

# Analysis and action plan for student learning



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Task 1: Establishment of a Professional Learning Community (PLC). *The candidate with approval of administration will research a minimum of three sources and organize and lead the Professional Learning Community to discuss the mission and vision of the Professional Learning Community.*

#### District Profile:

The Anson County school district is primarily a rural school district. There are approximately 3,769 students enrolled in the eleven schools in the district. The district has one primary school, five elementary schools, one middle school, and three high schools. Each high school has a different focus. They include an Early College, a New Technology High School, a traditional high school, and an alternative school.

The demographics of the student population are 59% Black, 33% White, 2% Asian, 3% Hispanic, 1% American Indian, and 3% Multi-racial. Seventeen percent of the students qualify for the Exceptional Children program and 7% are identified as Academically and Intellectually Gifted. There are sixty-six (2%) students who are Limited English Proficient. Approximately three-fourths (75.1%) of the students are eligible to receive Free or Reduced-priced Lunch. The overall attendance rate for the district is 94.4%, which is in line with the state average. The superintendent is in his first year of leadership in the district.

#### PLC Research:

A PLC is not just a meeting or a time to gather with colleagues to complete a task. “ A Professional Learning Community is an ongoing process in which

educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLCs operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators” (Mattos, DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2016, p. 10). It’s not just what happens on a specific day of the week. As the name suggests, professional learning communities are about learning, a focus on and a commitment to high levels of learning for each student. This is the fundamental work of the PLC. When as an organization we are clearly committed to this outcome, the adults in the organization must also be continually learning as part of their daily practice. This focus on student learning drives all aspects of the work of a PLC.

Working within this professional learning community are collaborative teams that work interdependently toward common goals for which all are mutually accountable. Barth (1990) states that “ The Relationships among adults in schools are the basis, the precondition, ‘ the sin qua non’ that allow, energize, and sustain all other attempts at school improvement. Unless adults talk with one another, observe one another, and help one another, very little will change” (p. 32). Goals set by a professional learning team are directly aligned to the overall outcome of learning for all. When they move strategically toward these goals, teams become the essential building blocks of the community and of the school improvement process. When they are action-oriented, results-oriented, committed to continuous improvement, and engaged in collective inquiry, these teams learn by doing and achieve big outcomes. The team’s key tool in achieving these outcomes is data — ongoing evidence of student learning.

According to Graham and Ferriter (2010), “ one of the first steps that effective learning teams take is systematically focusing their time and attention on the work that matters the most” (p. 148). The teams that make up the professional learning community maintain a focus on data – gathering meaningful data, analyzing and interpreting data, and using information from data to make decisions about teaching and learning. Teams take a cyclical approach to this work and use information from a variety of sources that allow teams to achieve measurable results on the journey to achieving team goals. The three big ideas of Professional Learning Communities include a focus on learning, building a collaborative culture and focusing on results.

The candidate met with the district transformation coach and superintendent to seek approval for developing and outlining the purpose for the Professional Learning Community. The candidate shared that “ the most promising strategy for sustained, substantive school improvement is developing the ability of school personnel to function as professional learning communities” (DuFour & Eaker, 2009, p. xi). The candidate then held a Professional Learning Community meeting with the district transformation team and key stakeholders to build consensus and approval. The team determined the designated date and time the meetings would be held. As stated by Graham and Ferriter (2010), “ while the challenges of recruiting schools into professional development communities are great, the rewards- successful, empowered practitioners and students who are learning regardless of circumstance-are worth the effort!” (p. 206).

PLC Selection:

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In July 2012, the school district was assigned a district transformation team (DST) from DPI that included a DPI district transformation coach (district support), DPI school transformation coach (principal support), DPI elementary instructional coach (teacher support), and DPI secondary math, ELA, and science coaches (teacher support) to assist with turning around the schools by building teacher capacity to promote increased student achievement. The first year we worked with the district, the DST team did not meet on a regular basis. Most communication and collaboration occurred through phone calls and emails. This did not allow for much communication about our impact in the field or identification of district needs to facilitate the goal of building teacher capacity and increasing student achievement. In addition, our team dynamics changed several times throughout that year, with the DPI secondary ELA and science coaches hired in September 2012, as well as a math coach hired in late October 2012. The DPI school transformation coach left halfway through the year. This left the district transformation coach to fill in this role until August 2013. The instability of our team created some additional concerns with building consistency. Therefore, some of our efforts were disjointed and duplicated.

In August 2013, we had a complete team for the first time since we began serving the school district. It was decided, at that time, that we would begin to meet on more consistent basis as a PLC in order to better meet the needs of the schools that we served and ensure that we had a common understanding of district initiatives, district needs, and district support being provided. As a result, a district PLC team was created that could work collaboratively to support the district and its needs. The team consisted of

the DPI district transformation coach, DPI school transformation coach, DPI instructional coaches, district curriculum administrator, district EC director, North Carolina School Improvement team, and assistant superintendent. The team was selected to represent the various school levels, subject areas, and the district. The members chosen work closely with the teachers, principals, and district.

This team has an extensive background including assistant superintendent, former principals, former regular education teachers, former special education teachers, instructional coaches, principal coaches, district office personnel, and state level personnel. The team members have worked with kindergarten to high school level and beyond. Combined these team members have also assisted with the implementation of Reading Research, Reading First, Math Foundation, Thinking Maps, Multi-Tiered System of Support, Positive Behavior Interventions and Support, Common Core, Corrective Reading, Reading Mastery, District School Transformation, Cognitive Coaching, and Read to Achieve. The team brings a combination of over 200 years of experience and various backgrounds that can enhance any Professional Learning Community.

#### PLC Meeting:

The initial meeting was to begin developing a collaboration between District School Transformation and district leadership in the form of a Professional Learning Community. All members of the District School Transformation team, the superintendent, identified district staff, and associate superintendent, were in attendance. During the meeting, all members

introduced themselves and the role they will perform in supporting the teachers, schools, and district. The candidate led the team in a discussion of the purpose of a Professional Learning Community. The candidate shared a definition of Professional Learning Communities as an interdependent team who will “engage in collective inquiry both in best practice and the current reality regarding their students’ existing achievement levels” (p. 3).

Next, the team discussed the key characteristics of an effective Professional Learning Community. Team members shared several characteristics including a need for collaboration, a shared purpose and vision, time, and support. According to DuFour, R., & Eaker, R. (2009), characteristics of an effective Professional Learning Community include: shared mission, vision, and values, collective inquiry, collaborative teams, action orientation and experimentation, continuous improvement, and results orientation. As a result of the discussion, the team worked collaboratively to begin the review and development of the vision and mission.

The team began with the discussion of the vision of the school district. The vision is “All Means All.” A discussion ensued about what this means and looks like in the district. The team shared how all students should be afforded the opportunity to grow and become future-ready students. Students that can be successful if they chose to go to college or begin a career. The district wants to ensure that all students are given the appropriate supports and scaffolds through a partnership with the families, schools, church, and community. This vision will ensure that all students receive the education necessary in whatever path they choose.

The team then reviewed and discussed the mission of the school district. The mission is “ We will ensure that all students acquire skills and knowledge necessary to be successful and responsible citizens.” The team shared that the schools are currently beginning the implementation of the core curriculum and pacing guide that was developed through collaborative teams. This will help ensure that students are receiving a core curriculum that is a set of educational goals, explicitly taught, focused on making sure that all students are receiving common differentiated curriculum across the district. As a result of the discussion, the team decided the focus is on ensuring that students are receiving an equitable education which will allow them to be successful productive citizens.

## References

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- Graham, P., & Ferriter, W. M. (2010). *Building a professional learning community at work: a guide to the first year* . Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree Press.
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