**East Valley School District #90**

**Overview and general comments**

This is a strong application submitted by a school district that is working to ensure that all of the component parts of PLCs are in place or in process. The questions are few but as the reviewer, I would be interested in more information regarding a few things. If those six (6) questions can be answered affirmatively, this application would merit approval and East Valley School District #90 would be eligible to receive the designation as a PLC Model School Status.

**PLC Story**

The application demonstrates a strong commitment towards implementation of the PLC process. Dedicated and protected time has been made available on Monday’s for team meetings. Furthermore, the applicants report an ongoing commitment to PLC training and development with quarterly training and support from a ST Associate to guide the process of implementation and continued exposure of staff members each year to the PLC process by participating in the Summer Institutes. The application also cites evidence of an effort to create the systems and structures that will support the work of collaborative teams.

**PLC Practices**

The application does not offer any insight into how teachers have worked together to identify the guaranteed and viable curriculum. Obviously, the work is getting done since a sample copy of the essential Math and ELA standards in grades K-5 is included in the resources section but some additional explanation of that process would be helpful. Please reference the work done at the middle and high school level as well. (1)

There is evidence of intentional monitoring of student progress. The monitoring of student progress is based on the practice of regularly looking at student work on Mondays during collaborative team meetings. The district has adopted a consistent approach (TACA) to the analysis of results which promotes reflection on their teaching practice, adjustments in instruction, and planning for intervention and extensions. The application also cites the annual review of local benchmark data and state results as routine practices that utilize the same TACA process to data into information teams can use to promote student learning.

According to the application, additional time and support is available for all students at each school. The elementary level uses a ‘core and more’ approach which delivers differentiated instruction in the classroom as part of ‘core’ and regroups students for the ‘more’ part of the district’s approach. It is unclear whether this second component (the ‘more’ part) is delivered inside or outside of the classroom by classroom teachers, non-certified staff, or specialists? (2) At the middle school level, the application explains that the ‘core’ aspect of the model is similar to the elementary schools and cites the existence of Tiered classes for Tier 2 and 3 support, but the fluidity of the support is not specified.(3) The high school also differentiates in the classroom and provides a period three days a week where students are able to access additional time and support, but the application suggests that this is an optional or voluntary opportunity for students.(4)

The faculty is involved in a collaborative process by responding to the four Critical Questions of Learning. Furthermore, the district has defined clear expectations and specific ‘look fors’ for each of the Critical Questions of Learning. The application also cites the district’s ongoing efforts to support collaborative teams, teacher leaders, and administrators with professional development that supports their continuous learning. Finally, the District should be commended for their recognition, and willingness, to commit to the PLC process as the primary school improvement initiative.

**Achievement Data**

There are some examples of very strong academic performance as well as some inconsistencies in achievement data. Overall, the data shows steady progress towards increasing the number of students who are proficient. Can the district offer any information about any gaps between subgroups and/or if any gaps exist, what the district is doing to close any gaps between various sub groups? (5)

Among some of the inconsistencies, student performance has declined for two consecutive years in grade 3 and has been up and down in grade 7. While there is evidence of steady improvement in 10th grade, and strong performance in English while Mathematics remains below state average at 34% proficient. Can you comment on the achievement data? (6)

Questions for the applicants. Please respond at your earliest convenience. Thank you

1. How have teams worked to identify the essential learning outcomes in at least mathematics and English Language Arts? Specifically, can you provide any information and/or evidence that this work has been done at the middle and high school levels?

Our District designated time during the Spring on 2017 for all teams, grades K-12, in all content areas, to work collaboratively to clearly define their essential standards. This included release time during the school day and additional hours outside of the school day, depending on the team. I have attached examples at the middle and high school levels for ELA, Math, Science and Social Studies to supplement the K-5 examples previously provided.

In addition, we have built common units around these essentials standards K-12 to ensure instruction, assessment and intervention is focused on these standards (examples attached) and providing a focused, guaranteed and viable curriculum for all of our students no matter what school or what classroom they are in. Since the initial work in the Spring of 2017, teams are provided time periodically each year (2-4 days, depending on the team) to review and revise their essential standards and unit plan work based on our analysis of State, District, and Classroom level common assessments, in order to refine and improve on what we learn from the data.

To ensure this work is resulting in improved student learning for all students, each team utilizes their Monday collaboration time to focus on the analysis of the weekly common formative assessments outlined in their unit plans and create corresponding action plans to address the needs of those students who have yet to demonstrate mastery. Our goal is for 100% of all students, in all classrooms, to demonstrate mastery of the essential standards by the end of the year. In order to do so, we must intentionally plan re-teach opportunities to build student skill, and then follow up with re-assessment opportunities so we can see evidence of the mastery in an independent setting. This is a cyclical process for each group of essential standards that occurs as an ongoing process throughout the year.

1. Can you provide a bit more information about intervention at the elementary level?

As mentioned in the initial application, structures are in place to provide extra time and support for all students specific to their learning needs. The shift in our culture has been made to reflect a focus that all students in the system are ‘ours’, meaning that it is everyone’s responsibility to ensure they are demonstrating high levels of learning. This is exhibited in the schools at a couple of different levels.

The first is within the classroom the student is assigned. During the core instruction for all students, teachers differentiate in the tier 1 core instruction to ensure all students have access to the core. This differentiated instruction is provided by our certificated teachers with the support of para educators. We ensure that all students are receiving instruction in grade level content, but provide different levels of scaffolding and support to ensure access.

The second layer is during the ‘more time’ which occurs within the classroom (not a pull out model), but students are grouped by need across the grade level team. This is a ‘walk-to’ model, meaning the teachers within the grade level have students from each other’s homeroom. We view this as their intervention (tier 2 and tier 3, depending on the level of the student) time as they will receive what they need, which may be below grade level, at grade level, or above grade level. This intervention/enrichment time is provided by certificated teachers, with the support of para educators. As mentioned, students are grouped by need as determined by common assessment data. It is structured so staff with the highest levels of expertise and success (as determined by the data), are placed with the students demonstrating the highest need. The higher the level of student need, the smaller the group size in order to give students the most individualized attention as possible.

From here, data is frequently monitored to adjust groups as necessary to continue to meet the needs of all students and maximize student learning. Our growth in this process over the last 3-4 years has been tremendous. Staff is getting more and more specific in their data analysis, which drives revisions in their assessments in order to get the data they need to provide interventions as specific as possible. This has continued to lead to improved results, in most areas, each year in our assessment data.

1. Please respond to the question regarding intervention at the middle school level?

As mentioned in the original application, the middle model is very similar to the elementary model, which we have found to be unique in a secondary setting. What I mean by that is that every student receives instruction in their core class that is directly aligned to their essential standards and outlined in their unit plans. Like the elementary, teachers provide differentiated instruction within the core to ensure all students have access to the core. In addition to this differentiated instruction, each core classroom also has designated, set-aside intervention time to address specific student needs, which again, can be below grade level, at grade level, or above grade level. This is primarily provided by the certificated classroom teacher, but we have also pushed in para support to those classrooms that have been identified as including the highest level of student need through our common formative assessment data.

The tier 2 and 3 classes mentioned in the original application are for those students who have exhibited the highest needs as identified by various points of historical student data. Students are ‘assigned’ to that ‘class’, but the groups within the class and the focus of those groups are fluid based on student need as identified by the weekly common formative assessment data. We have supported this work by purchasing instructional materials that have a computerized, online component that creates personalized learning pathways specific to individual student need. This tool is available in Reading and Math (K-8), and provides the opportunity for individuals to have meaningful, independent intervention instruction, while at the same time allowing the certificated classroom teacher and para educator can work with small groups or individuals who need the face to face support. This blended learning model has assisted in us better meeting the needs of all students.

I would say our strongest example of the growth of our staff in this process, as a result of our commitment to the PLC process, is the implementation of our co-teaching, blended funding model, classroom that began this year. This classroom has special education and general education students that are assigned to the same core class, and corresponding support class, based on having very similar needs. These classes follow the model described above, but is a departure from our previous traditional model of having Tier 3, non-special education students dispersed in various classrooms and special education students working in the classroom with the special education teacher. By moving to this new model we are better able to ensure more rigorous core instruction and support focused on students mastering our essential standards for our highest need Tier 3 students.

Furthermore, our middle school has implemented a school wide tracking model to track students in their progress towards mastering mathematics essential standards. These tracking sheets are posted in each math classroom and students earn stars when they demonstrate mastery. This allows individuals to see their progress and provides a visual reminder to all about who needs intervention, on what, and where they are at in their progression of learning as it relates to the essential standards.

1. Please respond to the question regarding intervention at the high school level?

As described above, our core instruction, differentiated support, and intervention within the core is similar at the HS as to what is occurring at the elementary and middle school levels, as described in the previous responses. As mentioned in the original application, though, the additional intervention time that is outside the core is different at the high school level. The intervention period is running 3 days a week for 30-minutes each day. This intervention time does include optional sections, but students identified through data as having a high need in a particular subject area, receive specific invites to specific interventions focused on their needs that they are required to attend.

During the collaboration time each Monday morning at the HS, as teachers go through the TACA process to analyze their student data, part of the process includes identifying students who need additional support and planning how both the classroom time, and the intervention time, will be utilized to provide this support. Students are identified by name, teachers determine who will be providing which support, and then invitations are sent through Google to specific students for those intervention sessions. Roll is taken based on those interventions and school attendance procedures are followed for any students who do not attend. ELA and Math are given priority for the invites. Students who do not receive an invite, can instead attend one of the optional sections. However, I do want to point out that our HS is an acknowledged area where we still see the largest room for growth in implementing highly effective PLCs. The HS staff has been more reluctant to change from traditional practices and has been slower in the shift within their culture to better address student needs, although there have been some outstanding pockets of growth in certain areas. We have identified various barriers within this and have created a targeted action plan with each our HS instructional leaders to ensure all teams continue to improve in order to better reflect our expectations of all teams. I have included the templates we are using to create the action plans that focus the instructional leaders on the specific needs of the teams. In addition, we have implemented ST Associate, Maria Nielsen’s 15-day challenge process to assist in simplifying the process and ensuring each team can get small wins within the PLC process. We believe this will assist us in getting momentum with our HS teams by gaining positive reinforcement for successfully engaging in the work. Our preliminary results have been very positive in the first 2 months of the year.

1. Did the District receive any updated data from the 2018-19 school year? If so, please share the most current information about student progress. Also, can you comment on 3rd, 7th, and 10th grade and offer any insights regarding the performance of sub groups? If gaps exist between subgroups, what is the plan for closing those gaps.

Our District has since received our 18-19 Science data, which I have added to the original student data achievement sheet and re-attached to this email. In addition, I included data from the Office of Superintendent of Instruction in the State of Washington that breaks down trend data at each of our schools and for the overall district, by subgroups. As can be seen, most data points show a general upward trend demonstrating improvement. However, there are areas where the trend is either inconsistent or is not moving upward. We utilize this data to examine our programs and systems of support, and have created action plans to better address the needs of students who are not demonstrating high levels of learning in the growth and achievement data. These inconsistencies are exactly why we have invested heavily in the PLC process, both from a financial perspective and from a human resource perspective. We believe that being great in the collaborative process will ensure consistent growth and achievement for all of our students in all of our classrooms, not just in certain pockets. If additional data is need that goes beyond this, I can certainly provide that, just let me know what specifically you would like to see.

As you pointed out, 3rd, 7th and 10th grades are 3 of the areas we are focused on improving. As we have analyzed data and examined the trends, we believe there are several reasons for some of the inconsistencies. These issues include where the teams are at the implementation of the PLC process, as well as other outside factors. These 3 grade levels in particular are grade levels that have some strong teachers, but are not yet strong in the PLC process, so the team as a whole is not as strong as they could be.

In response to these teams, and teams like this, we have worked with our administrators, as the primary instructional leaders in each building, to identify the team(s) within their building that has the highest need of support, create an action plan, and join that team as a regular member to provide leadership and support to ensure a more productive, high quality, collaborative environment. I have attached the resources we are utilizing for that. We are excited about the initial progress we have seen from these teams over the first couple of months of the 19-20 school year.

Another primary issue in the 3rd and 7th grade teams in particular, is staff turnover. Our 3rd grade team has welcomed 7 new staff members of the 12 total 3rd grade teachers across the district in the last 2 years. This has led to opportunities for growth in both the content knowledge of these individuals and the trust and respect necessary for a highly effective collaborative process. The 7th grade team is similar in that 3 of the 8 staff members are new within the last 2 years, with the 17-18 school year also having 2 of those staff members out for significant amounts of time on maternity leave. Since that year, though, 7th grade has made tremendous growth in the 18-19 school year, which we expect to continue based on what we have seen in common formative data to start 19-20.

The 10th grade team is a bit of a different scenario. As I mentioned previously, the HS staff has been more reluctant and moved at a slower pace in changing their practices and shifting their culture, which has caused the growth rate in student achievement to not be where we would like it to be. In addition, at the HS level we are seeing huge gaps in learning around pre-requisite skills necessary for success at the HS level. This is due to our previous system not adequately addressing the essential standards at earlier grade levels and ensuring mastery prior to moving on to the next grade level, which is why we have committed to improving the PLC process. We believe that we have grown tremendously in this area, both in the lower grade levels and at the HS level, which will lead to an increasing rate of students demonstrating mastery on the State assessments. By having better systems in place earlier, students will have less learning gaps and be more prepared for the higher level content. This, in conjunction with an improved and more focused intervention system at the HS, will lead to higher levels of success in 10th grade.

Lastly, regarding sub group performance, the SBA analysis charts that I have included show a breakdown of that data. As is the case with our ‘all students’ group, most data points show a general upward trend, with some inconsistencies within that. In addition, some subgroups that are smaller in size jump all over the place due to the fact one or two students can greatly change the percentage. As is described above, as we do with our ‘all students’ group, we analyze this data regularly and create action plans to address the needs identified in these areas. Specifically, one area that caught our attention the last couple of years is our ELL student subgroup. As you can see, the gap has grown in this area. As we looked at this deeper, though, although our achievement rate in the SBA of these students has not trended upward, our ELL progress rate on the ELPA 21 has been strong. This has led to the conversation about our ELL students entering our system with lower and lower language skills. Because of this, we have strengthened our PreK work and added a kindergarten early entrance classroom (5 months of additional Kindergarten instruction – prior to starting their ‘regular’ Kindergarten year) for our students with the highest needs based on our Kindergarten screener. In addition, we have expanded our training and support of teachers to implement Guided Language Acquisition Design (GLAD) strategies in the classroom to provide more robust support all day, every day for these students. Other examples of addressing sub group performance gaps are the co-teaching, blended funding model, classroom at our MS I explained above, the implementation of Tier 2 and 3 support classes at the MS, and the adoption of the 95% group phonics intervention program at our elementary schools. Each year, through data analysis, we adjust and/or add various levels of support to better address the needs of students identified within our data of not making the growth and achievement we would expect to see.

1. See request for additional information in #6 above.

I believe that my response to question #5 addresses most of topics requested in question #6 as well. However, the addition to this would be with regards to our 10th grade math scores. We believe there are several factors at play as to why these scores are below the state average. The first is what I have discussed above regarding the HS staff. The reluctance to change their practice and shift their beliefs is very evident within our HS math department for most individuals. To address this, our HS principal has chosen the math department, particularly the Algebra I and Geometry teams, as her focus teams. Because these teams did not have a strong leader within, and was not consistently following our expectations of the PLC process, she has taken on the leadership role within that team on a weekly basis and created an action plan to address their deficiencies. This action plan includes a strong unit plan designed around the essential standards, common weekly formative assessments that drive their Monday collaborative discussions, creating a targeted action plan to address specific student needs identified in the data, and then sending specific invites to intervention time to these identified students requiring them to attend the interventions to ensure mastery. In addition, these teams are working with a math specialist to expand the types of instructional strategies utilized in the classroom to ensure high levels of learning by all. Furthermore, as I previously mentioned, to ensure this team was able to find small successes in this process to reinforce the expected behavior, we utilized Solution Tree’s Maria Nielsen’s 15-day challenge to help simplify the process and make it more manageable for this team. We found that this team, along with most of the HS teams, were overwhelmed in trying to implement the PLC expectations with multiple preps, for multiple ‘teams’. As we have reviewed the results of the first 15-day challenge for the two math teams, we are very encouraged by the student growth and achievement results. This was very rewarding for the staff as well, who have all chosen to continue to break the process into smaller, 15-day challenges over the remainder of the school year.

Another factor we believe has impacted the HS math scores is, as described above, the fact that really this is where ‘the rubber meets the road’ in terms of learning gaps. Because our previous system, prior to implementing effective PLC’s, was not effective in adequately addressing ALL students’ learning needs, HS students have major gaps in their learning which greatly impacts their ability to be successful in 10th grade core content. We believe that as our system continues to grow in effectively meeting students learning needs at our lower levels, students will be more prepared with less gaps and higher levels of required pre-requisite skills in order to improve their chances of being successful in the HS core content.