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Module 3: Building Effective PLC Teams

Essential Questions

- How are effective teams developed within a PLC?
- What are the qualities of effective teams?
- How do we know if our team is effective?

Expected Outcomes

Participants will:

- Identify the characteristics of high functioning and effective teams
- Describe the stages of team development
- Assess the use of goals in a PLC
- Conduct effective meetings (agendas/roles/facilitation)
- Communicate the work of PLCs across school/district
- Use resources and tools that support collaborative inquiry, adult learning, and problem solving
- Assess the work of your team and determine next steps

Vocabulary

- **Consensus** – requires that all members express opinions on any decision and agree that they can live with the decision that is being considered. Any decision a team makes should be judged on two criteria: how well the decision deals with the matter at hand and how committed the group members are in carrying it out. Consensus is most effective for incorporating different viewpoints and for creating discourse that contributes to a collaborative culture.
- **Norms** – A set of rules arrived at by group consensus designed to guide the behaviors of its members and establish a safe, ordered, and productive context for their work.
- **Reflection** – A process which involves mental concentration and careful consideration both individually and collectively for the purpose of generating new learning -and/or deeper understanding. Teams take time to reflect by journaling, using Dyad or Triad protocols and in individual written responses to the day's work

at the end of each meeting. “What’s one thing that made me think? What’s one question I have?”

- **Trust Building** – A process which aims to increase reliance on the integrity, character, and/or abilities of the members of a group and increases confidence in their ability to care for one another. A vivid picture of what should be / could be and might become used to guide actions in the present.
- **School Culture** – The organization, structure, and practices deliberately carried out to create a school climate. It also includes the norms established by the principal (or principal and teachers collaboratively) for professional interactions, and for expectations for student learning (standards stated or implicit).
- **Faculty Buy-In** – The degree to which a faculty supports a particular idea or initiative. Faculty buy-in is usually a function of the degree to which the idea(s) to be "bought" are understood by those who are being asked to "buy" them. People will tend to buy-in when they have been invited to consider, reflect, and provide input as partners in the process instead of being told what they are to "buy."
- **Protocols** – A protocol consists of agreed upon guidelines for a conversation, and it is the existence of this structure — which everyone understands and has agreed to — that permits a certain kind of conversation to occur — often a kind of conversation which people are not in the habit of having.
- **Debrief** – Making sure that each team’s agenda includes time to talk about its process, what it was like to be a member of the team? How did this protocol work for you? The debrief is only about process.

Introduction

Creating effective teams that are committed to improving student, team and school performance is a complex undertaking. Understanding what creates effective teams will help make your PLCs successful. Numerous studies and books chronicle the complexities of developing teams within organizations. These studies and books also document the practices that help teams meet their goals. Their findings can and have been successfully applied to schools.

Organizing for Success

**Minuteman Regional Vocational and Technical High School,
 Lexington, Massachusetts**

What Does an Effective Team Look Like?



Observing norms of start on time /end on time, the six ELA team members are seated in a circle, ready to go at the very start of their Common Planning Time three times a week in second period. After a brief Connections, Bill, the facilitator for the day, reviews the group's norms and timed agenda, which at this meeting involve a sharing of peer observations. Each team member participated in using a peer

observation protocol to have an opportunity to visit one another's rooms (some in pairs) with a focus of looking at formative assessments. The protocol includes time for discussion and sharing about what data was gleaned from the observation for the observers and the observed, and a chance to debrief the protocol they used.

Bill reminds the group that the focus of today's session is to add new data and insights to what they know about how a newly implemented teaching strategy is working, part of an overall year goal of improving writing instruction, based on the school's vision of all students as writers. He uses a simple protocol to allow all voices to be heard which allows each member a specific amount of time to share by going around the table and asking everyone to respond to two guiding questions and then allowing for ten minutes of general discussion around what they heard. At the end of the ten minutes each member is asked to write about what key learnings and questions (What evidence did we observe that informs us about what we are doing well? What more do we need to know? What do we need to do differently?) they took away from the observations and the discussion. The group then shares their responses while Bill charts the key discussion points for all to see. Finally, they decide on an action plan based on these key learnings and questions, with next steps, point people, benchmarks and timeline.

All of this goes into the notes being taken by the recorder as well as agenda items for the next meeting. Notes are shared via a school-wide Wiki which allows for online discussion and support from other departments and PLC teams engaged in similar work.

What an Effective Team is Not

Teachers, administrators, and support staff do not share roles— the planning, facilitation and recording of the meeting is the responsibility of one person or the same, small group of individuals.	Teachers, administrators, and support staff do not have common planning time and/or opportunities to meet on a regular basis.
Looking at data means formal assessments and does not extend to daily student and teacher work. Teachers know how to assess data but not how to use it to inform practice.	Teachers, administrators, and support staff do not have a planned agenda and meetings tend to be reactive rather than proactive.
Communication tends to be ONE way: decisions are communicated to staff, students, and their families but there is no formal system of communication between teams or teachers.	Teachers, administrators, and support staff engage in meetings where there is no clear focus and conversations tend to meander rather than support the collective learning of the group.
Teachers, administrators, and support staff engage in meetings that are not action-oriented but are rather “complaint/venting sessions” that do not yield clear resolutions to questions/problems.	Everyone knows who the “good” teachers are –and who isn’t. There is little teacher-to-teacher effort to share challenges and best practices or to support growth. There is no trust and no time.
When the meeting is over, no one seems to know what will be done next. If notes are taken, they are collected in a binder and are not actively circulated.	The “real” conversations between teachers about school happen in the parking lot.

PLCs need a mission and permission – They need the tools, the time and the trust to build a collaborative culture. When a PLC is low functioning due to a lack of district and school-wide commitment, its members quickly assign it a role of, “We did that. It didn’t work.” When the question comes back to those who are doing the work, “What do we need to do this well?” and they are allowed to both define that and explore it; there is growth.

Stages in Team Development

PLC teams, like any other shared-responsibility gathering, go through stages of development. Taking the time to frequently assess where a team is in its quest towards effectiveness, and allowing the necessary focused discussion to ask why and to plan how, provides a context for its progression without risking “getting stuck” in one phase of what is a natural development.

Bass and Avolio (1994) identified five common stages that team members go through on their way to working together effectively:

1. **Forming:** The development of mutual acceptance during early meetings and activities. During this stage, team members are friendly and often will not disagree with each other's ideas.
2. **Storming:** The development of open, honest discussion of differences that can produce group conflicts. This stage is a natural part of developing trust and open dialogue about issues. Caring and honest acceptance of differences will foster better planning.
3. **Norming:** The team starts to establish the norms for working together, being productive, and cooperating. The team is meshing together and becoming more cohesive and creative as open and honest conflict gets resolved into productive working relationships.
4. **Performing:** The team has its goals, working roles, and norms; members can solve problems openly and honestly, plan new programs, and communicate with each other and the rest of the staff.
5. **Reforming:** All teams eventually lose and then add members. In this stage, the team begins anew as old members move on and new members are added. The process of becoming a team starts again.

Characteristics of an Effective Team

Here are nine key ingredients to building successful teams. Most effective PLC teams could certainly add more to this recipe from their own experiences! What would this look like in your school or district?

Discourse Effective Teams have a culture of discourse at their center.	Purpose & Accountability Effective teams have a clearly defined purpose that guides their work and specific, measurable goals that they hold one another and the team accountable for attaining.	Norms Effective teams are committed to norms that guide how the team operates.
Focus Effective teams are disciplined in maintaining their focus.	Communication Effective teams communicate effectively within the team and with those outside the team.	Progress Effective teams improve the ability of their members to function as a team in the future.
Collaboration Effective teams use systems of consensus to arrive at group decisions. They collaborate to ask the “hard” questions about teaching and learning too often bypassed in a passive, collegial setting.	Trust Effective teams develop a culture of trust which allows members to look at their practice openly rather than defensively.	Agendas Effective teams use specific records that drive the group’s daily and ongoing work, structure the discourse and allow time to be used equitably and efficiently.

Discourse

Effective Teams have a culture of discourse at their center – In a culture of discourse, team members discuss and think about significant issues related to improving teaching, learning, and assessment. Team members demonstrate respect for each other by valuing differences of opinion and being open-minded in regard to others’ ideas. Disagreements and challenges are welcomed in team discussions, as they often push collective thinking to a deeper level. Ultimately, many of these conversations result in improved student learning and growth.

“Educators who believe that a ‘primer’ – containing the philosophical underpinnings of professional learning communities and the practical steps needed to create them – and the introduction of modest changes such as study groups and team times are a sufficient set of tools to ‘re-culture’ their school don’t really grasp the sea change required to deepen trust and to create the intellectual ferment that characterizes a learning organization.”

– Louis, 2006

It takes time and discipline to raise the quality of teacher discourse – focusing on ideas and application rather than on the housekeeping details that often take up so much of teachers' time.

When a culture of discourse is at the center of a team's operations, the work of the team is better informed by the expertise of its members and more likely to affect lasting change.

Teams may use text-based discussions, case studies, and protocols for looking at student work to deepen their conversations and get them focused on the substantial issues surrounding teaching and learning.

At times, meetings can become uncomfortable when a group is hashing out important and difficult issues. Using protocols are all about having difficult conversations about hard questions.

Purpose

Effective teams have a clearly defined purpose that guides their work and specific, measurable goals that they achieve – The most productive teams have a purpose or mission that they are deeply committed to that drives them forward. A clearly defined purpose energizes a team because all members understand exactly why they are together. Similar to an overarching goal, the purpose or mission defines the general intent of the team. The common purpose serves to keep the team focused at all times. All actions and decisions must make sense relative to this purpose. Effective teams define and create clear action-plan based goals formed by assessing multiple forms of data.

Specific, measurable goals are the steps that will lead a team toward accomplishing its purpose and making an impact on the school or students. Too often in schools, committees continue to meet and plan, but fail to achieve measurable results. Often, at the end of the school year, or when the team loses its momentum, little or no action has taken place. Clear, measurable goals prevent this wheel-spinning by focusing discussion on action and how to achieve the desired outcomes.

Teams, no matter how big or small, only function well when they share a common goal. The work of PLCs is fundamentally about raising student achievement. How they do so is determined by the data that informs them more specifically about challenges to be addressed. Once the challenges are identified their action plan follows a cycle of inquiry that drives the team's work. Their action plans have clear timelines and who is responsible for specific activities, and progress is regularly checked at subsequent team meetings.

Norms

Effective teams are committed to norms that guide how the team operates – Norms are ways of working together that can help groups be more thoughtful and productive. Norms exist in every learning community whether or not they are named or agreed upon. The process of formally establishing productive norms is to name the ways a group wants to work together for the purpose of achieving and being held accountable to their goals. In such an environment, people voice, question, support, disagree, and take risks while working together respectfully and purposefully toward shared goals.

“Professional learning communities demand that teachers develop grown-up norms in a grown-up profession – where difference, debate and disagreement are viewed as the foundation stones of improvement.”

Hargreaves (2003, p.163)

While some team members might feel that they do not have a “need” for norms as a professional group, we find they are a critical part of the structure for using time well. Created through consensus by the members of each unique group, these positive, brief agreements (“Watch air time”, “Focus on

agenda”, “Be present”, “All voices heard”, “Consensus”) are posted on a visible wall or on agendas, reviewed at the start of each meeting, and reflected on at the close. The group asks themselves, “How did we do? Did we observe our norms? What do we need to be more aware of? Do we need to add or alter them?” Each member of the group is responsible for accountability to the agreed norms. “In looking at our norm around start on time/end on time, I am wondering if we are struggling to observe that and what we might need to differently.”

Focus

Effective teams are disciplined in maintaining their focus – Teams in PLCs have numerous responsibilities. How team members manage these differing roles and relationships affects how successful they are. The successful team uses the purpose, goals, and norms to maintain its focus. With each new idea, discussion, or possibility, all team members should ask whether the issues fits the purpose, moves them toward achieving the goals, and can be addressed within the team’s operating approach.

For example, a PLC investigating the school’s ability to teach low-level readers might find it difficult to meet and remain focused when mid-term reports are due or a field trip is planned for the next week. Yet, despite the many immediate pressures that members face, this team will meet because they understand that the long-term results of their work are vital to their growth and student progress.

To maintain focus, team members should continuously assess the team’s work. Keeping records of lessons learned, ideas discussed, decisions made, action taken, and communication with people outside the team can help evaluate a team’s focus.

Agendas as Part of PLC Fundamental Structure

Some schools and districts adopt a universal template for team agendas that allows for easier communication between teams, while others prefer to use one unique to their own needs. Agendas identify the key meeting goals, and often include overarching essential questions to the day’s meeting agenda.

Key to each agenda might be who is present, what will happen (questions explored, protocols used) or be discussed, as well as who will facilitate, who will time-keep and who will take notes. Including times for each agenda item is valuable. Having this agenda available on a document to type into directly by the Notes Taker at each meeting is an efficient means of communicating

immediately with team members as it can be sent out immediately. Some teams as they come newly to this work, ask that notes be approved by the team prior to being sent to the school community, with a 24 hour deadline to check and either offer changes or approve.

The agenda template has a clear inclusion of what was discussed, what decisions or actions were taken, who will be the point person in seeing that a resulting action plan is carried through, and when the action plan will be completed. Many teams include their norms right on the agenda template, which allows for a quick review by each member at meeting opening and for a closing, "How did we do?"

PLC Meeting Agenda/ Action Record	
Grade Level PK K 1 2 3 4 5 Sp. Ed Whole Staff Date:	
Team Members Present:	Norms: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be responsible- share the load, follow through • Be a respectful participant- take an active role in discussions and listen actively • Be flexible and reflective- be open minded • Be focused- stick with task and stay on topic • Be prepared- be on time and accountable for ourselves and others • Equity of voice
Roles: Facilitator (be sure to review norms): Kay Time Keeper:	Recorder: Susan Other:
Possible Purposes for Meeting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify Specific SLE to target • Design Explicit Lesson • Develop Formative Assessment • Scaffold Skills • Analyze Student Work • Differentiate Instruction/determine strategies or interventions 	Purpose/goal for this meeting: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •
Discussion/ Decision Summary:	
What follow-up is needed based on the information shared at this meeting?	
Action Steps:	Person Responsible:
Agenda for Next Meeting:	Data to collect and bring to next meeting:
Reflection of norms:	Date of next meeting:

Effective teams use specific records that drive the group's daily and ongoing work, structure the discourse and allow time to be used equitably and efficiently

Collaboration

Effective teams use systems of consensus to arrive at group decisions. They collaborate to ask the “hard” questions about teaching and learning too often bypassed in a passive, collegial setting – While teams may be collegial (cordial, friendly and respectful); it is the collaborative work that gets results. In professional collaborative cultures, teams engage in a

To Build a Collaborative Culture all members of the school community must...

- *Share the belief that working together collaboratively is the best way to reach the school’s goals*
- *Develop organizational structures that allow teachers to form teams and work together*
- *Agree on norms so teams can work effectively*
- *Define a collaborative vision based on what the school community authentically believes is the purpose of the school*
- *Set goals to achieve the vision*
- *Create an action plan to realize the goals*
- *Benchmark progress*
- *Be willing to collaboratively explore with and ask hard questions*
- *Celebrate success!*

number of practices with the goal of improving student learning. Colleagues use protocols, which foster a safe and structured environment to look at student and teacher work, offering support and feedback. Failures, mistakes and uncertainty are openly shared and discussed, often leading to greater risk-taking and experimentation in instructional practice. Collaboration moves the work beyond easy questions and allows the hard questions to drive further inquiry. The collaborative process of consensus requires that each team member take an active role in arriving at a best solution that each “owns” and understands.

Communication

Effective teams communicate effectively within the team and with those outside the team

- Depending on the nature of their work, teacher teams must communicate with other teachers, the Leadership Team, the Principal, other teams, parents, students, or the larger community outside the school. Effective communication informs other members of the school community of a team’s progress and allows outside groups to aid the team’s work. Teams need clear systems for passing on materials, discussions, and results from their work. Distributing minutes or short updates to those affected by or connected to the work helps keep those outside the team informed. Giving presentations to other teams or parent groups, creating team portfolios, or inviting community members to sit in on meetings are other ways for teacher teams to build bridges to those who can help them.

Progress

Effective teams improve the ability of their members to function as a team in the future -

While it is important that a team reach its goals, how they reach them is equally important. Truly dynamic teams show evidence of growth over time. For example, in the first year, members may become familiar with the team format and protocols used to guide discussions. In subsequent years, teams may make individual refinements and changes according to their needs. With experience, team members learn to work together better while they develop skills that they can bring to other teams they may work with in the future. Improving each member’s

ability for teamwork not only helps the existing team, but also moves the whole school forward. These team skills may include developing trust among group members, being open and honest with feedback and praise, creating agendas, developing communication methods, and facilitating meetings. Carl Glickman (1993) found that in successful schools, teachers are less satisfied with their teaching than teachers in less successful schools, because they are always seeking new ways to improve. The same dynamic is found in successful teams; the most effective teams are always reflecting and identifying ways to improve how they function and improve their instructional practice and student learning.

Trust

Effective teams develop a culture of trust, which allows members to look at their practice



openly rather than defensively – Trust is probably the greatest challenge to developing effective teams. A high functioning team allows its members to take risks. Studies of low performing schools indicate that it is a lack of trust at many levels that is the greatest obstacle to reform. Anthony Bryk (2006) found in a study of Chicago elementary schools that in schools scoring in the top quartile in the district on state tests, at least 75% of teachers reported having strong or very strong relationships with the principal and other

faculty. Conversely, in the bottom quartile schools, teachers reported having little or no trust with the principal and other colleagues. Bryk determined that this “Relational Trust” is a key factor to creating successful schools. Schools that have strong relational trust deliberately create the professional learning community structures, conditions, and culture that promote the building of strong trust among professionals.

Building trust requires time. Once norms are created, the team needs to work together on how to honor them. PLC time has to consistently provide opportunities for staff to work collaboratively without disruption by something ‘more urgent’. Attention needs to be purposefully directed to discourse on valuing differences in culture, experience, and expertise that each brings to the school environment.

“If you think about what it means to accept other teachers’ expertise and be willing to exhibit problems in your classroom, we need to take this trust feature very seriously. We can’t create the kind of professional community and the problem-based learning environments that we really need if you don’t have this.”

Karen Seashore Lewis

Next Steps

In addition to these important factors to consider in building professional collaborative cultures, here are some suggested steps which can support the creation of PLC at the school level.

Step 1: Build Trust

Effective teams can seldom afford to fast forward to “The Work” without ensuring shared norms which guide the work of team members. We can’t emphasize too strongly how critical the creation and observance of norms are for creating effective teams. Often schools worry about how to “get” teacher “buy-in” to PLC. Teachers need to be able to explore those concerns to arrive at a common agreement to commit to PLC work. Simply creating—and honoring—norms of conduct is often such a giant step towards creating community that even the biggest hold-outs are often amazed at what it feels like to be working in a well-functioning group.

- A. Create norms of understanding. Give the creation of norms the time it critically deserves. Each group that meets needs to have current norms that are created by those at the table. When that dynamic changes (someone leaves/someone comes) then norms need to be re-visited. Another approach to pushing discussion about norms is to start a meeting by using the Peeves and Traits Protocol which allows each member to be graphically clear about what he or she needs to make working in a team effective. This is a safe way for team members to share what they really need, and used more than once can help in re-visiting what may be static norms.
- B. Post norms where everyone can see them, or including them on the day’s agenda allows everyone to remain aware of agreed upon understandings of conduct.
- C. Reflecting on Norms is an effective practice as well. Recording your group’s norms on the day’s agenda gives the group time to reflect on them at both ends of a meeting. At the end of the meeting, members rate how they did in honoring their norms and those numbers are shared at the next meeting. (“Last week we did really well with our norms but were challenged by observing our norm of watching air space.”) This is often enough of a prompt to remind members to be thoughtful!
- D. Keep active and transparent about working with norms. Everyone is responsible for supporting them. When a norm is challenged (example: the group has a norm of “Be Present” and some members are continually checking their cell phones) any member of the team should feel safe addressing it (“I’m wondering if we can re-visit our norm of ‘Be Present’ “ or “It would be really helpful for me as a participant if we could agree to include cell phones under our norm of ‘Be Present’?”
- E. Starting each meeting by using some form of Connections to allow people to share what is on their mind in a structured format so that they can be “present” for the work of the team is well worth the 3 minutes it takes on the agenda. Connections can take many forms but the very simplest format is just to provide a space for one voice at a time to share what is on his or her mind VERY briefly, with NO dialogue. It is a listening protocol and when it is done it is done, and the team moves into its agenda.

- F.** Include activities that build trust as a regular part of early meetings. Compass Points is an excellent way to begin to break down barriers to trust by helping groups to see the value of each other's working styles and nearly always helps groups relax—and laugh. Classroom Meeting is often enjoyed by PLC teams as a protocol that helps get the question on the table allows for shared input and allows everyone to get a sense of how each member feels. We include several more in this section's Tools as well as in the Project's Tool Kit.
- G.** Review and arrive at how decisions will be made. Most PLCs use consensus which means each member agrees to be willing to “give” to find common decisions in the best interest of how that supports teaching and learning. Go through the process of what that looks like and how the group agrees to get there. Many teams use a simple “thumbs up” (in favor) “thumbs down” (don't agree) “thumb” neutral” (I can live with it).

Tools to Support Step 1 – Building Community

***Note:** *All tools & resources listed here can be downloaded as PDFs from our PLC website: <http://plcexpansionproject.weebly.com>. Many of the tools used in this Guide are excellent for use in the classroom as well.*

Creating Ground Rules: If your group hasn't done this yet—use this protocol for identifying “norms” of conduct. Requires stickies, chart paper or white board and time to talk; All groups need shared norms they create and honor together. These are the hallmark of highly professionally productive collaborative work.

Norms Exemplars: Some common norms teams have found very helpful. Keeping norms positive and generic are helpful in creating high expectations.

PLC Pilot Institute Norms

- Active Listening
- Recognize that everyone is a learner
- Check your assumptions
- Trust the process
- Respect all voices
- Start and end on time

Peeves and Traits Protocol: Use this as a “bell ringer” for team meetings with directions either at the table or on the wall. Allows members to prioritize a need for structure or conduct and let the rest of the group know about what this is and why they need it.

Compass Points : Actively exploring what working style strengths each member brings to the team and what challenges that might create for members who work differently is a great way to work towards understanding and trust. Most participants enjoy this lively protocol, especially valuable for creating “buy-in”.

Making Decisions by Consensus: A guide to consensus-making and a checklist for facilitators, this is a good tool to allocate time for on an agenda so that every member of the team can be part of creating a common understanding about what it means to arrive at consensus.

Fist of Five: In this method of determining where a group is in getting to consensus, each member of the group can hold up a fist to indicate blocking consensus, one finger to suggest changes, two fingers to discuss minor issues, three fingers to indicate willingness to let issue pass without further discussion, four fingers to affirm the decision as a good idea, and five fingers to volunteer to take a lead in implementing the decision. If a member “blocks” the decision, he or she must be willing to suggest changes, listen to clarification from others, be open to actively finding consensus, and expect a conversation!

Classroom Meeting: Classroom Meetings are a safe, quick way to publicly take the pulse of your group around a particular topic or issue. Using this protocol as a connection to how people are feeling about an issue or in arriving at a common understanding can be really helpful in creating norms of sharing and trust. Create your own question, relevant to the concern that is on the table.

Connections: Include Connections as the start of every agenda. If we allow members to share what is on their minds in a structured format, it allows them to both focus and not need to have a side conversation later on. Although the protocol calls for ten minutes, we often find that 3-5 is fine if the group is small. Team members need to be gently reminded at the start of Connections that this is a quiet activity—no dialogue. None. Body language is fine though! Listen, think, and relax. Silence is okay. Some team members find this activity awkward to start as they are unused to having quiet time in a group. You may find that using a prompt to help the team get used to this format can help in early stages; “a student who made you think today” or “a student who made you laugh” or a more general question that does not need to be at all related to school. One member may need to talk about the speeding ticket she got on the way in today; another may relate a brief story about teaching his son to scramble eggs. Persevere with this protocol—it can really help a team focus. What gets shared in Connections—stays in Connections.

100 Pennies: Use this as a connections activity, a way of introducing people and capturing the range of experiences of a group. You’ll need 100 pennies! Allows teams to both think about what comprises a powerful learning experience (in or out of school) as well as providing further insight into knowing more about each other.

Postcards From the Edge: A thought provoking connections activity. Allow time for stories. You will need to collect a variety of art or travel postcards which participants use as prompts to sharing a story about themselves.

Step 2: Develop Purpose & Accountability

Establish the structures that allow this work to be done. Effective teams can seldom afford to fast-forward to “The Work” without ensuring shared vision and goals.

- A.** Create common templates for agendas and a system of communication so that all members of your school-wide learning community are informed about the work of each group. Using prompts built-in to the templates to ensure critical parts of each agenda are met are a very helpful tool.

- B. Review the work and responsibilities of Facilitator, Time-Keeper, and Note-Taker and identify what these roles look like when done well. Rotating responsibility for these roles is one valuable way of preserving equity on the team. One good way to gain experience in using and facilitating protocol if you do not have a coach is to identify a co-facilitator and work together. Don't forget to debrief the process!
- C. Use Module 2 Survey Data as an entry point to successes and challenges on your team. Where is your group in its stages of development? Where does it want to be? An active way to assess what the data looks like is to ask members of the group to participate in a Continuum Dialogue based on questions from the Survey. This protocol requires a facilitator who asks people, "Why have you placed yourself at that point of the continuum?" Answers inform the group as well as raising further questions about what the group needs to have in place in order to do this work well.
- D. Define your team's purpose. "Why are we a team? What is our purpose?" The work of all PLCs in schools is focused on teaching and learning. Teams who find themselves working on issues which are a long way from what happens in the classroom would be well advised to ask themselves, "How is what we do in our work together positively impacting teaching and learning? What is our evidence?" This question can serve as a reflective benchmark throughout a team's work together and should be re-visited frequently.
- E. Communicate the work of teams. Many schools now use a Wiki, Google Drive or access on the school's website to upload meeting notes, tools, resources and discussion forums. They use school e-mail as a way to alert the community to new notes or information but the material itself is on the Wiki and not just an addition to an unwieldy load of e-mails.
- F. Finally, **reflection** is one norm, habit of mind and practice your PLC will want to observe frequently. How are we doing? What went well? What didn't? What questions do we have? What more do we need to know? Building a practice of recording responses to these reflections and sharing them (often not inclusive of names but just bulleted under each prompt) and including them in the meeting's notes is enormously helpful in staying focused. Referring back to them at the start of the next meeting keeps the group mindful of where it is and where it wants to be, allowing for wiggle room in how to get there.

Tools to support Step 2: Creating Structure

Obstacle Resolution Protocol: Helpful for groups who may be "stuck" in finding consensus (which happens in even in the highest-functioning teams). This protocol helps people look at what is getting in their way of finding common ground and moves the discourse forward.

Assessing A Team's Quality of Work: One of the facets of PLC is in assessing progress in how the team is functioning, a protocol which should be addressed at regular times in the team's calendar.

Continuum Dialogue: The Continuum Dialogue is a provocative yet non-threatening way to get to know the people one works with: their perspectives, their beliefs, their opinions on hard issues, how they think about themselves and others, what they think about teaching and

learning. It is also useful to see where people stand on difficult issues that need decisions and hear them out with respect and interest.

Guidelines to Effective Facilitation: It's helpful to use this facilitation check list as teams grow in confidence. Learning to facilitate well in a team is often “easy” as long as there are no conflicts but gets a lot more difficult when those arise (as they will); Reflecting and being “transparent” in how to manage challenges is the work of the team.

Guidelines for Effective Meetings: Helpful checklist to use when planning and reflecting on process. Use this both to build the right agenda template that meets your school/district needs and to re-visit it regularly as a benchmark to assess whether its working well for all uses.

Agenda Template Exemplars: These are just a few examples of what some schools and districts have created to ensure that meaningful work is accomplished and recorded (and shared). Groups can look at current agendas and compare with these—what works? What doesn't? Whose agenda is this—and whose values does it have? Beware of that time-eating laundry list!

This module is interdependent with tools introduced in Modules 1 and 2 as well as those you will use from Modules 1, 2, 4, and 5. Many of the protocols are useful in a variety of situations.
[Read ahead!](#)