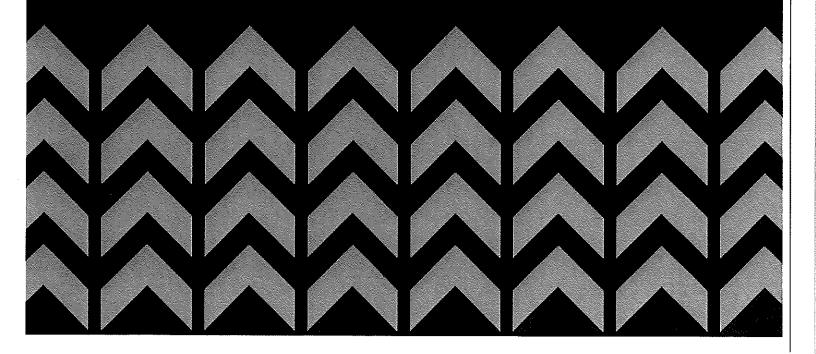# NPUSC
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SECTION 1

Application Essay

The New Prairie United Schools PLC Story

Tell us how you built shared understanding and commitment to the PLC at Work process

Nearly five years ago, NPUSC (New Prairie United School Corporation) leadership embarked on a PLC conference at Lincolnshire High School with a small group from the administrative team. From that conference, it was evident that transitioning into a Professional Learning Community at Work school district was vital in order to grow our staff professionally and academically. The administrative team realized that our district had become stagnant in professional growth, as well as educational practices within our five school buildings. Although our district is positively rated state-wide, and sometimes nationally, our practices were more top/down and autocratic in nature. The leadership team began discussing a 3-5 year goal for the NPUSC school district to become a true PLC school system. Knowing how vital it was to create a shared vision, the NPUSC administrative team began planting the seeds to create a collective mission and vision for the school community based on PLC principles. We spent our initial year developing a "collective understanding" of the PLC process. With the help of a Solution Tree educator/trainer, a guiding coalition of leaders from all NPUSC schools, including our teacher union leadership and school board, spent two days being trained on the basics of the PLC process-both what it is (collaborative work for students centered on the Four Critical Questions) and what it is not. Building a collective understanding of what PLCs are helped bring foresight to a united commitment that could move our school district forward. We then spent the rest of the school year developing our district's Mission-Vision-Core Values-Critical Commitments through our guiding coalition of leaders. Each district teacher had the opportunity to share their views, and meetings were conducted at each NPUSC school. These building level meetings included clarification of what the PLC process is and what it is not, why NPUSC leadership

wanted to pursue the concept, and meaningful dialogue about district mission and vision. After considerable input, NPUSC created mutually agreed upon and shared Mission-Vision-Core Values-Critical Commitments (see NPUSC Artifacts Section 8), based on our shared collective understanding of the PLC process. This led to a truly collaborative commitment from our teachers, school board, and administration to move forward to implement steps to become a PLC school district over a multi-year process. Next, the school board approved taking over 100 staff members to the yearly PLC Conference at Lincolnshire, Illinois, to begin year two of our journey after completion of the collective understanding and mission/vision process in year one. Being able to engage the staff in the PLC at Work Conference was key in creating a sustained process going forward. Having our staff hear from top leaders significantly catapulted our team on a unified front with clear understanding on what to implement first. The staff and the administrative team created norms (See NPUSC Artifacts Sections 3-7), restructured common plan time including at the secondary level, and worked to identify essential standards in year two. Next, after taking another 100 staff members to Lincolnshire, we dove into writing common formative assessments (CFA) during our third year of the PLC at Work process. More recently, all staff have been involved in Response to Intervention conferences, Grading Seminars, additional PLC Lincolnshire conferences, and a vast array in Global PD professional development. RTI processes have been implemented in all NPUSC schools in the past two years (See NPUSC Artifacts Sections 3-7 for RTI approaches/schedule), with the help of workshops led by Mike Mattos virtually the past two falls for our district staff. Also, NPUSC worked with a Solution Tree leader to create and pilot a new teacher evaluation process that aligns to the PLC principles (NPUSC Artifacts Section 8 for sections of plan). This occurred as a response to requests of the NPUSC teacher evaluation committee, which yearned for an evaluative tool that

would resemble the PLC at Work process. Finally, we have even begun a process in 2021 to involve ALL of our classified employees in collaborative PLC concepts. We have begun training in leadership styles, functions of a cohesive team, writing Mission-Vision-Core Values-Critical Commitments for each employee group (custodians, bus drivers, etc.), and training on collaborative meeting templates/practices for department meetings to collectively solve problems within those critical support areas for the betterment of students (See NPUSC Artifacts Section 8 Classified Documents). Here at NPUSC, we are a continual work in progress but we are striving every day to empower our teachers and administrative team to grow professionally in the PLC process.

Tell us how you are facilitating a culture of continuous improvement in your district.

In order to continually provide a culture of improvement for our school district, PLC processes have had to be refined often. Data and instructional practices are examined regularly and adjustments are made repeatedly to keep effective methodology at the forefront. Collaborative groups within the PLC process include building leadership teams, RTI teams, grade level teacher teams, Social/Emotional Support teams, and administration teams that examine student learning weekly to bi-weekly through a variety of data assessments. RTI teams, and teacher teams utilize common formative assessments (CFAs) regularly to adjust curriculum plans for students. Teachers make adjustments regularly based on weekly CFA data to meet the needs of our tiered students, as well as our gifted population. These measures do take time and NPUSC has worked with our school board, our local teacher's union, and building principals to place a priority on relevant time on-task with students. We have created late starts once a week for additional collaboration time, instituted common plan time for ALL staff including high school, and instituted corporation wide professional development days. These professional

development days not only include training for certified staff, but we have now started building collaborative methodology within the classified staff. In some instances, additional plan and collaborative time was given in order to provide the environment for continuous improvement for all of our staff. All five of our schools have guiding coalition building leadership teams, and RTI teams that meet to ensure systematic practices are in place or review the developmental needs of our students/staff. These teams are on the forefront in making the mission/vision goals a true reality within each of our five schools. Our secondary grades have increased the collaboration time greatly within the school day due to the adjustments that were made. Grade level and school wide leadership teams meet collaboratively each week to answer the four critical questions. SMART goals have been developed at the collaborative team, building, and district level (NPUSC Artifacts Sections 3-8 for examples). Both teams have collaborated to identify or implement: the essential standards and instructional strategies for all our classrooms, reflections/action on continuous or re-teaching practices based on student data, giving essential standards top priority, examining CFA data to develop our reteaching/enrichment plans, strengthening our current RTI process, mapping data trends to discover our areas that challenge us, and planning for the "next steps" in the PLC at Work model. Yearly SMART goals, written and revised based on the latest yearly CFA and academic trend data, facilitate a culture of continuous improvement.

NPUSC has also made a significant commitment to the RTI process by implementing seven additional intervention specialists at our five buildings. We have trained these teachers with the Tier 3 model/approaches from the leaders of the PLC process. This team is an additional support than our Title, ELL, and Dyslexic interventionists for our students.

Another example of an area NPUSC is demonstrating continuous improvement is our grading practices. As NPUSC learned more about the PLC process, it became evident that our grading practices were not aligned with student centered processes and are based more on efficiency for adults than demonstrating a true indication of the academic standing of a student. A committee was formed over two years ago that is studying the latest research on grading/assessing. This group is currently getting input from all NPUSC teachers and is writing NPUSC Mission Statements and Policy for grading procedures (see NPUSC Artifacts Section #8) that are more reflective of student-centered learning and a better accompaniment and partner in our PLC culture. Finally, NPUSC has embedded teams at each school that guide the PLC process, formed a guiding coalition at each building, and work with district leadership to coordinate PLC efforts. NPUSC is so committed to these teams to ensure continuous improvement that NPUSC added "Building Leadership Team" stipends at each NPUSC school to our collective bargaining agreement (see NPUSC Artifact Section 8).

PLC practices- "Monitoring Student Learning on a Timely Basis"

Describe the process that your school or district uses to create and implement a guaranteed and viable curriculum.

All K-12 classrooms have written curriculum maps, but more importantly now have essential standards identified in every grade and subject area to help guide the pacing of the curriculum. Considerable time was created during contract time and PD days to make an initial identification of essential standards using resources in Learning by Doing, Third Edition. First and foremost, our school system has made a valiant effort to update and provide a viable curriculum that aligns to the state's rigorous standards. Curriculum needs are seen as an investment within our school district. Essential standards as well as pacing guides are aligned to

student data with state/national standards, and are reviewed yearly at the beginning of the school year. Building principals meet with teacher teams and with each other to ensure essential skills will be learned and assessed in each classroom. This truly allows NPUSC to assure families their students are developing the same essential skills in any classroom at a particular grade or subject across our district. Central office administration meets each month with our principal team to review this information. Also, our school district adopted curriculum resources collaboratively for our core subjects to ensure relevant methodologies are being delivered and are in place. Curriculum committees meet with various curriculum vendors to critique and choose curriculum resources that are parallel to our local and state standards. After curriculum resources are adopted, the district wide training is held not only at the beginning of the school year but also throughout to ensure consistent collaboration with implementation. Teacher teams also ensure vertical alignment is being implemented across grade levels, as vertical collaboration meetings happen each year within subject areas during created collaboration meeting times in our work days. Elective classroom teachers also meet during their collaboration time to establish consistent instructional practices, collaborate on developing 21st Century Skills in all students through their subject areas, and curriculum materials are mapped out. This is an ongoing and fluid process especially when new curriculum is adopted on a cyclical basis.

Describe the strategies your school district uses to monitor student learning on a timely basis

Teacher teams and the administration have honed in their academic skills within the PLC process in the last four school years, particularly regarding assessment of student learning to inform instruction weekly. Consistent common formative and summative assessments have been written, outlined, summarized, and critiqued when examining student performance. These

assessments are directly aligned to the Indiana academic blueprints and our essential standards. Each team has created these types of evaluations to help gain a pulse of student achievement throughout the school district, but more importantly within each grade level and/or subject level. Student longitudinal data is observed and studied to help guide instructional modifications within the classrooms that happen in real-time on a weekly basis instead of waiting for a traditional end of unit test or grading period as we used to often do. The school district has also had a school wide formative assessment that is used for all K-10 students. This NWEA data helps us analyze local norms as well as compares our five schools to national norms. The school wide formative assessments allow us to also track students throughout their progress and individual growth at NPUSC. Finally, NPUSC has semester and yearly data meetings among administration, teaching teams and teacher leader/building guiding coalition teams. SMART Goals are shared for tracking progress at these meetings. These data meetings include yearly data presentation reviews with each of our schools' leadership teams, administration, and school board. In addition to this, we have a yearly board retreat based on reviewing student trend data to inform our next steps. At a recent board retreat meeting, NPUSC set district smart goals around writing development, SEL systematic processes, and developing a grading policy/practice consistent with PLC philosophy, which were all identified as a concern area in student data after reviewing both summative data at this retreat and formative data in our meetings between teacher teams and building and district leaders. The writing development goal is just one example of how district data meetings are being implemented during which building teams share quarterly CFA data with district leaders to monitor progress, and building leadership teams present to our central office administration and school board on CFA data yearly to identify action steps for

improving student learning in a timely basis. Examples of these NPUSC SMART goals can be found in Artifact Section #8.

Share how you are creating and implementing systems of intervention and extension to provide students with additional time and support for learning

K-12 grade level teachers and administration have been strengthening Response to Intervention processes for the past three school years. They have shifted the RTI process to a more collaborative process within their groups. NPUSC wrote two RTI state grants in the last 2 years and was awarded $2,510,000 to financially support and implement 10 new RTI positions and Therapeutic social workers for the sole purpose of reaching more students than our Title, ELL, and Dyslexic teachers are able to handle. These interventionists have been trained by only RTI specialists from Solution Tree's PLC model and Mike Mattos himself. All practices and implementations have been taken directly from Best Practices authored by Rogers, Smith, Mattos, and Buffum. Administration has taken leadership groups to several Solutions' Tree RTI conferences to help hone our skills on addressing Tier 1, 2 and 3 interventions. Secondary schools are in the second school year of RTI implementation (see bell schedules in Artifact Sections 6 & 7). Leadership groups have just begun the process of RTI implementation teams within the 6-12 schools. RTI time has been now carved out within the instructional day, including our secondary schools, and Tiered interventions are starting to take place. Next year more alignment of intervention practices will be a focus at the secondary schools to help align student achievement to individual teacher practices when it comes to intervention.

In the last school year, we placed a tight focus on high level professional development for our teachers. We adjusted our master calendar to train all teachers at one time and provide

late start follow up every Friday. Here are the PD's that we have covered and committed to in the last school year. Agendas are then created to follow up with the initiative proposed within remediation. That follow up is communicated monthly at leadership meetings to ensure implementation is occurring. NPUSC has been very intentional on PD that aligns to our remedial data needs.

- Mike Mattos: Best Practices at Tier 3 (K-12), Best Practices at Tier 2 (K-12)
- John Eller: Creating a PLC teacher evaluation that aligns to best practices (K-12)
- Doug Lillydahl: Forming a vision for a standards based reporting system to align to mastery (6-12)
- Troy Gobble: Forming a vision for a standards based reporting system to align to mastery (K-5)
- Jen Hasser with Kendore: Moving struggling learners to become independent readers (K-5)
- Kristina Smekens: Building a skilled plan to increase reading comprehension (3-12)
- Yvonne Rambo: Creating CFA's Ready assessment materials with current data (2-5)
- Stephanie Callahan: (LSW) Trauma informed Care (6-12)
- Stephanie Callahan: Verbal De-escalation (6-12)
- Tia Kolosa: Tier 3 behavior support interventions based on best practices (K-5)
- Dr. Nadine Harris: Healing the Long Term Effects of Childhood Diversity. (K-12)

Explain how your high performing, collaborative teams focus their efforts on improved student learning.

NPUSC has been a moderately high to high average performing school district, however the PLC process has sharpened and improved deficiencies within our academic achievement. Likely the biggest evidence of how high performing, collaborative teams have improved their efforts for student learning are the data points below. NPUSC has historically performed at five to six percentage points above state average, as noted in aggregate 2011-2016 state exam results. (See NPUSC State Exam History Chart in NPUSC Artifacts Sections 2 & 8). Note the increase highlighted below in percent above state average on state exams for NPUSC since implementing PLC concepts in 2018-**NPUSC performance above state average has nearly doubled since implementing the PLC process in 2018** :

NPUSC State Exam Rate Pass Rate Data (Grades 3-8), 2011-2021

Language Arts Results
2011-2016 Above State Avg 6.31
2018-2021 Above State Avg 11.06
Mathematics Results
2011-2016 Above State Avg 5.13
2018-2021 Above State Avg 10.83
Both ELA/Math Results
2011-2016 Above State Avg 6.3
2018-2021 Above State Avg 9.53

*Data Source-https://www.in.gov/doe/files/Archived-ISTEP.pdf

Perhaps a true measure of a Model PLC school system is whether or not student sub-groups such as students from poverty or special education are positively impacted in their academic performance just like students overall. NPUSC is proud to share evidence exists for positive impact for nearly all student sub-groups as well. We will discuss our four largest student sub-groups below.

Again, to isolate the change in rigor of our state exams to study this issue, we studied our average subgroup performance above state average prior to PLC implementation, beginning in 2015, to the past three years. The following sub-groups increased their average performance above state average:

*ELA Free/Reduced Lunch-9% above state average 2015. Never above ten percent on any year prior to 2015. 12% above state average for three consecutive years 2021-2023

*ELA Special Education-2.4% above state average 2015. Never above five percent on any year prior to 2015. Average 7.75% above state average for three consecutive years 2021-2023, including over 10% in 2023

*ELA English-Language Learners- no performance above state average prior to 2015. Performed above state average three years in a row 2021-2023 including 3.7% above state average pass in 2023

*ELA HIspanic Students-10% above state average 2015. 14% above state average 2021-2023 including 15% above state average for this sub-group in 2023.

*Math Free/Reduced Lunch-5.4% above state average 2015. Never above ten percent on any year prior to 2015. 15.9% above state average for three consecutive years 2021-2023, including nearly 20% above state average in 2023

*Math Special Education-2.4% above state average 2015. Never above five percent on any year prior to 2015. Average 11.7% above state average for three consecutive years 2021-2023, including over 16% in 2023

*Math English-Language Learners- no performance above state average prior to 2015 and below state average by 20%. Performed above state average one of past three years with gap reduced to within 5%, included one year above state average in 2021.

*Math HIspanic Students-3.3% above state average 2015. 12.1% above state average 2021-2023 including 16.3% above state average for this sub-group in 2023.

Finally, it is worth noting that these sub-groups increased the average percent passing BOTH exams when compared to state average from 2021-2023!

Highlighting some specific data achievements when studying PLC implementation impact on sub-group data, we saw a dramatic improvement in the Hispanic and Special education subgroups in grades 3-5 during the implementation of PLC processes. Our economically disadvantaged subgroup in grades 6-8 saw a significant improvement, as well as, our Special Education subgroup in 7th grade. During the COVID year, we were unable to complete the ILEARN state assessment. We use NWEA data for BOY, MOY and EOY to assess our students and drive our Tier 3 interventions. We reviewed our fall 2018 data to fall of 2019 and found our mean RIT (estimation of student's academic achievement) increased in 9 out of 10 grade levels. This is evidence that our students continued to make gains during the shutdown of our in-person school day during the spring of 2018 and the hybrid schedule during the following school year. In grades 3-8 our economically disadvantaged students increased 4% in ELA and 12% in Math. Our Special Education subgroup increased 6% in ELA and 9% in Math. Our 11th graders have taken the SAT School day test for two years. Our Special Education subgroup increased 12% in ERW, economically disadvantaged subgroup increased by 19% and our hispanic subgroup increased by 16%. These increases in our overall scores and specifically our subgroups are evidence that the PLC process we have implemented is working.

Overall, our district has shown growth in the majority of subgroups. Our Hispanic subgroup showed the most growth across the grade levels, but we did see significant gains in our

other subgroups. We appear to be making a great deal of progress with removing the learning gaps for all our students beyond the pandemic.

Collaborative teacher teams have achieved this level of improved student learning by strengthening our practices to bolster student achievement on NWEA and CFAs within our five schools on a monthly basis. The PLC process has been the significant factor to guide us in identification of essential learning skills and intervention weekly to improve those skills instead of waiting until after summative assessments. Identification of Essential Curriculum (and yearly review/adjustments based on state and local data), consistent common formative assessments, and a comprehensive RTI process for all Tier II and III learners is the clear "HOW" collaborative teams have focused their efforts on improved student learning. The near doubling of increase in percent above state average is clear evidence of this. When looking at our five schools our state scores have posted mostly A or B rated schools, as well as a Blue Ribbon Elementary. Our two Title One schools have been rated positively on a consistent basis and have outperformed many statewide Title One schools. Student learning has grown due to the evaluative PLC practices that have been implemented year after year. Each school has a slightly different and unique story within the larger context of our district doubling performance above state average on state exams. A snapshot of each school's PLC story can be found in that school's artifact area of the application packet.