

Just What is a PLC, and Why is Everyone Talking About Them?

Despite the challenging nature of the budget shortfall, the TTUSD leadership team remains focused on implementing a new educational model designed — and proven — to enhance student achievement.

Earlier this year, principals, administrators and one board member visited the Sanger School District near Fresno, Calif., in order to observe their educational delivery methods and experience the moving parts of this educational model firsthand. In addition, in January, board members and administration attended a conference at which the leading experts in the field of this educational model — Richard and Rebecca DuFour — shared information on strategies for educators to improve their schools.

The educational model centers around a concept known as Professional Learning Committees (PLCs). In a PLC, teachers work together to clarify and focus on the essential outcomes for each course, each grade level and each unit of instruction. These common essential outcomes reflect the teachers' efforts to build shared knowledge regarding best practices. Members of each team work interdependently to achieve common goals. In order to accomplish this, each team is provided with time to meet and uses that time to engage in collective inquiry on questions specifically linked to gains in student achievement.

"Effective school cultures establish clear parameters and priorities that enable individuals to work within established boundaries in a creative and autonomous way," explains Steve Jennings, TTUSD Superintendent. "The collaboration that characterizes PLCs is a process in which 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," he adds.

According to Gayle Garbolino-Mojica, Placer County Superintendent of Schools, PLC's have transformed schools and school districts across the country, and the Placer County Office of Education, which oversees the Tahoe-Truckee Unified School District, is committed to support building dynamic PLCs in all schools throughout the region.

Historically, TTUSD has not extensively collaborated between school sites. "We have had many successes within TTUSD; they are simply not systematically implemented across every classroom in the district," notes Bev Ducey, TTUSD Trustee, who visited the Sanger School District in January. "Basically, we are trying to learn from other's success so we can accelerate our ability to meet the state and federal achievement goals."

Under the DuFour model, collaboration and analysis of student achievement will allow for greater consistency — and accountability — across the district.

The TTUSD Board of Trustees is holding a series of additional workshops to address the budget crisis it is experiencing, and a schedule of these meetings can be found on

TTUSD's website. The public is encouraged to attend and be part of the budget process. Additionally, information, including feedback from the recent community forums, has been compiled into one large list to be analyzed and explored as possible solutions, and is posted to the TTUSD website. For a meeting schedule, or more information on school district happenings, click [here](#).

“Currently, a lot of attention goes to the kids who are not achieving at optimum levels. This new model will accommodate not only those children with additional intervention time, but will also address the higher-achieving students with additional enrichment,” Jennings explains.

Ongoing analysis of data is a critical component in the teaching and learning of this educational model. Data are transformed into information that impacts practice because it is easily accessible and openly shared. Teachers use results to identify strengths and weaknesses in their individual practice, to help each other address areas of concern, and improve their effectiveness in helping all students learn. In addition, the focus on results is critical to both the school’s system of interventions as well as a culture of celebration for its successes.

TTUSD has been working on this model for two years. However, implementing and sustaining the concept will require a shift in the current practices, and while some school sites are already on the PLC path, some will be initiating new practices in this direction. “The new model will require hard work and commitment,” says Bev Ducey, TTUSD Trustee. “But when educators do the hard work necessary to put these principles in place, their collective ability to help all students learn will rise,” she adds.

Kings Beach Elementary School Principal Eileen Fahrner, who visited the Sanger District with TTUSD in January, noted the trip was helpful in developing a common understanding and vocabulary of the PLC philosophy. “(It) helped to reiterate what we’ve already learned about PLCs,” Fahrner noted, “and to build on what we have been trying to create and fine tune at our schools to enhance student achievement.”

Noting it is a model TTUSD intends to implement for long range purposes, Jennings adds, “We’re looking at this in terms of what needs to happen now, next year, and into the future to accommodate our kids and allow them to be competitive in college and beyond.”

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