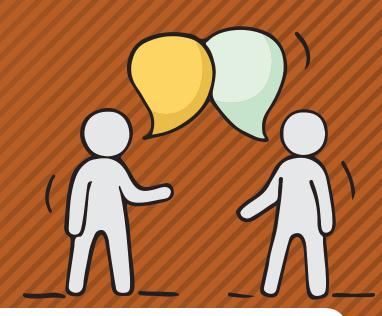# Module 1

THE PURPOSE AND STATUS OF YOUR PLC+

PUT THE PLAYBOOK TO WORK FOR YOU

The opening module of the Playbook serves to help your professional learning community build foundational knowledge about PLC+. Teams that are already acquainted with the PLC+ framework do not need to repeat Modules 1 and 2 at the start of every inquiry cycle. However, as new team members join, we advise that you revisit this work in order to sustain core knowledge. This module presents information about the characteristics of high-performing teams, followed by discussion of the five PLC+ guiding questions that drive your work. The purpose of this module is for teams to unearth assumptions about how professional learning communities work, and to promote the use of a shared vocabulary for professional inquiry and action.

PLC DEFINED

Take a moment to read the following quote by Shirley Hord (2007). As you read it, underline commonalities in what Hord describes as the purpose of a PLC, and the purposes that your team has captured. Circle anything that Hord mentions that resonates with you, whether it is confirmation of your current work, or aspirational:

A PLC is demonstrated by the collective learning that occurs. Professional staff from all departments and grade levels come together to study collegially and work collaboratively. They engage in collegial inquiry that includes reflection and discussion focused on instruction and student learning. They are continuously learning together. For example, a group may begin investigating student performance data to assess student successes and needs. Through reflection and discussion, the group identifies areas that need

◂ **VIDEO 2: MODULE 1 INTRODUCTION**
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attention—areas where they need to learn new content or instructional strategies. The group then explores how they will learn the new content or strategies. The group members may decide they will learn from someone on staff, from a central office specialist, from a colleague at another school, or from an external consultant. After they have put what they learned into practice, the staff goes through another cycle of reflection, discussion, and assessment. In other words, the learning is ongoing.

The PLC structure is one of continuous adult learning, strong collaboration, democratic participation, and consensus about the school environment and culture and how to attain the desired environment and culture. In such a collegial culture, educators talk with one another about their practice, share knowledge, observe one another, and root for one another's success (Barth, 2006).

NOTES

TEAM TIME DISCUSSION

Discuss the concepts you and your team members circled. Which of these describe your current processes? Which are elements you are striving for?

Thus, the two main purposes, as noted in the introduction of the PLC+ book, are

1. To improve the pedagogical knowledge (skills and knowledge about how we teach) and the content knowledge (skills and knowledge about what we teach) of educators through collaboration between colleagues

2. To improve the learning outcomes of students

There are six evidence-based characteristics of PLCs (Hord, 2004). Each of these needs to be considered if professional learning communities are to thrive. While the presence of these characteristics in and of themselves won't necessarily mean a PLC is effective, they are important considerations that teams should discuss as they embark on the journey of improving student learning and teacher expertise. Take a moment to individually self-assess your current reality against each of the six characteristics using the rating system below.

4: This is systematically embedded within our PLC.

3: This exists but couldn't yet be considered systematized.

2: This happens randomly and is not commonplace.

1: This is not yet established in our PLC.

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SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE PLC	CURRENT RATING
1. **Structural Conditions:** Does our PLC have established times that we are able to meet? Are there schedules in place that support collaboration and diminish isolation? Is there availability of needed resources?	4 3 2 1

Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic

2. **Supportive Relational Conditions:** Is there trust and respect in place within our PLC that provides the basis for giving and accepting feedback in order to work toward improvement?	4 3 2 1

Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic

3. **Shared Values and Vision:** Do members of the team have the same goal? Do they have shared beliefs about student learning and the ability of team members to impact student learning?	4 3 2 1

Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic

(Continued)

(Continued)

SIX CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EFFECTIVE PLC	CURRENT RATING
4. Intentional Collective Learning: Does our PLC engage in discourse and reflection around sharing practices, knowledge, and skills to impact the growth and achievement of our students? Do we find ways to learn from each other or learn together?	4 3 2 1

Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic

5. Peers Supporting Peers: Does our PLC support lifting each other up? Do we celebrate individual and group successes? Do we observe one another while engaged in practice to help others strengthen their practice?	4 3 2 1

Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic

6. Shared and Supportive Leadership: Are power, authority, and decision making shared and encouraged between teachers and building leaders? Is there a positive relationship among administrators and teachers in the school, where all staff members grow professionally as they work toward the same goal?	4 3 2 1

Ideas for Maintaining or Strengthening This Characteristic

The PLC+ Playbook

TEAM TIME DISCUSSION

Share your ideas for maintaining or strengthening each of the six characteristics. Identify three to five actions your PLC+ is committed to taking to do so.

PLC is not a new term or concept. There are most likely strengths that exist within your current PLC structure that will enhance the ideas and concepts captured in the PLC+ framework. The framework is designed to capitalize on what your PLC is already doing well while offering new and innovative ways to think about teaching and learning, with a focus on the students as well as the teacher. Take a moment to read about the five PLC+ guiding questions on the following two pages. As you read, think about the similarities and differences the PLC+ captures in relation to your existing PLC structure. Capture your thoughts in the table on page 10.

PLC+ GUIDING QUESTIONS

1. Where are we going?

This first question is critical. Teams that can answer this question have high levels of teacher clarity. They are keenly aware of the academic standards their students are held accountable to, and they have analyzed these standards to ensure a thorough understanding of the skills, concepts, and rigor level that lie within each standard. That clarity is used to drive the engineering of learning tasks so that evidence of student learning can be gathered and used to make instructional inferences moving forward. This work is often guided by pacing guides and supported with a variety of curricular resources.

2. Where are we now?

In order to answer this question, teams need to have evidence to determine current student proficiency and readiness levels against what they captured in the "Where are we going?" question above. This allows teams to determine appropriate entry points for instruction starting with where students are and moving them to where they need to be. This may require an inventory of existing assessments to identify current resources your team has access to, as well as determining the assessments that will need to be collaboratively designed by the team members. From there, teams identify a common challenge that will drive inquiry into their students' current learning needs.

3. How do we move learning forward?

This question focuses on our teaching practices and the means by which we learn from one another. Learning walks and microteaching are two effective ways to frame the ways in which we analyze our own teaching using the wisdom of peers. These are not the only ways to consider how to best move learning forward. We cross-examine the tasks that we have designed for our students by analyzing assignments for rigor and alignment to standards.

4. What did we learn today?

This is a question often asked of students that has just as much power when asked of the adults. Focusing on this question helps teams to synthesize the information discussed and the data reviewed to examine student progress and achievement. Posing this question to teams helps to ground actions and commitments moving forward. By the same notion, we have to acknowledge the simplicity but significance of this question: *If we gathered and met as a PLC and didn't learn anything, couldn't we have just emailed each other what we talked about?*

5. Who benefited and who did not benefit?

This question continues the examination of student progress and achievement. At times, students who are already at high levels of achievement are not focused on as much as students who possess large deficits in their learning. However, growth is something that all students deserve regardless of their current proficiency level. A focus on this question exposes both, thus guiding team members where to go next for each learner. This is an equity question, and addressing it ensures that factors such as race, socioeconomic status, or disability status aren't used as excuses that impede a student's ability to learn. Teams examine the supports designed for students in light of what is working and take action to improve what is not.

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TEAM TIME DISCUSSION

Where are there some new opportunities that the PLC+ framework offers to your existing PLC practices?

SIMILARITIES TO OUR EXISTING PLC STRUCTURE		DIFFERENCES FROM OUR EXISTING PLC STRUCTURE
	1. Where are we going?	
	2. Where are we now?	
	3. How do we move learning forward?	
	4. What did we learn today?	
	5. Who benefited and who did not benefit?	