**SINGAPORE AMERICAN SCHOOL**

**Middle School**

**PROFESSIONAL**

**LEARNING**

**COMMUNITIES**

**PLC Leaders Handbook**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Professional Learning Communities (PLC’s) have the power to enhance what we do – connecting educators, focusing on collective inquiry and action research, and promoting improved student learning outcomes. Focusing on what students are learning, how learning will be measured, and ultimately how learning for all will be optimized is a challenge for which we in the Middle School are well positioned to tackle. We have a collaborative culture with time and support for groups to work together to plan learning experiences, develop common assessments, analyze evidence of student learning, and ultimately learn from one another. It is an exciting time for the students and educators in the Middle School, made particularly more exciting because of the PLC leadership team that is in place.

**Responsibilities of PLC Leaders**

The strength of a PLC is that of the collective capacity of its group members. With the guidance of PLC leaders, we hope to capitalize on the combined skills, experience, and insight of all PLC members. With this in mind, it is important that PLC leaders focus on the following responsibilities:

* Attend all PLC leader meetings
* Promote the Middle School PLC shared vision
* Establish group norms
* Meet with PLC members on a regular basis
* Facilitate the development of common assessments
* Set SMART goals focused on student learning and achievement
* Engage PLC members in collective inquiry, action orientation and experimentation
* Prepare for PLC review meetings with administrative supervisor
* Establish a commitment to continuous improvement
* Apply evidence of student learning to inform and enhance practice

**PLC Planning for 2012/2013 School Year**

In preparation for the 2012/2013 launch of PLC’s, PLC leaders will be asked to be active participants/leaders at the first full faculty meeting. A basic outline of the agenda is below:

* Review of PLC Shared Vision
* PLC in Review – 3 Big Ideas
* Middle School PLC Goals
* Setting SMART Goals
* Collective inquiry into student learning results – what to focus on
* PLC timeline and expectations

As a PLC leader you will be asked to add more depth to each of these areas as you begin the work with your group.

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**PLC STRUCTURE**

**Meeting Timeline – PLC Group Goal Setting Meetings**

PLC leaders will meet with the MS Administrators in early August to discuss the timeline outlined below:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Month** | **Meeting** | **Tasks** |
| September/October  (post CWW) | 1st PLC Group  Meeting | Review group norms, unit plans, SMART goals, timeline and common assessments.  Plan for analyzing data and informing instruction, and possible additional SMART goals. |
| January/February | 2nd PLC Group  Meeting | Review SMART goal from Sept/Oct, collected evidence, data interpretation, impact on instruction/practice.  Plan for second SMART goal. |
| April | Final PLC Group  Meeting | Review second SMART goal.  Reflect upon PLC impact, effectiveness, successes and challenges. |

**Establishing Group Norms**

Perhaps one of the most critical and important first steps in setting the stage for success is the establishment of group norms or essential agreements for each respective PLC group. While it is often presumed that ‘norms’ are normal and assumed for any structured group, purposefully setting group norms have been proven to help groups more effectively reach their objectives, while promoting cohesion and building productive professional relationships.

Examples of what your group norms document might include are outlined below:

* Focus on student learning
* Take risks and ask questions – engage in passionate, honest and respectful discussions
* Avoid side conversations
* Listen without interruption
* Seek to understand before being understood
* Come prepared and be on time

***\* Please see the example of a group norm agreement on the next page\****

**PLC SAMPLE GROUP NORMS**

**To work effectively as a group we will:**

1. Keep the discussion focused on the topic at hand.
2. Value a collegial atmosphere where there is purposeful and open discussion around issues and ideas.
3. Ensure everyone has a voice.
4. Focus on solutions.
5. Work together as a group that values consensus rather than majority rule.
6. Make decisions that are:
   1. Student centered
   2. Based on the school mission and goals
   3. Research based
   4. Data driven

**To reach consensus we will:**

1. Create a climate of acceptance
2. Donate ideas for consideration
3. Examine ideas from all angles

* Consider implications, consequences and alternatives

1. Build on the ideas of others

* Construction results in bigger, better and more sound decisions

1. Seek first to understand before being understood.

**To make a decision we will ask:**

1. Have you had a chance to understand and be understood?
2. Will you support the decision both privately and publicly?
3. Can you live with it?
4. Are there other alternatives? (don’t hold an idea or the group hostage)

**PLC TOOLS – COMMON ASSESSMENTS**

**Creating Common Assessments**

One of the foundations of effective PLC work is the creation of common assessments. Common Assessments provide a benchmark from which PLC teams can make informed decisions regarding instructional interventions that impact and improve student learning. Marzano (2009) suggests that teams build shared knowledge around effective and balanced assessment practices by asking the following questions:

* How will we the learning of each student on a timely basis?
* Do our common assessments reflect the characteristics of quality assessments that we have identified?
* Are we using the results from the assessments to support students who are experiencing difficulty?
* What criteria are the members of our team using to assess the quality of students work?
* What evidence do we have that all members of our team apply the criteria consistently?

**Generic Scale for Common Assessments**

To further support PLC work in this area, please see the generic scale for developing common assessments established by Marzano below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **SCORE** | **CRITERIA** |
| 4.0 | In addition to a score of 3.5, in-depth inferences and applications that go beyond what was taught. |
| 3.5 | In addition to 3.0 performance, partial success at in-depth inferences and applications go beyond what was taught. |
| 3.0 | No major errors or omissions regarding any of the information and/or processes (simple or complex) that were explicitly taught. |
| 2.5 | No major errors or omissions regarding score 2.0 elements and partial knowledge of score 3.0 elements. |
| 2.0 | No major errors of omissions regarding simpler details and processes. Major errors or omissions regarding the more complex details and processes (score 3.0 elements). |
| 1.5 | Partial knowledge of the score 2.0 elements but major errors or omissions regarding the score 3.0 elements. |
| 1.0 | With help, a partial understanding of some of the score 2.0 elements and some of the score 3.0 elements. |
| 0.5 | With help, a partial understanding of some of the score 2.0 elements but not the score 3.0 elements. |
| 0 | Even with help, no understanding or skill demonstrated. |

**\*NOTE** – this is a generic and non-specific scale. To effectively implement a subject specific scale, Marzano suggests that teachers start by identifying the content that students would need to master to meet the unit’s objectives. This would be classified as a score of 3.0.

**PLC TOOLS – GOAL SETTING**

**SMART Goals**

SMART Goals will be the foundation of all common PLC team goal setting conferences. To review, SMART goals follow the criteria outlined below:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **S**  **Specific** | The goal is focused; for example, by content area, by learners’ needs, by assessment results, by data, etc.. |
| **M**  **Measureable** | An appropriate instrument/measure is selected to assess the goal. Concrete criteria for measuring progress toward the attainment of each goal should be used. |
| **A**  **Attainable** | The goal is within the teacher’s control to effect change. |
| **R**  **Realistic** | The goal is feasible for the teacher. To be realistic, a goal must represent an objective toward which you are both willing and able to work. |
| **T**  **Timely** | The goal is contained within a single school year. |

**SMART Goal Examples**

The goals shared below are examples of SMART goals. They are intended to provide some guidance on how SMART goals may be written.

**6th Grade Science**

By the end of the academic year, 100% of students will score over 190 on the RIT scale in all 5 science content/process areas (physical science, life science, earth science, science inquiry, and nature of science).

**7th Grade Mathematics**

By the end of the academic year, at least 50% of students will score 75% or higher on the Algebra 1 placement test.

**8th Grade RLA**

By May 2013, 100% of students will improve their writing scores by at least 1 point on the 6 + 1 Traits Rubric, in all 6 traits.

**SMART Goal Template**

Please refer to the SMART Goal template on the following page. The example is for the 6th Grade Science SMART Goal from above. A blank template for sharing your PLC SMART goal is located in the Google docs folder.

**PLC Team:** 6th Grade Science

**PLC Members:** Albert Einstein, Marie Currie, and Bucky Fuller

**BACKGROUND**

**Why are you selecting this goal/project? Is it aligned with school wide or divisional goals?**

To work towards the MS Science departmental goal for student MAP RIT scores in all 5 concept/process areas (all 6th grade students will score 190 or higher, all 7th grade students will score 200 or higher, and all 8th grade students will score 210 or higher).

**What data sources indicate that this is a student achievement project worthy of pursuing?**

August MAP scores for all 6th grade students indicate over 50% of students scoring below 190 in 4 or more of the concept/process scale areas.

**SMART GOAL**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Goal** | **Indicators**  **(What it looks like)** | **Measures**  **(How you know)** | **Targets** |
| To improve science MAP test scores. | Students will score 190 or higher in all 5 areas of the Science MAP test.  For those that don’t score over 190, they will realize at least a 10 point gain in all 5 areas. | Formative assessment tools (tests, quizzes, projects) throughout the academic year.  Science MAP test results in May 2013. | 100% of students will score 190 or above on science RIT scores. |
| **SMART Goal:** By the end of the academic year, 100% of students will score over 190 on the RIT scale in all 5 science content/process areas (physical science, life science, earth science, science inquiry, and nature of science). |  |  |  |

**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

**What instructional strategies will you maintain, introduce, or change to reach the PLC goal?**

(i.e. differentiation, technology, project based learning, heterogeneous grouping)

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**What professional development opportunities might you employ to assist with this project and reaching the PLC goal?**

(i.e. team teaching, peer observation/coaching, professional reading, in house experts, attending training)

**STEPS, TIMELINES, RESOURCES**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Steps** | **Timelines** | **Resources** |
| Chronological steps outlining the steps towards successfully reaching the team goal | Specific dates (by month) | Resources/support that the team will need to reach the goal (i.e. information, technology, space, people, skills, PD, financial, etc.) |

**PLC TOOLS – TEAM GOAL SETTING MEETINGS**

PLC teams will meet to discuss team goals with a supervising administrator at least 3 times in an academic year. These meetings will most typically follow the schedule outlined below:

* **September** – Goal Setting/PLC Process Review
* **January** – Review of 1st team SMART Goal
* **April** – Review of 2nd team SMART Goal

The **initial goal setting (September)** meeting will be an opportunity for PLC teams to share and/or clarify their SMART goals with the supervising administrator. This meeting will also serve to review the framework and expectations for all PLC teams. Teams may also want to take this time to request any support and/or resources they need to assist with their PLC work. To this meeting, PLC teams will be asked to bring the following (if complete):

* Group/Team norms
* Common assessments
* Student work
* Draft team goal proposal
* Research related to goal
* Data recording tools

The **second goal setting (January)** meeting will focus on the PLC team’s first SMART Goal. Specifically, the conversation will focus on the SMART goal, common assessments used, collected data, analysis of data, and plans to enhance instruction/student achievement. To this meeting, PLC teams will be asked to bring the following:

* Common assessments
* Research related to goal
* Data recording tools
* Data analysis summary
* Plans for instructional modification
* 2nd SMART goal proposal

The **third goal setting (April)** meeting will be very similar to the January meeting. Teams will review the 2nd SMART goal or the extension of the 1st SMART goal that was set in September. To this meeting, PLC teams will be asked to bring the following:

* Common assessments
* Student work
* Research related to goal
* Data recording tools
* Data analysis summary
* Plans for instructional modification

**PLC TOOLS – REVIEWING STUDENT RESULTS DATA**

The heart of all PLC work is the collection and analysis of student achievement data. PLC teams will use this data to enhance instruction and student achievement. To assist teams in the review an analysis of student achievement data, please refer to the tools contained in this section of the handbook.

**Data Sharing Guidelines**

**Quantitative Data**

When sharing quantitative data please consider the following display guidelines. This will help PLC team members and other data observers when interpreting and analyzing the data.

* Explicit and Informative Title and Context
  + Assessment name and subject
  + Grade level tested
  + Date of assessment
  + Number of students tested
  + Appropriate choice of chart style
* Charts or Tables Simple and Easy to Read
  + Good use of space and color
  + Easy to read fonts (style and size)
  + Clearly labeled legend and axes
  + Appropriate y-axis scale
  + Data point values where helpful

**Qualitative Data**

When sharing qualitative data, PLC teams might chose to display such data by:

* Selecting quotes or exemplars
* Building tables or matrices
* Using diagrams to visually display theories or models

**Dialogue vs. Discussion**

In the middle school there is a culture of collaboration that focuses on the best interests of students. Teachers often meet, both formally and informally, engaging in conversation about students and student learning. When these conversations focus specifically on student achievement, collected data, data analysis and plans to move forward, it is important for PLC teams to be skillful in effective dialoguing and discussion techniques. To better understand the difference between dialogue and discussion, please see the definitions below:

**Dialogue** – a reflective learning process that leads to a shared understanding. It builds a sense of connection and belonging, and creates an emotional and cognitive safety zone where ideas can be shared without judgment.

**Discussion** – leads to decisions being made. Skillful discussions display rigorous critical thinking, mutual respect, weighing of options and decision making that respects the group’s vision, values and goals.

**Consensus Building (Making a Decision)**

Consensus is a group process where the input of everyone is carefully considered and an outcome is crafted that best meets the needs of the group. It is a process of synthesizing the wisdom of all the participants into the best decision that meets the needs of the group. With regards to PLC work in the middle school, decisions should focus upon improving student achievement. To enable teams to do so, it is worth considering some of the basic tenets of effective consensus building:

* Create a climate of acceptance
* Donate ideas for consideration
* Examine ideas from all angles
  + Consider implications, consequences and alternatives
* Build on the ideas of others
  + Construction results in bigger, better and more sound decisions
* Seek first to understand before being understood.

To make a decision, teams should first ask the following:

* Have you had a chance to understand and be understood?
* Will you support the decision both privately and publicly?
* Can you live with it?
* Are there other alternatives? (don’t hold an idea or the group hostage)

**DIALOGUE PROTOCOL FOR SUMMATIVE RESULTS**

**Purpose:** The Summative Results Dialogue asks PLC teams to look at summative results (i.e. common assessments, report card grades, external assessments) and dialogue about what they notice. Comments should be limited to objective statements and questions that lead the team to a common understanding of what the data says about student learning.

**Essential Questions:**

1. What can we learn from this data?
2. How can this data help us improve student learning?

**Steps:**

1. Identify roles – group facilitator, note-taker and time keeper
2. Compare the figures for selected summative results (common assessments, report card grades, external assessments) and answer three questions:
   1. What statements can you make about this data?
   2. What surprises or anomalies do you notice? What questions do you have about this data?
   3. What additional data might help your team plan for improved student learning?
3. Group reflects on process, provides feedback and identifies one or more ‘norms’ to focus on during next dialogue protocol.

**DISCUSSION PROTOCOL FOR SUMMATIVE RESULTS**

**Purpose:** The Summative Results Discussion asks PLC teams to use statements generated during the Dialogue Protocol as the basis for making decisions regarding next steps. The team considers possible causes for results, brainstorms strategies and decides on a course of action to improve student learning.

**Essential Questions:**

1. What did we learn from this data?
2. What might be some reasons for these results?
3. What target will we set for improved student learning?
4. What steps will we take in order to improve these results?

**Steps:**

1. Identify roles – group facilitator, note-taker and time keeper
2. Review the statements recorded during the ‘dialogue’ and identify possible causes using brainstorm strategy. All ideas should be accepted without comment.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Statement | Possible Causes (Brainstorm) |
| i.e. 50% of the students did not reach the grade level standard in reading comprehension. | 1. Limited time given to teaching unit 2. Instructional strategies did not match the needs of students. 3. … |

1. Discuss the viability of possible causes and chose those that point to strategies within the control of your PLC team.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Statement  ‘What?’ | Possible Causes (Brainstorm)  ‘So What?’ | Strategies  ‘Now What?’ |
| i.e. 50% of the students did not reach the grade level standard in reading comprehension. | 1. Limited time given to teaching unit 2. Instructional strategies did not match the needs of students. 3. … |  |

1. Use the information gathered in this ‘Discussion Protocol’ to plan for implementing strategies. This information may also be used to set the ‘PLC Team Goal’.

Group reflects on process, provides feedback and identifies one or more ‘norms’ to focus on during next dialogue protocol.

**STUDENT LEARNING RESULTS SUMMARY**

To provide your PLC administrator with a better understanding of the student learning results and the ‘take aways’ from this data, please complete this form as a PLC team. It will help to set the stage for the PLC team conference.

**PLC Team:**

**PLC Team Members:**

**Date:** **Unit Topic:**

1. Describe the alignment between the unit assessments and the benchmarks/learner outcomes.
2. How did you organize the data? (please attach a copy to this summary)
3. What student learning strengths did the data show?
4. What student weaknesses did the data show?
5. During the course of the unit of instruction, what modifications were made to instructional plans as a result of the data?
6. What are the key insights for your PLC team from this data?

**PLC LEARNING LOG**

PLC teams will not be required to submit meeting minutes. Instead, it would be helpful to both the PLC team members and the supervising administrator to capture the most notable work and decisions of the PLC team in a ‘learning log’.

**PLC Learning Log Guidelines**

* Kept as a Google document, shared with all PLC team members and the supervising administrator.
* Includes brief descriptions of lessons, units and assessments being built and refined by teams.
* Chronicles dialogue, discussion and reflection meetings.
* Highlights any challenges and/or successes experienced by the PLC team.
* Briefly states the PLC team plan of action.

**LEARNING LOG (Example)**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Dialogue/Discussion/Reflection** | **Action** |
| September 1 | Created common assessment to assess understanding of basic principles of scientific inquiry and method (i.e. observing, questioning, predicting, hypothesizing, and inferring) | Plan to use the data collected to set a SMART goal related to the benchmark/learner outcome on ‘scientific process’. |
| September 15 | Reviewed the data gathered from the common assessment on the principles of scientific inquiry and method.  Found that only 50% of students have the prerequisite understanding of the scientific process to be successful in 8th grade science. | Will re-teach some of the basic concepts of the scientific method, specifically focusing on hypothesizing and inferring. |
|  |  |  |

**For a comprehensive resource that includes information, practical tips, and reproducible templates, please visit:**

**www.allthingsplc.info**