

Teacher Response to Collaborative Culture in a Midwestern Urban/Rural District

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Abstract

The term Professional Learning Community (PLC) has come to represent focus on educational change for student learning through increased collaboration and teacher isolation. This action research project looks at a suburban/rural school in Nebraska during its transition into a PLC. This research project looks at teacher and administrator perceptions in hopes of bringing shared perceptions to light and easing transition. The method of research was a mixed methods approach with data including: teacher surveys, administrator interviews, and teacher interviews. This approach was chosen to gather both qualitative and quantitative data from multiple sources. Current literature on Professional Learning Communities is divided into three bodies: effective leadership, team collaboration, and focus on student learning. Data gathered in this study shows an overwhelmingly positive response to PLCs and their implementation. None of those interviewed found the idea of a Professional Learning Community scary, and 100 percent value collaboration. Although this might show that the school in question is young and open to change, 63 percent of participants have been teaching for ten or more years. Based on these results, Maycomb High School should share these common perceptions and move forward without question. It is recommended that two issues be addressed as the school moves forward: time required and lack of teacher compensation. If these two issues are addressed positively, this research shows that Maycomb has the teacher buy-in and positive response needed as a first step in forming a true PLC.

CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Reflection

In the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and its accountability measure—Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), educators are now not only looking at the art of teaching, but they are also taking huge strides to understand the science of teaching. Many educators and authors are shifting their focus to concentrate on the concept of decreased teacher isolation and increased collaboration among educators with a focus on student learning (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). With this shift, come new ideas and research. Professional Learning Community has become a buzz word, as it is currently a hot topic in the minds of many administrators and teachers.

The focus of this action research project will be to closely examine the concept of Professional Learning Communities and their implementation within one suburban/rural school district in Nebraska. This will be done through teacher survey and interviews. In this study, the researcher plans to focus on creating avenues to ease the process of change in the implementation of a PLC. This first chapter will at the context of the study and its research questions.

The researcher, is a freshman and junior English teacher in Maycomb High School. Maycomb is a suburban/rural school district that is currently taking small steps toward the implementation of a Professional Learning Community. The district is a small, yet progressive district that has shown continual student population growth in the last five years. Currently, Maycomb High School has 576 students with 37 teachers on staff. It is my first year of teaching at Maycomb. During the school year prior, I was employed at a larger, progressive, suburban school district that advocated itself as a PLC. In my experience, differing definitions exist with regard to PLCs, and these differences can be a source of conflict among district employees.

Because of this discrepancy, I would like to better understand the concept, its implementation, and teacher perceptions as my current district takes larger steps in this direction.

Context of the Study

The intent of this action research study is to look at teacher perceptions just prior to what could possibly be a tumultuous time of transition. The study will bring common perceptions to light and clarify actions for administrators and teachers to take to transition into a Professional Learning Community.

Although numerous pieces of research are currently available regarding PLCs, many of the studies are done in very large districts far before or after the actual PLC implementation process. This research study will add a look at a suburban district in the Midwest that is employing pieces of PLC and will be moving more strongly in that direction. At the conclusion of this research study, results will be shared with employees and administrators at Maycomb High School to help illuminate perceptions and ease transition.

As an initial action, the researcher will create an online survey for teachers in the district regarding their perceptions, attitudes, and practices relating to PLCs. Teacher interviews from a group with differing years of teaching experience will also aid the study and its results. In addition, two administrator interviews will complete the data collection process for this study.

Problem Statement

The researcher's school district is slowly moving through the implementation of a PLC, and has future plans to move at a much quicker pace in creating this change. This research is designed to bring teacher and administrator opinions to light and aide in the transition to and the implementation of an effective PLC.

Research Questions

- What is the teacher response to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as measured by survey response and interview?
- What is a PLC and how is it created?
- Do teachers benefit from PLCs?
- Do classrooms and teaching strategies differ in a school that is a PLC as opposed to one that is not?

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress – (AYP) the accountability measure instituted by the NCLB policy stating that all schools must make certain benchmarks in progress each year.

Collaboration – 1. to work together, especially in a joint intellectual effort 2. to cooperate treasonably, as with an enemy occupation force in one's country (Hamilton et. al., 2005).

No Child Left Behind – (NCLB) a federally mandated policy aimed at improving academic achievement of all children in the public school system.

Operational Protocols – (Norms or SMARTgoals) commitments that team members are prepared to make to one another in carrying out their work as a team (DuFour & Burnette 2002).

Professional Learning Community – (PLC) a term used to refer to a school organization in which all stakeholders are involved in joint planning, action, and assessment for student growth and school improvement. . . where difficult things can be talked about, where hard questions about teaching and learning get asked, and where adults can learn from one another (Huffman and Jacobson , 2003).

Qualitative data - information not numerical in nature (Hendricks, 2006).

Quantitative data - numerical data (Hendricks, 2006).

Triangulation - multiple forms of data collected and analyzed (Hendricks, 2006).

Limitations

Although they are few in number, some circumstances could limit the completion of this study. The first factor that could hinder its success would be difficulty in gaining administrative approval for administration of the online survey to the high school teachers. Administrative approval is crucial in this context as surveys can be met at times with trepidation.

The second component to be considered is how accurately the teachers respond to the survey. Although it will be stated that the opinions stressed will in no way hinder a respondent's job, some might feel tentative about replying honestly if the views go against the understood opinions of the administration at this time. In addition, teacher education and preconceived notions about PLCs could skew the data set as there are many differing definitions in regard to this term at the current time.

Conclusion

It is my belief that a true Professional Learning Community benefits students greatly as teachers collaborate to pool ideas and work together with a focus on student achievement. Although this kind of community is very beneficial, it can be difficult to implement, especially when a teachers with many years of teaching experience are asked to change methods and planning styles. By completing this research, my district as well as my students will benefit from the information collected. I believe that the implementation of a PLC, if done with open communication, can be a somewhat smooth process; however, teacher and administrative perceptions need to be brought to light. Through this process, I hope to aide that communication.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This action research project will focus on Professional Learning Communities with regard to teacher perceptions and implementation. This study will focus on gaining insight into teacher response to professional learning communities as measured by survey response and interview. To start the chapter, a brief look at the current world of educational change will set up the study's premise. Following this abbreviated background and key term definition (Professional Learning Community), this literature review is divided into three current bodies of research that define Professional Learning Communities: effective leadership, team collaboration, and focus on student learning.

Change in Education

Change can be challenging at any level. Whether it is a classroom change or a change in an educator's personal life, transition is generally met with resistance. Many will joke that all too often educators become stagnant in their practices and are no longer receptive to small changes in their classroom after years of teaching. The same can be said about the larger span of education. Although the current era seems to be one of change, educational transformation is often difficult and time consuming. According to a recent article, "Changing instructional practices is not something accomplished easily or without conflict" (Johnson, 2006, p.151).

Change is evident in the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). NCLB is a national effort at reforming educational systems already in place. Politicians and educators often disagree about the direction and focus of American schools today. This can lead to controversy and slow change. The current educational time period can seem tumultuous; this turbulent time is

mirrored on a smaller scale as schools struggle to transition into different, progressive ways of thinking.

One change that many districts are advancing toward is the formation of a Professional Learning Community. “The idea of improving schools by developing *professional learning communities* is currently in vogue” (DuFour, 2004, p. 1). An increasing number of schools are working to change and form their school into a PLC. While the effort is there, many schools have differing views as to what constitutes a true PLC. Although many are making a true effort, it is important to clearly define the aspects that go into the complex idea of a PLC. DuFour (2004) explains the discrepancy regarding the use of the term PLC:

People use this term (PLC) to describe every imaginable combination of individuals with an interest in education—a grade-level teaching team, a school committee, a high school department, an entire school district, a state department of education, a national professional organization, and so on. In fact, the term has been used so ubiquitously that it is in danger of losing all meaning (p. 6).

PLCs seem quite difficult to define; however, Huffman and Jacobson (2003) seem to narrow the focus of the term:

PLC is a term used to refer to a school organization in which all stakeholders are involved in joint planning, action, and assessment for student growth and school improvement . . . where difficult things can be talked about, where hard questions about teaching and learning get asked, and where adults can learn from one another (p. 240).

Although the term may seem somewhat ambiguous, DuFour (2004) puts it into perspective by making a clear focus as to what is needed to create a Professional Learning Community: “Focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself

accountable for results” (p. 1). In a time where change is rampant and many schools are working to create PLCs, three key bodies of research stand out: effective leadership, team collaboration and focus on student learning. Although these three are the impetus of this research project, the researcher would be remiss without addressing basic needs for creating a PLC. In addition to overarching focus, schools need the following to implement a PLC:

1. Structured Time for Collaboration – a nationwide survey of more than 5,000 “collaborative” teachers showed that 69 percent participated in “regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers” and 53 percent participated in a common planning period with other members of their team” (“Maximizing the Impact,” 2007).
2. Money for Professional Development.
3. Teams with Operational Protocols

Effective Leadership

One key mode for change in any educational setting is leadership. As principals, superintendents, curriculum directors, and other educational administrative professionals implement new policies, they are the primary catalysts for change in any educational setting. Leadership is seen as the “preeminent influence on reform efforts, the creation of a positive school culture, and the building of PLCs” (DuFour, 2004). Not only are clear leaders in the school needed for this change, but the teachers themselves are also needed to stand out and lead as well.

Teachers may someday lead in administrative roles or structured appointments; however, this does not always have to be the case as Gabriel states, “Not all leadership positions are formal in nature. Every school has teacher leaders who do not serve—and may never have served—as

official leaders” (2005, p. 3). In a school district focusing on collaboration, all entities are learners and leaders together.

Whether it is a teacher or an administrator, forward thinking is key. “Effective leaders have a vision for their school, and they recognize the importance of teachers working together to achieve this vision” (Harris, 2002, p.22). The research indicates that leadership needs to be divided as weight is divided among pillars on a bridge. One individual cannot sustain the full responsibility, nor will he or she be as effective if solitary leadership is his or her focus. Lambert says that leadership “needs to be embedded in the school community as a whole. Such a broadening sense of leadership suggests shared responsibility for a shared purpose of community” (1998, p. 5).

It cannot be ignored that leadership is crucial when dealing with educational reform efforts. Student achievement is a top priority for educators across the board. Although many different facets come together for student achievement, management is a key step. Even though piece of the puzzle may have a different effect on the child whether direct or indirect, “student achievement begins and ends with the quality of the teacher, the instructional program, and its leadership” (Gabriel, 2005, p. 124).

Admittedly, administrative leadership is crucial at all times in the world of education; however, during a time of change, it can have an even greater effect. Currently, education is a very fluid entity even within its many constraints and laws. Although the focus for assessment may have made education more firm and fixed, it seems that today there is a focus on change. According to Fullan, “The more complex society gets, the more sophisticated leadership must become” (2001, p. 1). The leaders of today and the future have a daunting task ahead of them as society increases in complexity.

But what constitutes effective leadership? What does it look like? According to Fullan (2001), when a variety of pieces come together for the leader, and committed team members buy in to the process, successes will arise in a culture of change. Both parties play a large role in the success. One cannot affect change without the other.

Crucial pieces to come from the leader (Fullan, 2001):

- Enthusiasm
- Moral Purpose
- Understanding Change
- Hope
- Energy
- Relationship Building
- Knowledge Creation and Sharing
- Coherence Making

Following from Members:

- Team Commitment

Team Collaboration

This look at leadership has shown that quality leadership is a key asset for a district; moreover, shared leadership is an increased asset in a district working toward becoming a PLC. For quite some time, many schools have existed with a principal as leader and teachers as somewhat meek and obedient followers. A PLC system asks teachers to step out and lead through teamwork. Traditionally, teachers have taught on an island so to speak, with each teachers creating independently and working alone for students. “Even in a time where working collaboratively represents best practice, teachers in many schools continue to work in isolation”

(DuFour, 2004, p. 1). Because of this trend, difficulty can arise based on a staff's limited willingness to work together and collaborate.

How is a collaborative community created? Since PLCs are complex, the answer is complex. Without a pre-planned, didactic way to create a PLC, educators struggle to put the right pieces together. DuFour and Burnette (2007) state,

while principals are routinely advised to “build” a strong culture, cultures cannot be built. Architects and engineers construct a building using a linear, sequential model . . . none of this is true with culture. Teaching to culture is nonlinear and requires rapid responses to unanticipated problems as they arise . . . the more accurate metaphor for the process of shaping culture is not building a building but cultivating a garden (p. 1).

In today's “quick-fix” world of microwave dinners, The Internet, and Botox®, schools are finding it difficult to work around the non-linear approach that must be taken when forming a PLC. “These types of communities take many forms and evolve over time” (“Maximizing the Impact,” 2007). Although they may take different forms, one characteristic that all Professional Learning Communities share is collaboration.

In a PLC, collaboration is key as educators pool their thoughts and talents for the benefit of the students. Hopefully, this collaboration will affect the entire school environment by creating a place where students can see that teachers are working together and expecting the same types of results across the board. In a PLC, “teachers work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice. Teachers work in teams, engaging in an ongoing cycle of questions that promote deep team learning. This process, in turn, leads to higher levels of student achievement” (DuFour, 2004, p. 3).

Team collaboration helps to bring things to light that have traditionally been somewhat secretive such as “goals, strategies, materials, pacing, questions, concerns, and results” (DuFour, 2004, p. 4). For new teachers, the impending first year may seem quite ambiguous even after quality teacher training. Through the use of teaming, teachers new and experienced can benefit from shared ideas.

Understanding the fact that collaboration can have a positive effect on new teachers as well as those with much experience, should be a catalyst for buying in to this system. Experienced teachers gain stimulation and renewed focus from working in a collaborative setting. Newer teachers gain knowledge that only experience can teach. The idea is simply that teacher weaknesses no longer matter. For example, if one member of a team is weak in one area, another might be strong. Through their combined efforts, the students will benefit. This is not only true for weaknesses, but for strengths as well. PLCs are proof that the old sentiment, “Two heads are better than one,” applies to students *and* teachers.

Team collaboration can take many forms, “it can support autonomy in decision-making, aligning curricula to state standards, personalizing education for students, and enhancing instructional practices” (Hamilton et. al, 2005, p. 27). Along with these meaningful congruencies, staff can experience greater job satisfaction and experience stronger work relationships within the collaborative climate of the school.

Meaningful collaboration goes far beyond simply pooling ideas. Districts are missing the point when they try to put collaboration on a small scale. Collaboration for collaboration’s sake can detract from the goal of increasing what students learn. Oftentimes, schools are afraid to turn to PLCs as they are focusing on didactic “school improvement,” yet collaboration will often lead to *true* school improvement. For strong collaboration, schools must stop “pretending that

merely presenting teachers with state standards or district curriculum guides will guarantee that all students have access to a common curriculum” (DuFour, 2004, p.9).

Although many different districts have the exact same curriculum in place for all teachers of the same subject, the actual instruction and sometimes curriculum used can be quite different. The focus in a PLC shifts from what is being taught by teachers to what is being learned by students. Common goals can help create a culture where teachers are working together. As DuFour (2004) states: The PLC model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning has profound implications for schools (p. 7).

Focus on Student Learning

When a collaborative team comes together their guiding thought is student learning. Often, teachers are affecting student learning; however, new research-based strategies could aid this effort and result. In the past, problems have arisen as teachers attended professional development seminars only to return to school without the needed support for true implementation. Within the structures of a PLC that support is already in place. Teachers are encouraged to employ new research-based best practices—and discuss their successes and/or failures—as long as student learning is at the heart of the effort.

Many would be quick to respond, “Where will the time come from?” The career of teaching can be a very time-consuming and quick paced profession, often leaving educators feeling like they lack the time and capacity to reflect on teaching practices and student achievement. PLCs offer a place to review data, discuss effective teaching practices, identify

student needs, and discuss how to meet those needs. Three core questions are the focus that helps PLC members focus on common goals (DuFour, 2004, p. 2).

1. What do we want each student to learn?
2. How will we know when each child has learned it?
3. How will we respond when a student experiences difficulty in learning?

Historically, the focus of education has been on assessment; however, assessment methods have been as varied as the teachers themselves. The focus has been to teach, test, and move on to the next unit. When the focus shifts to student learning, PLCs strive to create common assessments so all teachers and students are on the same page with regard to what learning needs to take place to constitute achievement. When a collaborative community comes together to make and assess an assessment, teachers and students will benefit as most teachers today are somewhat ill equipped to use assessment data well (DuFour, 2004).

Even with meaningful data, sometimes the data shows that students are experiencing difficulty with learning. In a PLC, not only do teachers work together to help students learn in the same way, but they also work together to respond when students are having difficulty. According to DuFour (2004) the response must first be timely. The school quickly identifies students who need additional time and support. In addition to their timeliness, responses must be based on intervention rather than remediation. The plan provides students with help as soon as they experience difficulty rather than relying on summer school, retention, and remedial courses. Finally, they need to be directive. Instead of inviting students to seek additional help, the systematic plan requires students to devote extra time and receive additional assistance until they have mastered the necessary concepts.

So, educators will work together in response to student needs, but will collaboration have a positive effect on student achievement? Rosenholtz (as cited in Thompson et al., 2004) is one of the first researchers to look at the relationship between student achievement and teacher collaboration. She gathered qualitative data that showed how collaboration is a strong predictor of student achievement improvement in math and reading. Although her research only showed results in math and reading, this strong correlation shows that an impact *is* made when teachers work together. Her work does not stand alone; McLaughlin and Talbert (1993) confirmed the impact that teacher collaboration has on learning. In addition, in 2005, Hamilton et al. found three schools that reported increased student achievement through enhanced collective activities.

It might seem that with this data, PLCs are a perfect method to achieve student success. This assumption would be incorrect as many pieces must come together to form a quality PLC. Although they can have a positive effect, teachers must wade into this water with renewed focus and diligence to find out what pieces of a PLC make the greatest positive change for students.

Conclusion

The review of literature shows that while change in education can be difficult and lengthy, some schools have seen success in creating Professional Learning Communities. Although this “hot button” term is thrown around quite often in relation to many scenarios, it can be better understood by seeing that at its heart is a focus on collaboration and student learning. With educators working together and being accountable for results, students are seeing greater achievement. Although positive results have been shown, the formation of a PLC can be difficult as teachers are asked to change their methods and work together as opposed to the traditional solitary education approach. Once again, change is difficult; however, once teachers

buy into this system of collaboration, new and experienced teachers see positive outcomes—not to mention student achievement.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Overview

This action research project is focused on Professional Learning Communities with regard to teacher perceptions and implementation. The research is centered on the fact that the district in which the researcher teaches in is currently in the process of transitioning into a PLC. This chapter looks at the method used to complete the research study. The researcher surveyed teachers in the district regarding their perceptions, attitudes, and practices relating to PLCs. Teacher and administrator interviews from a group with differing years of teaching experience aid this study.

Research Questions

- What is the teacher response to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as measured by survey response and interview?
- What is a PLC and how is it created?
- Do teachers benefit from PLCs?
- Do classrooms and teaching strategies differ in a school that is a PLC as opposed to one that is not?

Participation and Site Information

School District #145 constitutes the site for this research study. The district includes the communities of Alvo, Eagle, Prairie Home, Walton, and Maycomb. These towns lie about ten miles outside of Lincoln, the state capitol of Nebraska. This proximity creates a rural/suburban school district that serves students from farm backgrounds as well as suburban families. Maycomb serves ninth through senior students. The total area of the district consists of

approximately 300 square miles with district property in four counties: Lancaster, Cass, Otoe, and Saunders. District schools consist of two elementary centers (K-5), Eagle Elementary in Eagle, Hamlow Elementary in Maycomb; Maycomb Middle School (6-8) in Maycomb; and Maycomb High School (9-12) also in Maycomb. The district is governed by a six member board of education. The district is accredited by the Nebraska Department of Education.

The school district has experienced continual growth for the last five years. Overall, the district employs 188 full and part time positions filled by 133 people, with six employees in two positions. This includes 11 secretaries, 47 teacher assistants, 17 custodian/maintenance personnel, 19 bus drivers, 20 cafeteria personnel, four library aides, and three technology support staff.

Specifically, Maycomb High School has 576 students with 37 teachers on staff, giving Macomb High School a small student-teacher ration of 15.6 to one. Of the 37 high school teachers, 20 are female and 17 male. The school also has ten teacher assistants, six special education teachers, one speech pathologist, one teacher of the developmentally delayed, two counselors, seven janitors, one principal, one assistant principal, one athletic director, one nurse, nine cooks, three secretaries, and two media specialists. The principal and assistant principal are male, and the counselors are one female and one male.

The high school is lacking in diversity as students are predominately Caucasian (97.9%). Two smaller ethnic groups are represented: Latino (1.4%) and Black (0.3%). Of the student population, 12 percent qualify for free school lunch, and five percent qualify for reduced price lunch. The student population also has 20 percent of the student body who qualify for special education. The researcher will conduct a survey of the teachers at Maycomb High School. The teachers are all Caucasian, ranging in age from 24 to 65. All teachers in the high school have at

least one prior year of teaching experience. The study participants were an intact group of teachers who were selected from a pool of applicants in an interview process conducted by the Superintendent and Principal.

The suburban/rural city of Maycomb is somewhat homogenous as its residents are 97.6% Caucasian. The town has a population of 2,448. The median age for residents in Maycomb, is 32 (this is younger than average age in the U.S.). Families (non-single residences) represent 80% of the population, giving Maycomb a higher than average concentration of families. The median household income is \$63,889.

Overall, the residents of the community are highly supportive of both the teachers and administration of Maycomb. The district outlines its beliefs in its mission statement (2006). The district believes:

- all children can learn
- our school and community must work as partners for successful education
- in lifelong learning.
- the need to plan and educate for the future.
- that equitable opportunities must exist for our students to meet their individual needs
- in providing an environment that is physically and emotionally safe for our school community.
- that our community is diverse, that each student is unique, and his/her ideas, feelings and beliefs will be respected.
- that our students are entitled to quality facilities.

This study involved collaboration between the researcher, teachers, and the administration of Maycomb High School. The collaboration was conversational in nature and included a large amount of open-ended discussion questions. Meetings were pre-arranged.

Data Collection

This research study used a mixed methods approach through teacher survey and interviews. The teacher interview located in Appendix D includes multiple choice responses that are quantitative in nature and open-ended questions that are qualitative in nature. In addition to the survey, the researcher conducted teacher and administrator interviews (Appendices B) to gain further insight with open-ended questions geared toward qualitative responses.

The first step in the data collection was to e-mail out the teacher survey by using zoomerang.com. This free survey site is an effective tool because is confidential, and it allowed the teachers at Maycomb High School to reply in a timely manner. The ease in taking this survey was intended to increase the sample size. To increase validity, the survey located in Appendix B was completed anonymously. The survey launched on April 18, 2008, and teachers were given an extended time period (one week) to respond to the electronic survey. During this week two reminder e-mails were sent. The extended week and reminder e-mails were given to encourage thoughtful response and aid in the number of responses. The questions in the survey are an effective research tool because they reflect the research questions and will generate both qualitative and quantitative data. This collection method was geared to show teacher's beliefs about the PLC and the process of its implementation.

Following the administration of the survey and the one week window, the researcher secured the participation of interviewees and set up a mutually agreed upon date, time, and location for each interview. Teacher interviews allowed for more complete responses than the

teacher survey. In addition to teachers, principals are important to the implementation process of PLCs (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003, p. 240). Their leadership methods and styles, along with their philosophies regarding school change, all impact the implementation process. Due to this, the researcher identified two high school administrators, one Principal and one Assistant Principal, from the high school which will be called Maycomb, and asked them to participate in the study. Three classroom teachers were identified and selected to participate. They were chosen by the researcher as prime examples using criteria such as: gender, content subject taught, and knowledge of and experience with the implementation of PLCs. It was the researcher's desire to select individuals with knowledge regarding PLCs.

Survey participants, both teachers and administrators, were hand-delivered interview questions (Appendices B and C) before the interview in order to provide an explanation of the study and to allow the participants time to reflect and prepare for the interview. During the face-to-face interview, they were allowed to bring notes if needed. Only one interviewee chose to use notes. Specific questions located in Appendices B and C were asked in the interview. Interviewees were also asked to complete a short demographic questionnaire located in Appendix A. For reporting, participants were assigned pseudonyms to provide for accurate data and candid responses. The interviews were tape recorded and later transcribed. Interviews were scheduled in April and took place in May of 2008.

Data Analysis

Hendricks (2006) states that qualitative data can only be explained and used to answer research questions after they have been interpreted. To complete this interpretation, the interviews were transcribed and read before any specific patterns were documented. Once the initial face-to-face interview was complete and the interview was transcribed, the researcher

contacted the interviewees again to allow them to review the typed transcript and check for accuracy. After reviewing the transcripts, the researcher contacted participants via e-mail for clarification or follow-up questions as needed.

The data collected from the zoomerang.com teacher survey was compiled and put into graphical form. The graphs were analyzed, then the data was disaggregated by gender and years of teaching experience. After the data was tabulated and charted, it was analyzed to reveal any consistencies and/or trends in thought. Hatch (2002) states that, “the fewer the number of participants, the more important it is to include multiple data sources” (p. 50). Therefore, in addition to the survey, the teacher and administrator interviews (Appendix B) were grouped according to like response and charted.

Following the interviews, the next step was to look through the documented teacher and administrator responses and complete a thematic analysis. Hendricks (2006 p. 134) states that researchers can complete thematic analysis by building general themes from specific examples in the data. Through this process, the qualitative data will take a more qualitative form. Some themes that the researcher will be looking for are: leadership, collaboration, time needed, and resistance to change. By looking for trends in this way, the researcher hopes to reveal repeating themes in the responses.

Summary

The intent behind the research for this study was to determine teacher perceptions of Professional Learning Communities. The study took place at a midwestern school that is moving toward a collaborative concept. The study looked at teacher surveys, administrative interviews, and teacher interviews to determine the actions needed to implement a Professional Learning

Community in this midwestern town. The results will be used to assist the district through this transitional period.

CHAPTER IV
REPORT OF RESULTS

Overview




This study took place in April and May of 2008 in the midwestern town of Maycomb's high school. The online survey was launched on April 15, 2008 and remained open for one week. High school faculty provided data for the teacher survey. In addition, three teachers were selected for more open-ended response interview questions. Finally, two administrators were interviewed in the same open-ended fashion. The study was intended to illuminate common perceptions in a district that is moving toward becoming a Professional Learning Community. The collected data is intended to ease transition and create avenues for change. All individual survey responses are charted in Appendix F.

Research Questions






- **What is the teacher response to Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as measured by survey response and interview?**

Going into this study, it seemed clear that many teachers in this district had positive thoughts regarding Professional Learning communities, but after looking at the teacher responses and compiling the interview information, the positive response was almost overwhelming. Survey question number three was the first question used to gauge teacher response. To be honest, this question was an error in data collection. The response "Highly Agree" was placed at both ends of the continuum, consequently eliminating the possible response "Highly Disagree." Although the question was flawed, and could be thrown out, it was also noted that 76% of respondents clicked next to the words "Highly Agree" when asked if they value teacher collaboration. Based on the survey results to follow, it seems a fair assumption that the




responses were not intended to reflect “Highly Disagree” as it is located on the continuum, but rather were intended to go with the typed response of “Highly Agree.”

3. I value teacher collaboration.			
Highly Agree		7	23%
Disagree		0	0%
Not Applicable		0	0%
Agree		7	23%
Highly Agree		16	53%
Total		30	100%





The Maycomb teachers had a positive response to the idea of teacher collaboration, but as expected, at this time in the transitional process, the field was very spread out with regard to actual current practice in collaboration. Although it was interesting to note that 7 percent of respondents never collaborate, it was also noted that 93 percent were collaborating at least monthly.

4. Currently, I collaborate with other teachers:			
Never		2	7%
Monthly		3	10%
Weekly		9	31%
Daily		7	24%
Multiple Times Daily		8	28%
Total		29	100%




One major goal of this study was to illuminate teacher perceptions toward the idea of creating a Professional Learning Community. It seems that the professional culture in Maycomb was ready to move toward more structured collaboration as 80 percent of those surveyed were on the positive side of the continuum when asked about the feeling that this idea creates. The other 20 percent were unsure or felt that the question did not apply.

6. The thought of a Professional Learning Community at our school makes me feel:			
Very Scared		0	0%
Scared		0	0%
Unsure or Not Applicable		6	20%
Happy		19	63%
Very Happy		5	17%
Total		30	100%






Although it was clearly perceived positively in this district, collaboration, no matter how positive and helpful, takes time. The lack of time seemed to be the school’s biggest roadblock on the way to becoming a Professional Learning Community. Although time constraints can be a reality, the teachers in Maycomb were quite confident that time was not a huge factor as 67 percent disagree and 17 percent highly disagree that collaboration takes too much time. Only one teacher surveyed felt that collaboration was too time consuming.

7. Collaboration takes too much time.			
Highly Disagree		5	17%
Disagree		20	67%
Unsure or Not Applicable		4	13%
Agree		1	3%
Highly Agree		0	0%
Total		30	100%





Staff felt that collaborative time was time well spent because all respondents noted that they enjoyed collaboration with co-workers. In a job that can sometimes be daunting and quite time-consuming, it is clear that Maycomb teachers enjoyed the opportunity to share ideas and strategies with other professionals in the building. One of the biggest steps in this process is fostering a collaborative culture. It seems that the foundation for this was already in place as 97 percent of the responding teachers welcomed the opportunity to collaborate as a subject area department.

9. I would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with my subject-area department.			
Highly Disagree		0	0%
Disagree		0	0%
Unsure or Not Applicable		1	3%
Agree		14	47%
Highly Agree		15	50%
Total		30	100%

Although many teachers had positive feelings toward the “idea” of a Professional Learning Community, it is clear that many felt that they were not completely capable of diving into the concept. Twenty-three percent of respondents noted that they would need more training. The positive perceptions of collaboration could change if more training was not offered as the school moved toward becoming a PLC.



12. I would need more training to collaborate with my fellow teachers.			
Highly Disagree		5	17%
Disagree		12	40%
Unsure or Not Applicable		6	20%
Agree		6	20%
Highly Agree		1	3%
Total		30	100%

The findings of this survey need to be brought to light as two employees of the school felt that the culture was generally opposed to collaboration. The responses to question nine show this was highly untrue. By removing that incorrect perception in sharing this data, the school could have more success with the implementation of this collaborative culture.

13. Our school is generally opposed to collaboration.			
Highly Disagree		9	30%
Disagree		17	57%
Unsure or Not Applicable		2	7%
Agree		2	7%
Highly Agree		0	0%
Total		30	100%

- **What is a PLC and how is it created?**

This second research question was more concretely answered in the review of literature, but some of the survey responses related to the ambiguity of the term. It was unclear whether the teachers truly understand the term, but 100 percent were confident that they understood it. Perhaps the confusion with the term that was noted in the literature review was not present at this school, or a second possibility is that many differing definitions actually existed, and teachers were unaware of these misconceptions.

5. I understand the term Professional Learning Community.			
Highly Disagree		0	0%
Disagree		0	0%
Unsure or Not Applicable		0	0%
Agree		15	50%
Highly Agree		15	50%
Total		30	100%

The teacher and administrator interviews (Appendix E) showed that the teachers had somewhat differing definitions for the term; whereas, the administrators were on the same page. It was clear that the administrators were familiar with DuFour’s work as they both answered that a focus on student learning was key. The three teachers responded that a professional learning community was “time together. . . to share ideas,” “a place where professionals can encourage and sharpen one another,” and “a place where teachers share ideas and thoughts regarding

student learning.” A general understanding was clear, but a definition missing a focus on student learning is at its focus flawed.

In interview question number two all those interviewed--teachers and administrators alike--agreed that one of the components needed to create a Professional Learning Community is openness. The educational community must be ready and willing to participate to see success from collaboration. In addition, the obvious factor needed was time. All noted that time loomed as an important, and sometimes difficult factor.

Question fourteen was an open-ended question that asked for suggestions to help teachers transition toward being more collaborative. A theme was clear in the twenty-four responses as seventeen were predominately about time and scheduling. Other points were noted such as leadership, but it was clear that specific, structured time was needed for teachers to buy-in to this concept.

14. What things would help you transition toward being a collaborative teacher?	
#	Response
1	Time to plan and willingness from others.
2	School day time
3	
4	Time needs to be available and it can not always be outside the contract time. Even with stipens it is difficult to allow more time for more things
5	Being able to not allow seniority to rule in collaboration. Making it a requirement (like one unit).
6	Additional Time; If the importance of collaboration was continuously reinforced by school admins.
7	Structured conversation points that were communicated to a group ahead of time.
8	Time to collaborate
9	Just time to plan.
10	others seeing how effective it can be
11	Time
12	Guidance and directives from administrators
13	Time available to work with other teachers
14	As a special education teacher I feel that there is always collaboration between teachers about students.
15	planning time
16	More formal opportunities to get together with other teachers for the purpose of collaboration.
17	The fact that I am a para educator strengthens the advantage of collaborating with teachers to get more ideas on how to successfully deal with students. Each person has a different perspective on how they perceive the situation and more heads are better than just one in most situations. I think this would benefit the paras helping and assisting their teachers and the students.
18	a different teaching schedule
19	A new colleague to work with-
20	Time to collaborate.
21	Time and modeling. Perhaps have some suggestions or objectives on what should be the outcome of teacher collaboration.
22	Time to collaborate.
23	setting times to collaborate with other teachers in my department
24	time to work with others
25	time, open attitudes

In much the same way as question fourteen, question fifteen asked for open-ended responses about what teachers wanted from administrators. Again, teachers wanted the administrators to structure the time needed for collaboration. Twenty of the twenty-five responses noted time and scheduling. Teachers also noted that money and organization were needed.




15. What pieces would you like administrators to provide to increase collaboration in our school?	
#	Response
1	More time. The school structure is set up to maximize teacher student time, and minimizes collaboration time. Giving teachers more time to plan and discuss professionally will increase student learning opportunity, not the other way around.
2	Keep leading.
3	Initially, I'd like guidelines and then let us develop our own forum.
4	Unless they can provide more time in a day there is not much they can provide
5	A class period to organize it (along with a plan period we already have)...at the same time as our department...like at LPS.
6	Time, money, reinforcement of current collaborative ideas.
7	Structured conversation points and set times for collaborative meetings
8	higher discipline so we spend more time teaching and less time doing their job
9	Time to plan.
10	more time for teachers to meet
11	require each teacher to document an example of collaboration between/among teachers
12	Time
13	Guidance, directives, some supervision and follow-through
14	Time and resources
15	Time!
16	A built in time to collaborate. As teachers we put students first and touch base with other professionals when we can fit it in.
17	planning time
18	Setting up expectations of collaboration and supporting the time for getting together.
19	I feel that paras should be including in staff meetings before and after classes so that shared ideas could be put to use and lines of communication would be opened.
20	schedules that encourage collaboration
21	We could have a scheduled department meeting once a month with an administrator present
22	Provide time to collaborate.
23	Time for departments to meet.
24	Time, paid.
25	scheduled times to collaborate



- **Do teachers benefit from PLCs?**

All interviewees were asked this research question. The teachers agreed that they benefit from PLCs. Susie noted that some possible benefits included communication, a positive work environment, and the opportunity to think of different ideas. Brian felt the system benefited teachers, especially from the standpoint that the strong support system kept teachers from being “on an island.” The administrators felt that the benefits were quite numerous. It was noted that the system benefited strong teachers by providing a leadership avenue. In addition, it also

benefited mediocre teachers by putting them in conversation with teachers who experienced more success in the classroom.

It is clear that teachers benefited, but it was also pertinent to look at the related question of whether students benefit from PLCs. All interviewed felt that students benefit, after all, that is the purpose of a true PLC. In addition to the interview response, those surveyed echoed this assertion. Ninety-six percent of the teachers who responded felt that collaboration would benefit students, and 100 percent of those surveyed felt that students benefited from teacher collaboration.

10. Collaboration with my subject area department would benefit my students.			
Highly Disagree		0	0%
Disagree		0	0%
Unsure or Not Applicable		1	3%
Agree		10	33%
Highly Agree		19	63%
Total		30	100%

11. Students benefit from teacher collaboration.			
Highly Disagree		0	0%
Disagree		0	0%
Unsure or Not Applicable		0	0%
Agree		11	38%
Highly Agree		18	62%
Total		29	100%



- **Do classrooms and teaching strategies differ in a school that is a PLC as opposed to one that is not?**

Of the three teachers interviewed, only Rita seemed to be able to put her finger on the difference between a classroom that is a PLC and one that is not. She noted that the main difference was the congruity that the classroom showed with others in the district. Mr. Smith





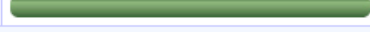
noted that a PLC classroom looked similar to a strong teacher’s classroom that was not a PLC, because methods that are focused on student learning were already in place. He noted that the difference was in the number of classrooms that were employing such positive instructional practices. Mr. Roberts noted that with classrooms in a PLC similarities made it easier to predict success than in a school with many different classrooms that were using many different instructional strategies.

Participants Selected

For the online survey, e-mails were sent to all high school teachers in Maycomb. All had the opportunity to participate. Thirty classroom teachers participated: 19 females, 10 males, and 1 chose not to identify his or her sex.

1. Sex:			
Male		10	34%
Female		19	66%
Total		29	100%

Of those who responded, one had zero to one years of teaching experience; two had two to three; four had four to six; four had seven to ten; and nineteen (the vast majority) had ten or more years of experience.

2. Indicate your years of teaching experience:			
0-1		1	3%
2-3		2	7%
4-6		4	13%
7-10		4	13%
10 or More		19	63%
Total		30	100%

For the teacher interviews, three faculty members were chosen based on gender, content subject taught, and knowledge of and experience with the implementation of PLCs. It was the researcher's desire to select individuals with knowledge regarding PLCs.

The first teacher interviewee was a 38-year-old female, science teacher and coach. This teacher, to be called Susie, had three years of teaching experience, one of which was at Maycomb. Susie had some experience with professional learning communities as she met bi-weekly with her department in her previous school.

Interviewee number two, to be called Brian, was a 38-year-old male who has fifteen years of teaching experience, five of which are at Maycomb. Brian was a teacher of history and economics and had a large amount of experience with professional learning communities as he served as a staff developer with other districts.

The final teacher interviewed, to be called Rita, was a 29-year-old female who had five years of teaching experience, two of which were at Maycomb. Rita was a math teacher who was currently participating in a first year phase of a math department Professional Learning Community. This PLC had met six times at the time of the interview.

Two administrator interviews took place with the Principal and Assistant Principal at Maycomb. Administrator interviewee number one, to be called Mr. Smith, was a 33-year-old male, and interviewee number two, to be called Mr. Roberts, was a 28-year-old male. During the course of the study, only seven teachers chose not to participate in the online survey. As the survey was anonymous, the researcher was unable to ascertain why they abstained from taking the survey. All interviewees remained intact throughout the study and were forthcoming and willing to schedule time for interviews.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Professional Learning Community. At the start of this study, it seemed that teachers at Maycomb might be quite divided in their opinions regarding this new buzzword; however, after interview and survey, it is clear that the school was almost entirely united in its positive response to the term. This study not only aimed to illuminate teacher opinion, but to also clarify meaning as the school moved toward the creation of a more collaborative culture. A Professional Learning Community involves educators collaborating in structured settings with a focus on student learning.

It is clear that this term was getting more attention in the district. The math department was the first department to begin the collaborative team process. Other departments were going to phase in following the math department. It will be a gradual transition, but the change was starting. Change can be difficult at any level, but this study hoped to ease transition by bringing common perceptions to light. It is quite clear that the Maycomb high school faculty were overwhelmingly positive in their response to the idea of collaboration; however, they all shared trepidation when it comes to time and scheduling issues. The school wanted its leadership to answer the tough questions of “how?” and “when?”

In addition to working through the time issue, administrators would benefit the faculty by providing more training. Professional development sessions on working in collaborative teams would focus the entire staff, and bring a higher sense of confidence as valuable time would be used to implement this new system. Admittedly, this is not an easy transition, but with common perceptions illuminated, the district could garner the needed teacher buy-in that collaboration entails. One of the most important common perceptions was that 100 percent of those surveyed

valued collaboration, none of those surveyed identified the thought of a Professional Learning Community as scary, 84 percent did not think that collaboration took too much time, 100 percent enjoyed teacher collaboration, 97 percent would welcomed the opportunity to collaborate departmentally, and most importantly, 100 percent agreed that students benefited from teacher collaboration. With findings that are this one-sided, it seems that sharing these facts would motivate and encourage staff to jump into this process and whole-heartedly work as a team with the students' best interests at heart. Sixty-three percent of the survey respondents have been teaching for ten or more years, and they were still open to this idea of change so that students would benefit.

On top of teacher buy in, the other large roadblock that has been identified is a lack of teacher time. It is pertinent for the administrators to concretely block out time for this collaboration and provide concrete expectations about what is to be completed during meetings. Even if the issue of teacher compensation cannot be remedied, it must be addressed. Administration must either find a way to provide the time within the teachers previously agreed upon contractual hours, or they must compensate fairly for the additional time required. If this is not a possibility, the administration must greet the issue head on and explain why the benefits of this system will be worth much more than the time that is required. The administrative response to the issue must be verbalized as it will be at the forefront of many teachers' minds. Admittedly, teachers will probably see this benefit down the road, but at the start, their attitude and effort are crucial to make this a reality. The time issue must be dealt with.

It seems that if common positive perceptions are brought to light and the time is structured for collaboration fairly, the school system is ready to move forward. Teachers agreed that collaboration would benefit students. Even if it is not all at once, positive collaboration is

this district's future. It does not seem that this study should be replicated on a larger scale, as its results are singularly beneficial for this district, but the study could be repeated in the district following the transition to see how teacher perceptions have changed. It will be pertinent to share this study's results with administration, so that its results can be a part of the transitional process. The results will help to make conversations more open and realistic. Information shared will help to foster a collaborative culture as opinions and ideas become transparent for all involved. This transparency will allow for open and honest communication between administration and faculty as they work together to share leadership and to result greater student achievement through collaboration.

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Appendix A

Demographic Questionnaire

Sex: M / F

Age:

How many years of teaching experience do you have?

How many years of experience at this particular school?

What is your current role in the school?

Have you had any training or experience with collaboration? If so, please elaborate.

I _____ agree to participate in the interview for this research study using the questions listed previously on this page. I understand that my responses will be confidential and my name will be changed in the final research paper. I also understand that my participation will in no way hinder my employment.

Signed _____ Date _____

Appendix B

Teacher Interview Questions

Sex: M / F

Age:

1. In your opinion, what is a Professional Learning Community?
2. What is needed to create a PLC?
3. Is there a benefit for teachers in a PLC?
4. Is there a benefit for administrators in a PLC?
5. Do students benefit from PLCs? If so, how do they benefit?
6. Have you been in a school that is not considered a PLC? If so, what is the difference for classrooms in a school that is a PLC as opposed to one that is not?
7. What do you feel is our school's biggest roadblock on the way to becoming a PLC?
8. What is your vision for our school collaboratively?
9. What actions are you planning to take to make this a reality?
10. What is the timeframe?
11. What are your feelings about the loss of teacher time that collaboration entails?

Appendix C

Administrator Interview Questions

Sex: M / F

Age:

1. In your opinion, what is a Professional Learning Community?
2. What is needed to create a PLC?
3. What are your feelings in response to the thought of collaboration?
4. Is there a benefit for teachers from PLCs?
5. Is there a benefit for administrators from PLCs?
6. Do students benefit from PLCs? If so, how do they benefit?
7. Have you been in a school that is not considered a PLC? If so, what is the difference for classrooms in a school that is a PLC as opposed to one that is not?
8. What do you feel is our school's biggest roadblock on the way to becoming a PLC?
9. What are your feelings about the loss of teacher time that collaboration entails?
10. What can teachers in our district do to aide this process?
11. What part does the assessment of student learning play in a collaborative culture?
12. What tools will teachers have at their disposal when they find that students aren't learning material?
13. Do you plan to accommodate for the loss of teacher time that collaboration entails? If yes, please explain.

Appendix D

High School Teacher Survey

1. Sex M/F

2. Indicate your years of teaching experience:

A	B	C	D	E
0-1	2-3	4-6	7-10	10 or More

3. I value teacher collaboration.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure or Not Applicable	Agree	Highly Agree

4. Currently, I collaborate with other teachers:

1	2	3	4	5
Never	Monthly	Weekly	Daily	Multiple Times Daily

5. I understand the term Professional Learning Community.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure or Not Applicable	Agree	Highly Agree

6. The thought of a Professional Learning Community at our school makes me feel:

1	2	3	4	5
Very Scared	Scared	Unsure or Not Applicable	Happy	Very Happy

7. Collaboration takes too much time.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure or Not Applicable	Agree	Highly Agree

8. I enjoy collaboration with my co-workers.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure or Not Applicable	Agree	Highly Agree

9. I would welcome the opportunity to collaborate with my subject-area department.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure or Not Applicable	Agree	Highly Agree

10. Collaboration with my subject area department would benefit my students.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure or Not Applicable	Agree	Highly Agree

11. Students benefit from teacher collaboration.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure or Not Applicable	Agree	Highly Agree

12. I would need more training to collaborate with my fellow teachers.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure or Not Applicable	Agree	Highly Agree

13. Our school is generally opposed to collaboration.

1	2	3	4	5
Highly Disagree	Disagree	Unsure or Not Applicable	Agree	Highly Agree

In the following questions, please write out responses.

14. What things would help you transition toward being a collaborative teacher?
15. What pieces would you like administrators to provide to increase collaboration in our school?
16. Please state any additional comments in regard to the questions provided in this survey.

Appendix E

Teacher Interview 1: Susie

1. An opportunity for professionals of any industry to have time together to brainstorm what they are currently working on or ideas of what future activities might be.
2. Openness, on behalf of those involved, and a comfort level to also freely express yourself so you can create an environment where people can feel comfortable and safe in sharing their views. And also to beginning constant education or information and ideas you should be elaborating on.
3. Yes, there is. And those benefits would be: the opportunity to maybe think of some different strategies that maybe would have worked for other teachers that you haven't even really thought about or maybe that you have thought about but have been some what hesitant on how to incorporate rate them but you could ask questions on how to maybe address some thing that you have considered hurdles in trying different activities. And I also just think from the communication standpoint whether that would be teaching or just communicating with other individuals that gives everyone a more positive and more open environment for a way of work.
4. Yes. For that matter of fact that I think again, just the communication factor that one are always striving to improve on what your doing or learning different ways, especially if you look at education or high school education on how to constantly give high school students, to get them engaged and see the relevance on that, I think PLC's mainly with the administrators not having that one on one contact with the students.
5. Then again, I think it is just the aspect of getting teachers to maybe try some things that have been successful for one teachers than maybe another teacher would try that same strategy and just find things that work or don't work that you can find out before actually having done them or just honestly just constantly being able to modify what you are doing in a classroom.
6. I have not been in a school that has not been considered a PLC.
7. Not having said that department needing, or that kind of factor.
8. Being a new teacher coming into this environment, it would be nice to have a set schedule time to collaborate with my other department members on the strategies they are working, not only to learn about the here and now, but to make sure I am preparing them for the class they are going on to next year and also to even for the teachers that are having them before me to communicate amongst everyone ideas or ways to learn to how to use a little bit more of all the classes they have taken in a more effective way.
9. You know, right now especially still being in the survival mode, as the first year kind of finishes out here, you know I do look back really at if I have time it has been nice to have the my other freshman teacher being so willing and he really comes down and checks on me frequently and asks me what kind of things are going on. And usually we rely a lot

more on the email communication because we can do more of that at our leisure but it is very hap hazardly right now. So it would be nice to be more systematically about checking in with him.

10. Well I think it should be having more at the beginning of the school year, so that you know the response yesterday would have been nice; that we start doing it baby steps but since really we don't have anything in place it would be hard to say because it seems like right now so many teachers has spent so much time here anyway again to really find time outside of school, it gets more demands on something that it would be nice just to figure that out in our school years as it is in fashion. So I don't know.
11. To me it's not really losing time, it is actually gaining time when I look at it from a perspective that it would make teachers work more effectively if we just had some collaboration time because you learn how to do a lesson plan or a unit more effectively so that it is a lesson to be collaborative with your teachers. So I don't that will change, if anything I think it would improve your teacher plan.

Teacher Interview 2: Brian

1. A professional learning community is a place where professionals can encourage and sharpen one another in their skills as educators.
2. I think the first necessary component of a PLC is a willingness in the attitude of the educators to open that proverbial close door and open up their classrooms and have a willingness to share what is going on with their students in their classrooms, struggles and successes, as well as a study of what works and what doesn't in today's classroom.
3. Yeah, I think the benefit for teachers is that in the past teachers are really just out on an island and doing their own thing. And the benefit for teachers is support system and support network, like-minded professionals trying to improve their pedagogy.
4. Well it depends if the administrator see themselves as building managers or instructional leaders. And if they see themselves as instructional leaders I think the benefit is it can be great. Because then you have a group of teachers that you are leading and directing and then those teachers are helping out in that process themselves.
5. Yeah, if the students don't benefit, then there's not really a whole lot of reason for doing it. And so they benefit in the sense that, again going back to the fact that we are challenging each other and sharpening each other, providing support for one another. Any time you want to make improvement that you have to take a risk and making an improvement also means making changes. And changes are hard for everybody especially in isolation, but as you are doing that as a group and trying to implement those changes together then they are going to be a lot more affective and you will be able to sustain them for a longer period of time.

6. Sure, I was in a school where I was trying to make some of these changes on my own. And I am going back to that island and I was on an island out there. And people thought I was crazy for the things that I was trying to do in my classroom. That doesn't mean that they weren't good people or good educators, they just didn't see the benefit in the PLC and they didn't see any reason for them to make any kind of changes that I was making.
7. Well I think it all starts with attitude and people willingness to buy into doing it. And then come the realities of time and implementation, organization, and how we are going to do those things.
8. You know with kids in the district and myself, then I guess I'm always looking at the Josh Nunnally test and what kind of classroom do I want for my own children. And so I guess my vision for our school system would be a school system where teachers are working together and again, sharpening one another, providing support as we make changes and take risks. And try to create the best environment for our kids, everyday, every school, every class period, and every room.
9. What ever my principle wants me to do.
10. Whenever he wants me to do it.
11. For me time, no one has more or less time than anybody else. And so it's not the amount of time, for me it's more of what we are doing with that time. And if the time of what we are using is used to move our school forward than I want to do that. And at the same time I think that you can also pick up some time along the way with some time that you are losing. And so I think those things, they always work themselves out.

Teacher Interview 3: Rita

1. A collaboration of teachers where they get together to share ideas and thoughts regarding to student learning, which includes teaching strategies and curriculum and anything that you would do in your classroom and also just ideas on how to create and build and foster a positive learning environment.
2. Time, and teachers who are willing and have an open mind and are willing to take risks and try new things. And also a leader who has gone through it and kind of know what to expect and can make sure that the collaboration time is used effectively.
3. Yes.
4. Yes.
5. Yes, students would benefit. If your PLC is designed to improve student learning and the school is your main focus, then your students would definitely benefit.

6. The school that I was previously at did not have PLC's and this school is just starting. So I'm not sure I have experienced something that is truly a PLC that I could walk in and say "Oh yeah, that's a PLC". My guess would be that there's, in a school that doesn't have PLC, everybody's just kind of doing their own thing, and there's just no similarities among the classes. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing, but everybody just their kind of own individual instead of a team of teachers.
7. Probably, teachers either being stubborn or just not being able to do a little extra without being compensated for it. Either they are stubborn and stuck in their own ways or feel that it would just be a waste of time. Maybe they haven't seen the benefits of it. And possibly if a guide thrown together kind of hastily and not enough time put into it, you know not enough direction and leadership.
8. I think it would be awesome if the departments met like once a month. And you know it doesn't have to be a long thing but just to touch base and not just to talk about test scores but talk about teaching ideas and just share ideas and different things, because if you teach the same class as somebody else it would be nice to share concepts, and actually know the department head and what the, you know, actually feel like the department has a purpose.
9. I just have an open mind and willing to be part of PLC's. Our math department is kind of being a guinea pig for the PLC's. So I've gone to those meeting with an open mind and have asked questions and kind of challenged the PLC to make sure we are getting something out of it. And I guess, just putting forth ideas of what we could get out of it.
10. I would say, at least a year, maybe two years. Again, this year we just started, to my knowledge, the math is the only PLC besides the learning teams. I think that's different, I don't know, as far as the department goes. So I think it would take a while for our administration to, you know, kind of observe and see what happens out of this and come up with ideas of where they want it to go and then be able to model that and give it a few guide lines and a little bit of training, I guess, as far as what should happen the expectations we should meet. So it could probably take a couple of years I guess.
11. I don't see it as a loss. I think that the students would benefit greatly, and teachers as well. I enjoy being able to share ideas, sharing things in the classroom. I don't view it as a loss at all, and I would be really excited if we had PLCs.

Administrator Interview 1: Mr. Smith

1. I think it is just when you have a focus on student learning. But it is more than that. You have to have something in place to be a true professional learning community. A lot of people think it is just a book club where you get together and study a book. A true professional learning community is going to focus on student learning and there is going to be a vehicle in place to make sure that that happens. That requires collaboration and requires a focus on continuous improvement. Again those things are easy to say and name but to be a true professional learning community, which is what we would like to

see happen here and is in the place to happen here, you have to have the collaboration time, focus on improvement and looking at data so you can have specific targets from that data.

2. The number one thing, you'll hear this answer a lot, is it has to be a priority in time. But when we think resources, we think of money or material, or technology, biggest resource you have in school is time. And it is the most valuable resource and it is what you have the least of. In order to have a professional learning community you have to have a commitment to have collaboration because without it you don't have one. So you need that, you need a vision and to have teachers buy in, and than that collaboration time is really the biggest thing of a professional learning community, and than you have to have a target. Are familiar with our curricular matting? Because really for a professional learning community you have to have a curricular mat because you need to have a similar curriculum across the board. If you and I are both teaching English but we're teaching curriculum in different way it is going to be hard to have a professional learning community. So, one of the first step is identifying. What are the essential things the students need to know? And identifying what those key objectives are and mapping the curriculum to that in a professional learning community.
3. I think it is essential if you are going to have a professional learning community, but again it takes time and teachers are already over extended. So unless you are going to change the calendar, to where you are providing time within the school day, you are going to ask the teachers to do things outside the contract hours and to stay extra. And the reality is no matter how good teachers are; it's not always something they want to do. Now we are fortunate with the 8 o'clock to the 8:40 start time because we can use that. But it is still not enough time.
4. Absolutely. I think it is a benefit for the really good teachers because they're going to be challenged and they are also going to feel like they are leading the group a little bit. And it is a huge benefit to the mediocre and the struggling teachers because now they are brought in and the boat is going forward. And they don't have a choice; they are going to have to get on it. I think it is the only way to go for students. Because now as a parent I want to know whether they are in Ms. Smith's class or Mrs. Smith's class my kids are going to learn the same thing. And professional learning communities start to ensure that. Because you starting at the point, and obviously teachers are going to be different, but the curriculum is going to align and teachers are going to be brought along in that. How are you doing that? Are you finding this effective? All of sudden I see that, because the a professional learning community is going to review data, so I see that on a test or on one of our objectives, that your kids are getting it completely and proficiently and mine aren't. We can have a conversation now. And it becomes an unthreatening way to observe, that because right now I can guarantee that teachers aren't going to taking your test course and talk to a different teacher about it.
5. One of our number one jobs is instructional leadership to other teachers. But a professional learning community does that for us. I believe that you tap in the experts that you see in the building instead going out to look for experts to come for staff

development. Professional learning communities naturally do that already. Because as you would have one in your curricular area, one teacher is going to be an expert in one area and another teacher is going to be an expert in a different area. As you guys work together you're naturally going to grow. Again instruction leadership is tough because, not here, but some teachers like to go to their room and shut their door. I'm going to teach the way I taught. It's right because I said it's right. Where as now there are those types of conversations taking place. How can we do things better. And again, by looking at data to see if we are doing things right, if your getting things done and if you're not what are we going to do about it.

6. Skip.
7. The only other school I've been at, besides here, has been Park Middle School. LPS is working hard to try to get PLC and they are trying to be a true PLC. They were not at the time I was there and they aren't yet. But they are trying to get there. I believe that we are trying to get a PLC and trying to get the aspects of a true PLC. But we're not there yet. I think that we are going to get there. I don't necessarily think there is going to be a big difference in a classroom with a PLC, of a one that's not, in a really good teachers classroom. Because they are already going to have the key objectives, they are already going to have data, to not drive decisions; I don't like the word data-driven-decisions, but data informed decisions. They are going to look at data and that's going to inform them how to give feedback, how to adjust their instruction. The benefit in a PLC is that it is going to happen in a number of classrooms across the school. It is going to be consistent through the curriculum. It is going to help some teachers that are struggling in that area and give them a clear focus too. Really it just gives you a foundation for people to fall back on even they need to. And right now even though we have two English 9 classes and two social studies 10 classes, types of things, you walk into those classrooms they can have different objectives, and we need to decide what are the essential objectives that are going to be taught across the board and that's what it does in a PLC classroom too.
8. Absolutely, time.
9. Skip.
10. Well, they have to almost want to do it, because they know that it is the right thing to do. Because right now there isn't going to be an abundance of money although Ryan has cleared up different things to try and do that. But in order for teacher to do that, they have to want to continue to get better they have to continue and understand that right now that probably is not going to mean early outs on Fridays to get together to collaborate or those types of things, that might be nice in the future.
11. Skip.
12. What it does is that it gives you the network of support. Rather than it being a 3 agent and then me in your classroom and me asking "Evi why aren't you kids doing it" than that's a bad reflection on me now I look deficient or she is going to think I'm not getting that done. Or if I go talk to Kassebaum he's going to put that on my evaluation. And that

opens up that dialogue. So I can feel comfortable to go “Hey you know what? My kids are not getting this done on 12.1.1. What are you doing? How can we make this better?” other than that teachers should already have tools, this should already be going on. My kids didn’t do well I’m going to re-teach it. Or why didn’t they do well. So that shouldn’t be new. A lot of this stuff in a professional learning community shouldn’t be new. Should be things already happening. But what it really does, to simplify it, it gets it in the same language with similar objectives. Which you have to come to a consensus on what are the key objectives. With the new law passing that is going to be done for us. Whether it is a sad reality or not we are going to be graded and judged and compared and evaluated by how are students are going to do on these states tests that are coming out compared to other districts. So if a person’s naive to think that is not going to dictate our key objectives. Because if we are teachers our kids all about WWI and the state test is only questioned on WWII we have set our kids up for failure and our district up. So that is going to dictate our essential objectives.

13. Right now we have 8 to 8:40 and we are going to utilize that time the best we can. With out it coming to the point to where it is burdensome and people start to dig their heels in. Because you have to have staff by in. We ultimately would like to see a calendar change. In the future. Where are district says we are born to be a PLC then a part of that is time, and our calendar needs to reflect that. And that conversation has started.

Administrator Interview 2: Mr. Roberts

1. In my opinion a PLC is teachers working collaboratively, talking about students and looking at specific data. And that specific data drives their decision making process. I guess in the simplest terms, that, you know, teachers work collaboratively, talk about students and discussing data and that data drives their decision making process.
2. First an understanding of what a PLC is. An overall understanding. A systemic idea where teachers have a good understanding of why they are meeting, what their purpose is. And then also there has to be kind of a comfort level amongst the teachers, and I think that comfort level is created by stating the norms. Deciding what we are going to accept and what we are not going to accept. And those teachers come into full understanding of this is why we are here, here’s what we are going to go and this is how we are going to do.
3. Probably the most crucial aspect of any organization: Moving forward.
4. Absolutely, the idea of sharing. Professional expertise. Balancing ideas off of each other. Differencing opinions. Question and Answer. There are a thousand benefits for teachers and for students.
5. Absolutely. My belief as an organization, we move forward to benefit kids by using collaborate wisdom and current literature research to drive our decision. And to have teachers in groups, department groups or however PLC is set up, by having them

discussing things amongst themselves, I meant they are already experts in the field, I'm the instructional leader. But to be able to take advantage of the professionals that are on the front line everyday, to bounce ideas off of them, to lead them in a direction but then allow them to decide how are we going to go about this, if there is a change that we feel that is necessary, and it is not just I decide on the change, its we discuss is there a need is there a sense of urgency for something. And then to have the experts, who are the teachers, chew on those things to have some base line data to decide is there something that we can do differently and how are we going to do that. They are the ones that I need to get feedback on. What works and what doesn't work. As an administrator there is nothing more important than taking advantage of your experts. And I think that PLC's give you the opportunity, kind of give you a systemic way to do that.

6. One of the key ingredients of a PLC is the data. And when we are able to find base line data, when we see there is a need, that data will help us drive our decisions, and data obviously comes from the students. And when we are able to look at that data, decide on changes we need to do, we are going to see what works and what doesn't work. So whatever the data tells us we are going to change we are going to do things differently or we are going to continue to do things the same, based on that data. There is no guesswork involved, we are going to see what work and what doesn't work, and then our decisions are based on those things.
7. Well, I don't think have been a PLC. And I don't think a lot of schools are true PLC's. And what I mean by that is a lot of school's consider PLC's to be book studies and that is not what it is. Really, the big difference between a PLC and a non-PLC is independent contractors versus collaborative and teachers working collaboratively. And if you are independent contractors you are leaving success up to chance. I mean you have 30 teachers, 30 different ways of doing things, you can't predict success in those areas. And if you are working systemically or there is something that is already in place and every teacher understands where we want to go you can predict success in that way. And at least you can monitor, adjust and do things differently whereas if you have independent contractors you don't know what's going on in every place, you don't know what everyone's goals are, and where they are going. And that way you are leaving success up to chance. So that is what I think is a big difference between PLC and non-PLC schools.
8. I want to say time. But I think the first thing is my ability to get teacher to understand the purpose of PLC's and the buy in. I feel very comfortable in our teachers desire to collaborate. But then the next step is, what is the true purpose of a PLC, its' not just a chance to chit chat its making them understand what we are going to do and how are we going to do it. I think that is a very big roadblock. But probably overall is going to be me as the administrator controlling what I can control you know not looking at a district wide calendar but looking at what I can do for the high school, and that will probably be finding the time for teachers.
9. It's crucial. I think even though yeah that it is a necessity, and the benefits far out weigh the drawbacks. There's no doubt. I don't look at it as a loss teacher time I think we are gaining way too much by doing this.

10. Well, the first thing is the responses that you got from your PLC survey. I mean that is an open invitation that teachers are interested and they want to collaborate. I think that is the first step, and that opens the door. But it's not that that is dictating what we do, but that was definitely satisfying to see that our teachers are yearning to collaborate with their other teachers.
11. Well, just the ability to gather that base line data I mean when you have an assessment and you have teachers; I'll use the departments as an example, but when you have numerous teachers looking at the same data, when student learning is the top of the discussion you know there is a lot of different opinions or lot of different ways on how learning happens but when you have a base line data or a base line assessment we can find out what works what doesn't work, we can change, change the way we assess, we can change the way we are teaching, to try to make sure every one is on the same page, and I think when we are all inline we will see student achievement go up.
12. Well, they are going to have each other, number one. They are going to be able to discuss what works in some classrooms and what works in other classrooms. Just their professional collaboration and the ability to bounce ideas off of each other. Well there are a lot of things. When you talk about tools, I think PLC's are a great opportunity to talk about professional development and different strategies that takes place in the classroom. That gives them time to talk about literature, research, it just again, is that professional growth time, or professional collaboration time, whether it is about student data, whether it is about up to date research, whether it is about professional development sessions that teacher have attended that can implicate in some way, taking little pieces of what teachers do to make it beneficial in their classroom, I mean there is just so many benefits and so many tools that teachers will be able to use as a result of this collaboration, probably most of all just that conversation and the million things that they can benefit from.
13. No, PLC has to be during the school day. There is probably a number of ways you could do that, you could get creative with the schedule, we have talked to the board about the importance of PLC's, and how that should have an effect on the counter for not the 08-09 but the 09-10 school year. So I do believe we will get some time to do this, but the expectations will not be to have the PLC to be out of school time.

Appendix F

Teacher ID	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1	m	4-6	HA	MTD	A	H	HD	HA	A	HA	HA	D	D
2	m	10+	HA	D	HA	VH	D	HA	HA	HA	HA	HD	HD
3	f	10+	HA	W	A	U/NA	D	A	A	A	A	A	D
4	f	2-3	HA	MTD	HA	H	HD	HA	HA	HA	HA	D	HD
5	m	7-10	A	D	A	U/NA	D	A	A	A	A	HD	HD
6	m	10+	A	W	HA	H	U/NA	A	A	HA	HA	A	U/NA
7	f	2-3	HA	MTD	HA	VH	D	HA	HA	HA	HA	D	D
8	m	10+	HA	W	A	VH	D	HA	HA	HA	HA	U/NA	HD
9	m	10+	HA	M	A	H	D	A	A	A	A	A	A
10	?	10+	HA	W	A	H	D	A	A	A	D	D	HD
11	f	10+	HA	W	HA	VH	D	A	A	HA	A	HD	HD
12	m	7-10	HA	MTD	A	H	D	HA	HA	HA	HA	D	A
13	f	10+	A	N	HA	H	U/NA	A	A	A	A	D	D
14	m	10+	A	MTD	HA	U/NA	D	A	U/NA	U/NA	A	A	D
15	f	10+	HA	D	A	H	D	A	A	HA	HA	A	D
16	f	10+	A	M	HA	H	D	A	A	A	A	D	D
17	f	4-6	HA	D	HA	H	HD	HA	A	HA	HA	HD	HD
18	f	7-10	HA	W	A	H	HD	HA	HA	HA	HA	A	D
19	m	10+	HA	D	HA	H	D	A	A	A	A	U/NA	D
20	f	10+	HA	MTD	A	H	D	HA	HA	HA	HA	HA	D
21	f	10+	HA	M	A	H	D	A	HA	A	A	D	D
22	f	10+	HA	N	HA	H	D	HA	HA	HA	HA	U/NA	D
23	f	10+	HA	W	A	U/NA	U/NA	HA	HA	HA	HA	U/NA	HD
24	f	10+	HA	W	HA	H	A	HA	HA	HA	HA	D	HD
25	f	4-6	HA	D	A	H	D	HA	HA	HA	HA	U/NA	D
26	m	4-6	A	D	A	U/NA	D	A	A	A	A	D	D
27	f	0-1	HA	W	HA	VH	HD	HA	HA	HA	HA	U/NA	D
28	f	7-10	A	?	A	H	U/NA	A	A	A	A	D	D
29	f	10+	HA	MTD	HA	H	D	A	HA	HA	HA	D	U/NA
30	f	10+	HA	MTD	HA	U/NA	D	HA	HA	HA	HA	HD	D

