

Mance Park Middle School
Professional Learning Community Handbook
2022-2023

★ What are Professional Learning Communities?

PLC's are 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. PLC's operate under the assumption that the key to improved learning for students is continuous job-embedded learning for educators. (Learning By Doing; DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos; 2016)

The PLC process is not a program. It cannot be purchased, nor can it be implemented by anyone other than the staff itself. Most importantly, it is ongoing--a continuous process of conducting schooling that has a profound impact on the structure and culture of the school and the assumptions and practices of the professionals within it. (Learning By Doing; DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos; 2016)

PLC's are not something we do at MPMS, it is who we are and how we function day to day on our campus.

★ Three Big Ideas That Drive the Work of a PLC

1. A Focus on Learning

The first of the big ideas is based on the premise that the fundamental purpose of the school is to ensure that ALL students learn at high levels (grade level or higher). This focus on and commitment to the learning of each student are the very essence of a learning community.

PLC members must be guided by a clear and compelling vision of what the organization must become in order to help ALL students learn.

Essential components of a PLC to ensure a focus on learning are:

- Collective commitments clarifying each staff members role in creating an organization the ensures all students learn at high levels
- Progress monitoring with results-oriented goals
- Identification of essential standards
- Implementation of systematic interventions and enrichments

2. A Collaborative Culture and Collective Responsibility

The second big idea of PLC's is to ensure that all students learn at high levels, educators must work collaboratively and take collective responsibility for the success of each student. In a PLC, collaborative team members work interdependently to achieve common goals for which members are mutually accountable.

Collaboration is a means to an end, not the end itself. Collaboration does not lead to improved results unless people are focused on the right work.

Working collaboratively at MPMS is not optional, but instead is an expectation and requirement of employment.

3. Results Oriented

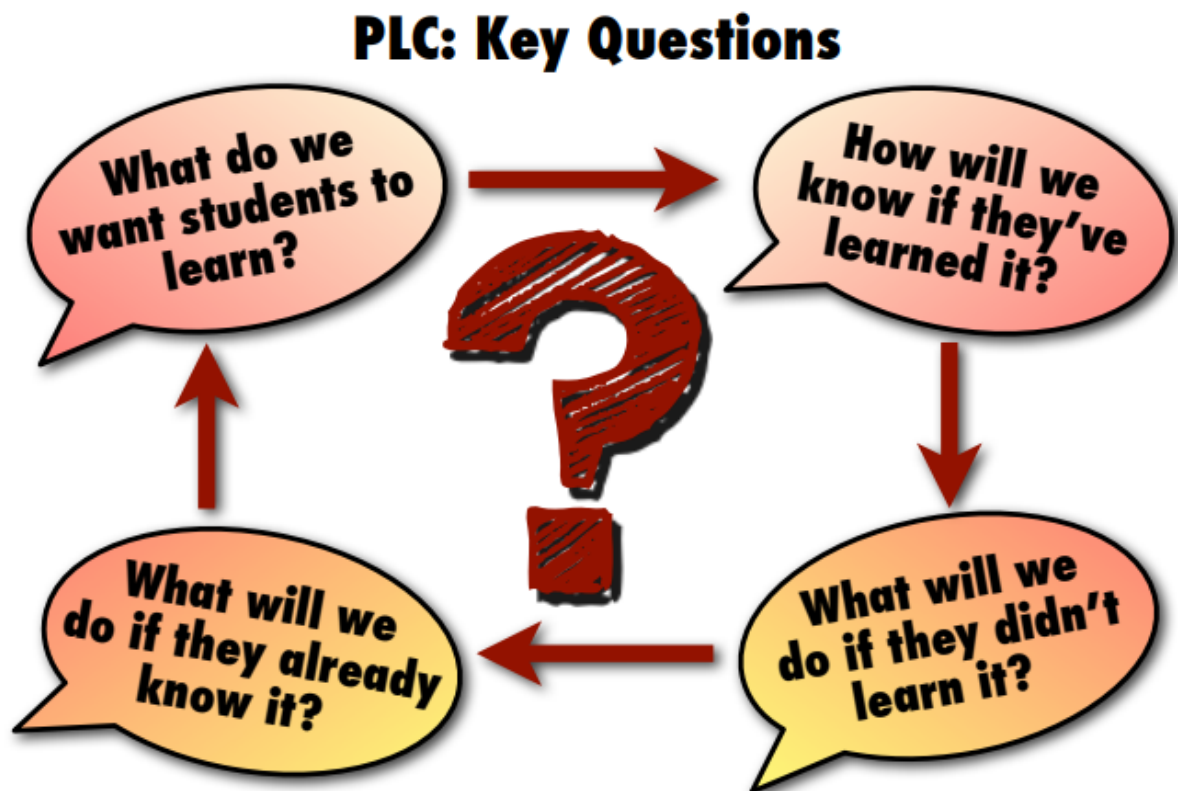
The third big idea that drives the work of PLCs is the need for results orientation. The constant search for a better way to improve results by helping more students learn at high levels leads to a cyclical process in which educators in a PLC:

- Gather evidence of current levels of student learning
- Develop strategies and ideas to build on strengths and address weaknesses in that learning
- Implement those strategies and ideas
- Analyze the impact of the changes to discover what was effective and what was not
- Apply new knowledge in the next cycle of continuous improvement

★ Four Guiding Questions of a PLC

The four questions should be at the heart of every PLC discussion. In order to raise student achievement, Professional Learning Communities must be able to answer all four of these questions.

Key Questions for Professional Learning Communities



Question 1: What do we want all students to learn?

The PLC should first review the course/grade level essential standards to establish a viable curriculum for ALL students. The discussion that occurs in the PLC regarding these curriculum components will build shared knowledge and understanding of what the PLC wants all students to learn. As the PLC determines its focus, it is important to answer the focus question based on their area of greatest need.

What does a high-functioning PLC look like at the sustaining stage of Question 1?

Analyze Essential Learnings:

- All teachers collaborate to create or review state standards and content/ grade level essential standards for current courses as well as vertically articulated courses.
- All teachers in PLC are teaching with essential standards in mind and communicating learning targets to students.
- All teachers demonstrate a high level of commitment to the essential curriculum, to students, and to PLC members.

Determine Appropriate Pacing:

- Teachers have established the essential standards for each unit of instruction and are committed to instructing their students according to the essential standards and to the team's agreed-upon pacing guide/proficiency map.

Discuss and Share Instructional Strategies:

- All teachers systematically share evidence-based effective instructional strategies and utilize newly learned strategies in their own classrooms.

Question 2: How will we know if students have learned it?

The PLC collectively creates and aligns common assessments to measure student progress toward meeting the team goal. Both formative and summative assessments should be used to measure progress toward the goal. The formative assessments (Assessment FOR Learning) inform the teacher of student progress as the learning is happening. The formative assessments also provide students with feedback about their progress toward the goal. The summative assessments give the teacher and students a summary of the student learning.

What does a high-functioning PLC look like at the sustaining stage of Question 2?

Create and Administer Assessments:

- Every teacher has collaborated within the PLC to develop a series of common, formative and summative assessments.
- Teachers are assessing student learning on a consistent and equitable basis.
- Every teacher administers common formative and common summative assessments.

Align Assessments:

- All assessments are entirely aligned with state standards and essential standards.
- All assessments administered are consistent in format and rigor with those used by other teachers in the PLC.

Use Data to Evaluate Student Performance and Inform Instruction:

- Teachers collaboratively create a common scoring system and consistently use it to measure proficiency.
- Every teacher regularly uses results from common formative assessments to guide real-time instruction.
- Teachers use results from common summative assessments, make decisions for future changes in content, instruction, and assessment. (MPMS Data Analysis Protocol)
- Teachers assign grades to all summative assessments.

Question 3: What will we do if they do not learn it?

The PLC uses the results of the common assessments to determine which students need additional time and support in learning the essential skills. Collectively, the team develops a plan to support those students who are not making progress toward the goal.

What does a high-functioning PLC look like at the sustaining stage of Question 3?

Determine Appropriate Intervention and Differentiation:

- The PLC has a highly coordinated, sequential system of interventions in place.
- The PLC identifies and makes plans for students to receive extra support even before they fail. Student achievement is monitored on a daily basis. Students who experience difficulty are required, rather than invited, to put in extra time and utilize extra support. If the current level of support is not sufficient, there is an increased amount of time and support provided.
- All students are guaranteed access to this systematic intervention regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned.
- Teachers consistently differentiate curriculum components within each unit of study

Question 4: What will we do if they already know it?

The PLC will use results of the common assessments to determine which students need an extension of the learning. Just as the PLC provides additional time and support for those not learning the material, the PLC needs to engage the top students as well.

What does a high-functioning PLC look like at the sustaining stage of Question 4?

Determine Appropriate Enrichment and Differentiation:

- The PLC has a highly coordinated, sequential system of enrichment in place.
- The PLC identifies and makes plans for students who have already mastered the learning.
- All students are guaranteed access to this systematic enrichment regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned.
- Teachers consistently differentiate curriculum components within each unit of study.

★ The PLC Process Requires a Culture That is Simultaneously Loose and Tight

The PLC process empowers educators to make important decisions and encourages their creativity and innovation in the pursuit of improving student and adult learning.

Teachers working in collaborative teams have the primary responsibility for analyzing data, developing student learning, and strategies for improvement. Teachers have the authority to make all of the important decisions because these aspects of the PLC process are said to be “loose.”

At the same time, however, there are elements of the PLC that are “tight,” that is, they are nondiscretionary and everyone in the school is required to adhere to those elements.

Tight Components of MPMS PLC's

The tight elements of our MPMS PLC's include:

- Educators work collaboratively by meeting daily in PLCs and take collective responsibility for student learning, and clarify the commitments they make to each other about how they will work together.
- The team establishes a guaranteed and viable curriculum (Essential Standards), unit by unit, so all students have access to the same knowledge and skills regardless of the teacher to whom they are assigned.
- The team develops common formative assessments (Assessment FOR Learning) to frequently gather evidence of student learning.
- A systematic process is implemented to provide interventions and enrichments for all students including those that struggle and those who have reached proficiency. (examples - Tier I = Tiered Lesson Design; Tier II = tutorials, Hornet Time; Tier III = Prescribed programming (LLI, Dyslexia, etc.)
- The collaborative team uses evidence of student learning to inform and improve individual and collective practice of its members.

★ Guiding the Work - MPMS Guiding Coalition

To assist the campus in the “right” work, a leadership team or “Guiding Coalition” was created to assist us as an oversight of our work. The team consists of teachers, administrators, instructional coaches, counselors, technology personnel and other staff members. The purpose of the group is to assist the campus in moving from dialogue to action in regards to PLC work. Below are Collective Commitments (Non-Negotiables) established by our Guiding Coalition.

★ MPMS PLC Collective Commitments (Non-Negotiables)

- Our PLC is driven by the **4 Essential Questions** of a PLC...
 - What do we want our students to learn?
 - How do we know if they have learned it?
 - How do we respond if they didn't learn it?
 - How do we respond if they already learned it?
- Operating as a **Collaborative Team** by...
 - Being helpful
 - Being a problem solver

- Not taking things personally
 - Not multitasking
 - Celebrating each other's successes
 - Being present and focused with student achievement as the main priority
 - Alignment of work with school goals
- Conduct business with **Effective Communication** that is...
 - Positive
 - Professional
 - Open-minded
 - Honest
 - Patient
- Commit to always being **Prepared** for PLC time by...
 - Being focused
 - Staying on topic
 - Prioritizing goals
 - Following the agenda
 - Organizing and reviewing ALL materials
- Properly address **Content** by...
 - Aligning to the standards
 - Establishing and following sequence and pacing guides
 - Creating proficiency models and hold ALL students accountable
 - Making instructional decisions based on data
- Create a climate of **Risk Taking** by...
 - Buying in to campus initiatives
 - Being willing to try new things
 - Getting out of your comfort zone

★ **Development of Team Norms**

What Are Norms And Why Do We Need Them?

Norms are the framework from which team members commit to conduct business. Attention to their development and adherence to them ensure the success of the group and facilitate the members' ability to deal with critical issues. Norms are composed of several components that clarify team dynamics.

Norm Elements To Address Include:

TIME:

When and where will we meet?

Will we start on time?

LISTENING:

How will we listen to our peers?

Are there any bad ideas?

How will we discourage verbal interruptions when others are speaking?

CONFIDENTIALITY:

What content is to be held in confidence?

What can be shared after the meeting?

DECISION MAKING:

How will we arrive at a decision?

What if everyone doesn't agree with the group decision?

PARTICIPATION:

Is participation optional?

Will we have an attendance policy?

What will we do if a member consistently misses meetings?

EXPECTATIONS:

What do we expect from team members?

Do we need a method for ensuring each member comes to the meeting prepared with appropriate data or other items?

★ Setting SMART Goals**Rationale:**

SMART goals set the direction for educators to improve student achievement in a targeted area.

Definition:

A SMART goal clarifies exactly what students should learn, the standard of learning expected and the measure used to determine if students have achieved the standard. Goals should focus on the results rather than the process or task.

A SMART goal is:**Strategic and Specific -**

Focuses on specific student learning. It answers the questions - Who will learn? and What will they improve?

Measurable -

The success toward meeting the goal can be measured in student achievement. It answers the question - How will you know you have achieved the goal?

Attainable -

The goal is set to be achieved in a specific amount of time, with increased teacher effectiveness. It should be a stretch from current achievement data. It answers the question - Is this realistic yet a stretch?

Results Oriented –

The goal is measured on the basis of specific evidence.

Time-bound -

The goal has a clearly defined time frame including a target date. It answers the question - When will the final assessment of the goal occur?

Examples:

SMART goal: All 5th grade students will increase their score on the spatial sense, geometry, and measurement strand to at least 80% proficiency on the 2011 Math MCA-III.

Not a SMART goal: We will train teachers in PLCs during the 2010 - 2011 school year. The teacher training goal focuses on a process rather than on results; the goal could be achieved and student achievement could actually decline.

★ **Data Review**

Many questions often arise as a data discussion begins, but one of the biggest is: What do we do with it?

In the PLC, data will serve two different purposes. The first purpose is to define the greatest area of need for students on the team, which will give the PLC a focus for its work, and the second is to provide immediate feedback to inform real-time instruction and improve student learning.

PLC's will utilize the **MPMS Data Analysis Protocol** to determine their greatest area of need. By analyzing CFA data and other formative assessment data, PLC team members will be able to make just in time data driven decisions to adjust their instruction. Additionally, team members will be able to determine student by student and standard by standard decisions in regards to appropriate tier II interventions and enrichment activities for Hornet Time and tutorials.

Using Common Formative Assessment Data:

The data that can be gathered from a common formative assessment is dependent on how the assessment is designed. As PLCs collaboratively create their assessments, it is important to know what skill(s)/learning targets each item is assessing. Once the PLC knows what skills the items are assessing, they can gather data on the specific skills/learning targets students are or are not learning.

Some questions to consider while analyzing the results of a common formative assessment: What skills did the students do well on? With what skills did the students struggle? Is there a need for whole group intervention? If not, which specific students need intervention or enrichment?

PLC's will also utilize other data pieces including STAAR results, Benchmarks, and Unit (Summative) assessments to make the necessary instructional decisions for students based on need.

★ Strategies of Assessment FOR Learning

Formative Assessments...

are assessments for learning aligned to the essential learnings and are used by teachers and students during instruction. They provide feedback used to adjust ongoing teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes. **Examples:** exit cards, one minute quick writes, student interview, quick quizzes, homework that provides feedback, classroom observations, classroom questioning, or any other classroom activities that provide feedback to teachers and students about whether they have met a particular learning target, while they are still teaching/learning the content.

Summative Assessments...

are assessments of learning aligned to the essential learnings and designed to provide a measure to determine if learning goals have been met. Examples: teacher-created achievement tests, final exams, state tests

Strategies of Assessment FOR Learning

Assessment for learning should address three questions for the student. Each question may be addressed using specific strategies.

Where is the student going?

Strategy 1: Provide students with clear learning targets.

Strategy 2: Use examples of strong and weak work.

Where is the student now?

Strategy 3: Offer regular descriptive feedback.

Strategy 4: Teach students to self-assess and set goals.

How will the teacher help the student close the gap?

Strategy 5: Design lessons to focus on one learning target at a time.

Strategy 6: Teach students focused revision.

Strategy 7: Engage students in self-reflection, and let them keep track of their learning.

★ PLC Documents, Protocols, and Common Language

1. [MPMS PLC Agenda](#) - a document used by instructional coaches and teachers to plan meaningful PLCs
2. [MPMS Proficiency Map](#) - an overview that shows teams the standards by unit they will teach throughout the year and the length of time to spend on each unit
3. [MPMS Pacing Calendar](#) - a school calendar with the number of instructional days marked for each unit
4. [MPMS Essential/Priority Standards](#) - a list of priority standards chosen by the teams during PLC; the standards that you are guaranteeing ALL students will know and be able to do at the end of the year (These are the standards you will write your common formative assessments around and will be what your intervention and enrichment will be focused on.)
5. [Unpacking the Standard](#) - the process of creating focused learning targets based on verbs and nouns in standards
6. [MPMS PLC Unit Planning Template](#) - a document teams use at the beginning of each unit to look at the unit as an overview
7. [MPMS Lesson Plan Template](#) - a document format used to plan and submit daily lessons that are guided by the four PLC questions ([RLA Template](#))
8. [MPMS Lesson Cycle](#) - a period of instruction wherein students should master a given essential standard (Student data is collected through common formative assessments to determine intervention and enrichment.)
9. [MPMS Data Analysis Protocol](#) - a document format used to ensure campus alignment during data analysis (This document should be referenced during backwards planning and after assessment to inform interventions and extensions.)
10. **MPMS Common Language** - additional established terminology used during the PLC process
 - **Readiness standards** - emphasized on the assessments; essential for success in the current grade level or course.
 - **Learning objective** - standard, what the students need to know and master
 - **Learning target** - concrete goals written in student-friendly language that clearly describe what students will learn and be able to do by the end of a class, unit, project, or even a course
 - **CFA** - common formative assessment
 - **Tiered lesson** - a differentiation strategy that addresses a particular standard
 - **Intervention** - short-term, specific help to ensure students learn the unit's essential standards and associated learning targets on a unit by unit basis (Question 3)
 - **Enrichment** - opportunities for students to extend their learning of the essential standards (Question 4)