.
Sharing research and resources.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focusing the meeting discussion on a specific article and how it relates to each teacher's instructional practice. Occasionally adding research sharing time on agendas whereby members give an overview of an article or piece of research, or can demonstrate resources used in the classroom. Encouraging teachers to regularly share relevant articles, book titles and other resources. Posting links to research and resources in shared drives. Having a PLC focused on addressing a professional development area via a book study.
Going deep instead of wide on topics.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimizing the number of topics on the agenda. Placing team members in primary presentation or sharing roles on a revolving basis.
Connecting to next steps.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mutually establishing a future meeting to revisit a topic to see how teachers have tried or advanced a strategy that members collectively wanted to pursue. Inviting and encouraging peer-to-peer observation of lessons to learn a practice or seek feedback. Ask administrators for substitutes or peers for class coverage. Sharing additional professional development opportunities and incorporating them into Individual Professional Development Plans (IPDPs). Collectively attending conferences and external professional development events. Encouraging teachers with strong practices to share work more widely in virtual communities or during school, district, regional, state or national professional development events.



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Championing ideas from the group.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Converting ideas of team members into potential projects. Ask if there is interest among team members to take an idea and scale it up.
Including all members in expectations to try a practice or improve implementation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identifying one or two project leads from the group. • Partnering a mix of experienced, well-organized and novice volunteers to be primary leaders on the project. • Assigning some next steps to all team members to pilot a practice or start an initiative of the group. Delegated tasks might include sharing ideas with other teams, making requests to administration or building team, finding additional research, crafting communication or piloting project components.
Identifying connections between the work of the PLC and school-wide and district-wide goals and initiatives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Inviting administrators and teacher leaders outside of the PLC (e.g., academic coaches, PLC leaders on complementary topics) to meetings to communicate about school-wide and district-wide initiatives connected to the focus of the PLC. • Reviewing alignment of the PLC's topics to school and district objectives.



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Crediting peers and team for content developed and shared.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reminding team members to cite and credit peers and other sources for lessons, examples and content shared when they deploy items in their own classrooms.
Reviewing disparities in student outcomes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Seeking disaggregated data by race, gender, disability and other available demographic data to see if disparities exist in outcomes or assessments related to the PLC topic.
Discussing and sharing learning that increases cultural competence and culturally responsive practices.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connecting to resources on cultural competence and regularly incorporating information in PLCs. Utilizing reflective questions in PLCs regarding culturally responsive practices.



Building Relationships and Partnerships

PLCs cultivate this element of teacher leadership by ...	Options to do this may include...
Inviting internal or external experts to present or facilitate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Welcoming guests from Educational Service Centers, community organizations and other districts to share information at PLCs related to your area of focus. Facilitating exchange of knowledge across PLCs with occasional joint meetings on topics of mutual interest.
Featuring topics on family and community engagement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inquiring among the group about ways to engage family members or make sure families are informed about the area of focus. Sharing instructional practices that involve community partnership and engagement with students.



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Resources for Your PLCs

The following resources identified through the case studies, as well as the Institute of Educational Sciences What Works Clearinghouse and the Regional Education Laboratories (REL), may assist in fostering the work of PLCs.



Source: Flickr

PLC Frameworks

DuFour, R., Eaker, R., & DuFour, R. (2005) *On Common Ground: The Power of Professional Learning Communities*. Solution Tree Press. Bloomington, IN.

[Aurora City Schools, Professional Development \(PLC\) Discussions Framework](#)

Facilitating Peer Teacher Engagement

Knight, J. (2015). *Better Conversations*. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, CA.

Berger, W. (2014). *A More Beautiful Question*. Bloomsbury USA. New York, NY.

Core Subject PLCs

[Aurora City Schools, Potential PLC Resources for Four Core](#)

English Language Learners PLCs

PLC Facilitator's Guide for the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide, *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/plc.asp>.

Math PLCs

Professional Learning Models to Support Student Success in Mathematics, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/appalachia/blogs/blog15_pl-models-support-student-success-in-math.asp.

Reading and Language Arts PLCs

PLC Facilitator's Guide for the What Works Clearinghouse Practice Guide, *Foundational Skills to Support Reading for Understanding in Kindergarten through 3rd Grade*, <https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southeast/plc.asp>.

PLC Facilitator's Guide for the What Works Clearinghouse practice guide, *Teaching Academic Content and Literacy to English Learners in Elementary and Middle School*, https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/southwest/pdf/REL_2015105.pdf.



Online PLCs

Blitz, C. L. (2013). *Can Online Learning Communities Achieve the Goals of Traditional Professional Learning Communities? What the Literature Says*. (REL 2013–003). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic.
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/pdf/REL_2013013.pdf.

PLC Effectiveness

Blitz, C. L., & Schulman, R. (2016). *Measurement Instruments for Assessing the Performance of Professional Learning Communities* (REL 2016–144). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Mid-Atlantic.
https://ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/regions/midatlantic/pdf/REL_2016144.pdf.

King, M. (2016). 6 Key Features of Successful Community of Practice. *Journal of Staff Development*, 37(6), 12-14.
<https://learningforward.org/docs/default-source/jsd-december-2016/6-key-features-of-a-successful-community-of-practice-december16.pdf> or
<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=&id=EJ1124422>.

Darling-Hammond, L. & Richardson, N. (2009). Research Review/Teacher Learning: What Matters? *Educational Leadership*, 66(5), 46-53.
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/feb09/vol66/num05/Teacher-Learning@-What-Matters%C2%A2.aspx>.

Evidence on PLCs

Akiba, M., & Liang, G. (2016). Effects of Teacher Professional Learning Activities on Student Achievement Growth. *Journal of Educational Research*, 109(1), 99–110.
https://www.lib.fsu.edu/sites/default/files/scholarship/effects_of_teacher_pl_activities.pdf or
<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=&id=EJ1094016>.

Vescio, V., Ross, D., & Adams, A. (2008). A Review of Research on the Impact of Professional Learning Communities on Teaching Practice and Student Learning. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 24(1), 80-91.
<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0742051X07000066> or
<https://eric.ed.gov/?q=&id=EJ782410>.

Carroll, T., Fulton, K., & Doerr, H. (2010). *Team Up for 21st Century Teaching and Learning: What Research and Practice Reveal about Professional Learning. Condensed Excerpts*. National Commission on Teaching and America's Future.
<http://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED512177>.