

Leading Effective PLCs

A Practical Guide for Instructional Leaders

What is a PLC? Professional learning communities (PLCs) provide recurring, structured time for teachers to collaborate—studying instructional content, analyzing student work and data, preparing for upcoming lessons, and strengthening practices aligned to shared instructional priorities. Effective PLCs are grounded in real classroom content and directly increase the quality of instruction.





Core Leadership Competencies

COMPETENCY 1: Nurtures Culture

Cultivates a PLC environment focused on professional growth and student progress

- Facilitate or support PLCs that give teachers time to study content collaboratively, analyze student work and data, adapt upcoming lessons, and practice prioritized instructional strategies.
- Encourage teachers to evolve mindsets and adopt new practices while affirming their perspectives, effort, and contributions.
- Facilitate the development of meeting norms that promote objective-aligned collaboration and honor teachers' work styles.
- Structure PLC experiences to prioritize teacher processing, reflection, and application of shared learning.

COMPETENCY 2: Develops Teachers

Uses curriculum-based professional learning to build teachers' skills, knowledge, and mindsets

- Align PLCs to instructional priorities, implementation targets, or other observed implementation needs.
- Prepare thoroughly for PLCs by practicing challenging portions and completing necessary content study to support teachers in real time.
- Adjust pacing, scope, and facilitation to meet the specific needs of your teachers (e.g., new teachers may need more focused, step-by-step practice on a single strategy).
- Use curriculum-aligned resources to achieve PLC objectives and support instructional priorities.
- Ensure teachers leave each PLC with clear takeaways and specific action steps that include criteria for success.
- Reinforce shared implementation expectations (e.g., pacing, lesson preparation, pedagogy) and develop the skills and knowledge needed to meet them.



COMPETENCY 3: Measures Progress

Analyzes data before and after PLCs to assess effectiveness and adjust accordingly

- Notice and note teachers' strengths and areas of need to inform 1:1 coaching and future PLC planning.
- Analyze observation data to evaluate the impact of previous PLCs, inform future sessions, and make instructional wins visible to the team.
- Request feedback from teachers about the effectiveness of recent PLCs and communicate how that feedback shapes future adjustments.

COMPETENCY 4: Builds Leadership Capacity

Develops the capacity of other instructional leaders to effectively guide PLCs

- Prepare for upcoming PLCs with other leaders through co-planning, deliberate practice, and requesting feedback on meeting resources (e.g., objectives, readings).
- Co-facilitate or model PLC meetings to demonstrate exemplary use of all indicators from Competencies 1–3.
- Observe PLCs led by other instructional leaders and provide feedback grounded in these competencies.
- Debrief PLC meetings with other leaders to reflect on their impact on teacher practice.

PLC Planning and Reflection Tools

The PLC Planning Cycle



Before the PLC: Leader Preparation

- Review recent observation data and identify 1–2 instructional priorities to address.
- Draft a clear PLC objective with a measurable outcome for teachers.
- Practice challenging portions of the PLC before facilitating.
- Prepare any student work samples, lesson excerpts, or resources teachers will use.
- Anticipate teacher questions and plan for real-time support.
- Co-plan with another leader and rehearse if possible.

During the PLC: Facilitation Moves

- Open by naming the objective and connecting it to teachers' observed instructional needs.
- Build in structured time for teacher processing and reflection—not just delivery.
- Use probing questions to deepen thinking rather than providing all the answers.
- Adapt pacing and depth based on what you notice in the room.
- Celebrate progress explicitly and name the “why” behind each strategy.
- Close with clear action steps and criteria for success in the classroom.

After the PLC: Follow-Through

- Note individual teacher strengths and areas of need observed during the PLC.
- Look for application of PLC learning during subsequent classroom observations.
- Solicit brief teacher feedback (written or verbal) on the PLC's usefulness.
- Use data from the PLC to inform 1:1 coaching priorities.
- Communicate how teacher feedback will shape the next PLC session.

Signs of a High-Quality PLC

- Teachers are doing more talking and thinking than the leader.
- Discussion is grounded in real student work or lesson content.
- Teachers leave with a concrete plan they can use the next day.
- Norms are honored, and collaboration feels safe and focused.
- The session is tied to a visible instructional priority or school goal.
- Progress from previous PLCs is acknowledged and celebrated.

Key Reminder: While PLCs should typically align with school-wide instructional priorities, curriculum implementation is complex. When unexpected teacher needs arise, it is appropriate and responsive to shift PLC focus to address those needs directly. Stay flexible and data-driven.



Leader Reflection Prompts

Alignment and Planning

Was this PLC clearly connected to an instructional priority or observed teacher need? How do I know?

Notes:

Teacher Engagement

Were teachers actively processing and reflecting, or mostly receiving information? What would I change?

Notes:

Action Steps

Did every teacher leave with a specific, actionable next step and criteria for success? What evidence do I have?

Notes:

My Growth as a Facilitator

Which facilitation move do I want to strengthen for the next PLC? What support do I need?

Notes:

