

Benton Middle School- PLC Application 2017

Tell us how you created a successful PLC.

The transformation from a traditional school environment to a Professional Learning Community (PLC) did not happen overnight, nor did it happen by completing a set of hierarchical tasks. Our PLC has continued to develop as a result of ongoing, purposeful learning. In our early stages, we concentrated on developing high functioning interdisciplinary teams. This decision was influenced by our desire to align with the middle school concept that viewed us as a transition period between elementary and high school. More recently, we have focused our concentration on building high performing grade level content teams because we are convinced that they have the greatest impact on student learning. Our leadership team has been instrumental in this growth process. We identified the highest performing schools in the state with similar demographics and enlisted our leadership team to make site visits and learn the secrets of their success. We also visited two model PLC schools in a neighboring state to observe ways to implement content teams and multi-tiered RTI. Our leadership team also engaged in two book studies, *Learning by Doing* and *Pyramid Response to Intervention*, attended multiple PLC trainings through Solution Tree, and completed a PLC self-assessment and reflection. We were able to take this new knowledge and create an action plan to refine our PLC process.

Crucial to our development as a PLC was scheduling daily common planning periods for grade level content teams. Our content teams focus on student learning by using the “Four critical questions of learning” to drive their collaborative work. Teams identify essential standards for each unit, create frequent common assessments aligned with these standards to monitor student learning, and use the assessment data to identify individual students who need additional support and the teachers best equipped to provide that support.

Another priority was creating a fluid system of interventions to ensure that *all* students get the additional support they need to learn the essential standards at a level that is at or above proficiency. We implemented a multi-tiered, fluid pyramid of interventions that guarantees that all students will be provided with additional time and support for learning when they struggle, and has consequently created a culture where “failure is not an option.” Support for all learners is provided at Tier 1, support for our intentional non-learners and failed learners is provided at Tier 2 on an as needed basis, and our Tier 3 interventions provide intensive support to students with significant needs.

The development of a strategic mission plan also played a major role in creating a successful PLC. We revisited our mission and vision and created six SMART goals to

provide a clear focus for our efforts and ensure that our time and resources are being used to achieve these goals. Goal-setting has become an integral part of our PLC process. We are setting school-wide SMART goals, content teams are setting their own SMART goals, and our students are even creating their own personal learning goals (PLGs), creating a sense of mutual accountability. We feel that it is equally important to celebrate the successes of our PLC when we reach these goals in order to provide motivation and cultivate a success mindset.

We have had many successes to celebrate over the last four years as we have embarked on this PLC journey. We have reduced our failure rate by 39%, improved our School Performance Score by 11.6 points since 2013, and earned the status of top performing middle school in our district. We credit this success to our transformation to a high performing Professional Learning Community.

Explain how you built high-performing, collaborative teams to focus efforts on improved student learning.

Interdisciplinary Teams:

Previously, our school schedule allowed common planning time only for interdisciplinary teams. One of our major shifts was prioritizing common planning time for our grade level content teams to meet in order to truly function as a PLC; however, with our belief in the middle school concept we still felt interdisciplinary team planning time was important. Our interdisciplinary teams are able to meet once a week during the 30-minute Flex period. The primary focus of the interdisciplinary teams is on the social and emotional needs of the students. Teachers often set up parent conferences during this time, in which the entire team will meet with the parents to discuss concerns. A counselor is also present at these conferences to provide suggestions and guidance to parents as they seek solutions to the issues being addressed. Teachers also use the interdisciplinary team time to streamline classroom procedures. For example, each interdisciplinary team may have the same process for requesting makeup work or the same expectations with regards to classroom rules. Although the focus of the interdisciplinary teams is narrower in scope, they continue to have a positive impact on our PLC.

Leadership Team:

It was important to develop strong leaders within the school in order to function as a high-performing PLC. We built a leadership team which consists of the administrators, instructional coach, counselor, and one representative from each grade level content team. This team has been instrumental in creating and maintaining high-performing teams. The team engaged in site visits, book studies,

and PLC trainings through Solution Tree. We used the acquired knowledge and the self-assessment tool to create an action plan which is an ongoing effort to ensure our PLC is working towards operating at the sustaining level of implementation. Having a member from each content team represented on the leadership team has created a seamless system for executing these plans. Leadership teams have ownership of the plans because they played an active role in formulating them, and therefore are perfectly placed to redeliver to their respective content teams.

The leadership team has also been responsible for providing professional development to the staff throughout the year. For example, we revisit the “3 Big Ideas of a PLC” at the beginning of each year. Examples of other professional development include fixed vs. growth mindset, the four critical questions of learning, technology tools to administer common formative assessments, pyramid of interventions, and motivating the unmotivated. We have to continually seek ways to challenge the status quo and continue to grow to meet the learning needs of *all* of our students.

Content Teams:

The development of a new school schedule was imperative in order for the content teams to have adequate time within the contractual day to collaborate. The structure of the school schedule allows 71 minutes of daily common planning time for content teams to meet. Members of the administrative team are scheduled to meet with each team on a weekly basis, both for accountability purposes and so they can actively participate in the collaborative work of the teams.

It was equally important to establish clarity regarding the PLC process to prevent this time from being used simply as a meeting with no clear purpose. This is where professional development provided by the leadership team has played a major role. The four critical questions of learning continue to drive the work of each team. The teams establish norms and revisit these collective commitments at the beginning of each meeting. This is important to ensure that their time working together is positive and productive. During this time, teachers work collaboratively to accomplish the tasks on the team’s agenda. The agenda items vary by week, but include setting goals, identifying essential standards, planning rigorous lessons, creating common formative assessments aligned with the essential standards, analyzing data using the data analysis protocol tool, planning remediation and extension lessons, or other tasks that are focused on learning.

Describe the strategies used to monitor student learning on a timely basis.

Monitoring student learning and progress is one of the most vital components of the PLC process. Our teachers monitor student learning through various means, including

frequent common assessments, summative assessments, LEAP 360 interim assessments, and Personal Learning Goals (PLGs).

Prior to teachers monitoring student learning, teams must have a solid understanding of what exactly should be monitored. The first essential question for PLCs provides clarity to guide the work of each team:

What do we want our students to learn?

Essential Standards:

Each content team uses guiding questions which address endurance, leverage, and readiness to identify essential standards for each unit. These essential standards represent the guaranteed and viable curriculum that teachers believe *all* students must learn.

Once each team has reached a consensus with the essential standards, we must monitor student learning of these standards to ensure that *all* students are at or above proficiency. The second essential question for PLCs will continue to guide the work of each team:

How will we know if they have learned it?

Common Formative Assessments:

Content teams collaborate during their daily common planning time to create common formative assessments that are aligned with the essential standards. These assessments are administered daily so teachers can get immediate feedback to guide instruction and provide Tier 1 support to the students who have not yet demonstrated proficiency of the targeted standards. Benton Middle School's "Bring Your Own Technology" policy and commitment to increasing classroom access to technology, provide teachers with an opportunity to use online apps to administer the assessments and gain easy access to meaningful data. Teachers are introduced to these tools through professional development provided during content team meetings.

Common Summative Assessments:

Content teams work collaboratively to create common summative assessments that are administered at the end of each unit. Teams use Dufour's *Data Analysis Protocol* in their team meetings to analyze the data from these assessments in a meaningful way. Teachers identify students who continue to struggle, create a plan to remediate these students through Tier 2 interventions, create a plan to extend learning for students who are at or above proficiency, compare data to determine strategies that are correlated with areas of strengths, and reflect on potential causes for areas of weakness.

Leap 360 Interim Assessments:

Interim assessments provided by the state are administered at three critical points in the school year to monitor progress of learning. The teams will use the data from these assessments to create a 6-week action plan to provide targeted support through reteaching, interventions, and extensions.

Personal Learning Goals:

Just as important for teachers to monitor student learning is for the students to monitor their own learning. The leadership team provided professional development for our faculty in the area of student goal setting and individual conferencing. The “Goal Digger” session highlighted the importance of students setting and tracking their personal learning goals (PLGs) in order to develop a sense of ownership and accountability. Since then, the teams have implemented goal-setting in the classroom at many levels. This facilitates an advisor/advisee relationship in which teachers have students review their testing data and set challenging, yet attainable PLGs for their state assessment in the Spring. Teams also developed graphic organizers for the students to track their growth based on results from summative assessments, LEAP 360 interim assessments, and STAR. The ELA content teams have even allowed students to provide input on setting their own Accelerated Reader (AR) goals based on STAR data. The objective of the program is to promote students to take ownership of their own personal goals and become more intrinsically motivated learners.

Share how you created systems of intervention to provide students with additional time and support for learning.

Students are not only intellectual, but also social and emotional beings thus revealing the complex interplay of factors that influence a student’s learning. Unfortunately, numerous barriers can prevent students from learning during core instruction. However, *all* students have the ability to learn when provided with additional support and interventions. Benton Middle School’s Response to Intervention is a multi-tiered system of support for students who failed to learn the essential grade-level standards during their core instruction.

Tier 1: Core Program

Teachers administer frequent, often daily, common formative assessments aligned with the essential standards and use the data to identify students who are not yet proficient with the targeted standards. If the data reveals a class-wide weakness, the teacher responds by re-teaching the standards through a different mode of instruction. If the data reveals specific students who have failed to demonstrate proficiency, the teachers provide immediate support through classroom-embedded

interventions. Although the structure of these interventions varies across the teams, it typically occurs during the first 15 minutes of class the following day. Teachers pull the identified students into a small group to remediate the targeted standards. During this time, the other students work on completing tasks from their weekly “Extension Menu”. The Extension Menu is designed to provide a variety of tasks that students can choose from that extend their learning of the standards.

Tier 2: Supplemental Program

Teachers administer common summative assessments at key points in the curriculum (end of chapter, end of unit, etc.) to determine whether all students learned the targeted standards. Students who have not yet demonstrated proficiency receive additional support through Tier 2 interventions. The system of support provided depends on whether the student failed to learn because they “can’t do” or because they “won’t do”.

Intentional Non-Learner (Won’t Do):

These students either failed to learn the standards because they choose not to engage in the learning process, or are failing the course because they lack the study skills or the supports at home that typically lead to success. These students often fail to complete their classwork assignments, study for tests, return homework, etc. To compensate for a lack of support at home, we are taking the necessary measures to provide additional time within the instructional day to address these needs through our Study Hall program.

Study Hall:

Who is targeted?

- Currently has a D or an F in the class due to failure to complete assignments, study for tests, etc. and/or...
- On the potential failure list due to insufficient quality points in the course.

How are students assigned?

- Teachers assign students using a simple Google Form.
- A Study Hall assignment slip is provided to the student by the teacher.
- Study Hall teacher(s) access the responses through the Google spreadsheet to verify attendance and monitor assignment completion.

What do students work on during this time?

- Incomplete or missing assignments, homework assignments, study for upcoming tests, etc.

Failed Learners (Can't Do):

These students failed to learn the standards because they either lack prerequisite skills, need additional time, or they didn't respond to the method of delivery. These students are identified through the common summative assessment data and are provided with interventions through our FLEX period. These interventions are provided by teachers other than the students' daily classroom teacher, so an additional professional educator can diagnose potential problems, employ different teaching strategies, and build new relationships.

FLEX Period:

What is Flex Period?

- A daily 30-minute period where students will rotate through extensions and enrichments unless they have been assigned to interventions.
 - Extensions (4 days): Students are stretched beyond essential grade-level curriculum or to a higher level of proficiency in the four core content areas.
 - Enrichment(1 day): Allows the students to experience a variety of fun elective subjects; enrichments will rotate every 4 ½ week grading period. Students are not pulled for interventions during this time.
 - Interventions (Fluid): Targeted students are pulled from their extensions to receive interventions.

Who is targeted?

- Students who have yet to demonstrate proficiency of the essential standards after initial instruction and classroom-embedded interventions.

What do students work on during this time?

- Content teams collaborate to develop remedial lessons to target standards specific to the students' needs.
- Common assessment data is used to determine which teachers will remediate which standards.

How are students assigned?

- Teachers assign students using a simple Google Spreadsheet that utilizes a dropdown menu to select remediation options.
- Student tickets are merged from the spreadsheet information.
- Each teacher receives a set of tickets for their homeroom class on Friday and distributes the tickets Monday morning.

How often can teachers restructure intervention groups?

- Teachers will use their summative assessment data to drive these decisions, but can be as often as necessary.
 - **Example:**
Week 3: Unit 1 Assessment

Weeks 4-5: Students who did not demonstrate proficiency of essential standards receive targeted interventions during FLEX period.

Week 6: Unit 2 Assessment

Weeks 7-8: Student intervention groups will be restructured based on the data from the Unit 2 Assessment.

Tier 3: Intensive Support

A number of potential barriers could prevent students from making adequate progress towards learning the standards despite Tier 1 and 2 interventions. We provide students with several systems of intensive support based on specific student needs.

Reason	Intervention
Significant weaknesses in foundational skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Alternate Core Curriculum for ELA and Math: Language! and Learnzillion• Skills Review class as an elective for intensive ELA and Math interventions• Read Naturally for oral reading fluency and comprehension• Reflex Math for computational fluency
Chronic or Excessive absenteeism	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Counseling Interventions
Severe behavior and/or motivational concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• PBIS interventions: mentoring, check-in/check-out, small group support

We recognize the importance of effectively utilizing data as we implement a multi-tiered system of support for struggling students. Our commitment to operating as a PLC, as well as the schedule structure in place, provides an ideal RTI framework to ensure *all* students learn the standards.