Valley Elementary School

Frederick County Public Schools

Jefferson, MD

Solution Tree Model PLC School Submission

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John D. Ewald, Ed. D.

**PLC Story**

Valley Elementary School (VES) serves students in pre-kindergarten through fifth grade. As a rural elementary school in Frederick County Public Schools (FCPS), MD, VES has a strong history of engaged parents, committed staff, and caring students.

It was time for Valley ES to revisit our mission, vision, core values, and goals, the four pillars. We fully engaged our entire school in the principles and actions of professional learning communities and to Frederick County Public Schools’ Accelerated Learning Process (ALP).

As we began this work, it was important to remember that we would need to depend on others to accomplish our goals and to encourage the development of leadership throughout our school. To do this, it was important to “get the right people on the bus.” These leaders and this group became our guiding coalition.

The four pillars of mission, vision, values (collective commitments), and goals provided the foundation of our work (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, and Mattos, 2016). Staff, parents, and in some cases students, answered the questions respective of each pillar to continue our work (Williams and Hierck, 2015). Our work led to the development of our shared mission, vision, collective commitments, and school wide goals.

MISSION

The mission of Valley Elementary School is to;

Empower students to take risks and be self-aware.

Respond to and meet the unique needs of each and every student.

Prepare students for their global future.

VISION

Valley Elementary School is a school community where academic excellence is achieved and social-emotional well-being is developed as a foundation for success.

COLLECTIVE COMMITMENTS

To achieve our shared vision for Valley ES, students, staff, and parents have committed to going about our work with;

Honesty

Kindness

Equity

Collaboration

Respect

Commitment

SCHOOLWIDE GOALS

1. To improve student achievement in language arts in each grade level as measured by performance on local, state, and national assessments.
2. To improve student achievement in mathematics in each grade level as measured by performance on local, state, and national assessments.

To accomplish this goal, in alignment with the PLC at Work process, Valley Elementary School moved from having an interest in PLC’s to making a commitment to the PLC process (DuFour et al, 2016). As an entire school, Valley Elementary School became a Professional Learning Community (PLC). Staff made a commitment to and participated in an ongoing process. They worked collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry. And, as a result, our students achieved improved results. Student achievement increased as did teachers’ instructional and collaborative skills. Specifically, student scores increased in a three-year period within a range of 5.6% - 80% in student groups.

Additionally, staff perceptions of school climate, curriculum and instruction, engagement and communication, leadership, professional development, and safety, health, and wellness increased exponentially over a three-year period with increases ranging from 7% - 25%.

These results were made possible due to the fact that our PLC at Work process went beyond a single team. The PLC at Work process was the work of our entire school. For example; the master scheduled was developed to allow for teacher collaboration, a schoolwide plan for intervention was developed and implemented, processes were established to form the essential work of teams and how that work would be monitored, and our school mission, vision, collective commitments, and goals (PLC Pillars) were developed and agreed to. In turn, the term PLC at Work seemed to leave us. Now, this work and how we went about it, was simply who we were. Who we were, what we planned for, and what and how we expected to achieve.

Student achievement is regularly monitored, shared, and discussed with students, teachers, and administrators. Teachers meet twice weekly with their grade level team. During these collaborative blocks, essential standards are identified with support of school based content specialists. This leads to instructional planning aligned to identified essential standards, Tier 1. Subsequently, the development of and planning for intervention and support takes place to provide students the time needed to master what they need to know to be successful, Tier 2 and Tier 3. These authentic systems of intervention provide students additional time and support for their learning.

Students’ reading and math intervention occur at each grade level three times per week. Our students’ intervention and support schedule is religiously followed. It is regularly reviewed on a weekly basis and revised as necessary.

**Monitoring Student Learning on a Timely Basis**

The use of Common Formative Assessments (CFA’s) – a lynchpin of the PLC at Work process -is pervasive and consistent across all grade levels throughout the school. They allow for the ongoing analysis of teaching and learning. They are used to inform instruction. They reflect on teacher practices. Our CFA’s support student learning and adult learning.

Teachers receive authentic teacher driven as well as system driven professional development from school-based literacy and mathematics’ specialists. Administrators join grade level twice weekly meetings as well as meet quarterly with grade level teams to review student achievement data, monitor progress, and plan for student intervention, support, enrichment, and acceleration.

As part of our grade level teams’ data protocols, teachers reflect on their own practices as well as their collective team practices. These reflective discussions are facilitated by the grade level team leader, content specialist, or administrator. This process provides teachers the opportunity to share effective strategies with their colleagues based on data.

Additionally, our guiding coalition determined school wide goals and regularly monitored achievement of and toward those goals, and helped to determine learning targets for our students. Our guiding coalition; met monthly as a leadership team or school improvement team, facilitated the development and adoption of our four pillars, and assisted in the development of teacher leaders throughout our school.

Key data points that were regularly analyzed by grade level teams systemically throughout the school included; common formative assessment results in reading and math, Performance Series in Reading and Math, DIBELS, student disciplinary reports, monthly student attendance reports, and Maryland Comprehensive Assessment Program results.

While the results in English and mathematics across identified groups is to be celebrated, it is important to note that such results are were not consistent across each identified grade level. These grade level teams experienced staffing challenges which may impacted this change in results.

Professional development tailored for grade level teams or teachers is also discussed, planned for, and scheduled. These quarterly meetings also include other key professional staff members including the Special Education Teacher, English Language Teacher, Literacy Specialist, and Mathematics’ Specialist. These same key professional staff members also attend grade level team meetings with teachers.

Additionally, each teacher develops an approved Student Learning Objective (SLO), which aligns with the School Improvement Plan. SLO’s are measurable instructional goals established by teachers for a specific group of students over a set period of time. They are monitored twice yearly with an administrator and teacher or respective grade level team.

**Creating Systems of Interventions to Provide Students with Additional Time and Support for Learning**

Students in need of intervention and support are monitored through a school wide data base. The school’s master schedule, including the schedules for Instructional Assistants and non-classroom-based staff, is developed to provide additional plug in and pull out support for students.

The development of the students’ master schedule is driven by student need and the ability of staff to support student learning. Grade level teams are given common planning time throughout the week.

Student performance with respect to various support and intervention instructional programs, including authentically designed programs, is regularly monitored and adjusted. This structure provides reading and math intervention at each grade level. These student interventions are specific and based on student needs.

Staff members providing these student interventions attend weekly meetings with respective grade level teams to share, discuss, and adjust programming for students.

**Building Teacher Capacity to Work as Members of High-Performing Collaborative Teams that Focus Efforts on Improved Learning for All Students**

Several systemic processes are in place to build and maintain high performing collaborative teams focused on improving student learning.

Grade level team members, with literacy specialist, mathematics specialist, special education teacher, and English language teacher, are provided weekly professional development authentically designed based on teacher and team needs as well as prescribed needs from administrators or system perspectives.

Quarterly kid talks are planned for and conducted with grade level team members as sell as content specialists. These kid talks are broken into analysis of students’ achievement data, realignment of resources to best serve student needs, collaborative instructional planning, and authentic professional development modules for teachers.

Monthly staff meetings briefly address administrative matters followed by substantial school wide professional development based on student achievement data, teacher needs, and administrators’ focus areas.

Additionally, authentic, sanctioned, and system conferences, modules, and workshops are provided for staff as needed.

**Resources**

1. [Team Norms](https://docs.google.com/document/d/18-zFIa76oi5Xo17ouqTJJ1whZIWd1v2DVOvDa_03Qz0/edit)
2. [SMART Goals](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1QGdVBNWsWUhgzXYALrHVdpA0-087hUaTGFfaGF5_G3Q/edit)
3. [Essential Standards unpacked into Learning Targets](https://mdk12.msde.maryland.gov/INSTRUCTION/StandardsandFrameworks/ela/Pages/EnglishHomePage.aspx)
4. [Common Formative Assessments](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1OTbbW2zv3AqAMblte0Hg-mdjEubkLiNveOwhMoYuvWE/edit)
5. [Data Analysis Protocol](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1AD5K19B7O-0QYtNEb9vTketxnyR-g8cG5rvvnp90mS4/edit)

References

1. DuFour, R., DuFour, R., Many, T., and Mattos, M. (2016). *Learning by doing*.
2. Hierck, T. & Williams, K. (2015). *Starting a movement.* Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.