Building Professional Learning Communities: Uses of PLC Aid

Background: As part of the 2017 state budget, a new category of aid to schools, Professional Learning Community (PLC) Aid, has been provided to support the development of learning communities within and across districts, in order to help teachers and administrators analyze and use the assessment data they collect to improve classroom instruction. In this document, the State Professional Learning Committee is offering detailed suggestions for the use of PLC Aid for the development, effectiveness and sustainability of PLCs.

PLCs can offer an effective, collaborative learning-focused process that can foster improvement in teaching and learning by providing a powerful infrastructure where teachers can engage in constructive dialogue, reflect on and improve instruction, and share ways to increase effectiveness in the classroom to positively impact student learning.

How to Use This Document: The four charts below represent aspects of the work of PLCs: holding collaborative meetings, focusing on student learning outcomes, aligning standards and student learning objectives, and driving effective instruction. Within each chart, the information is organized by stages of PLC development and provides suggestions and examples of ways in which PLC Aid funds can be used support the work in that area. Please note that this guidance is intended as a starting point and is in no way a comprehensive description of PLC work or an exhaustive list of possible supports, nor is it a statement of requirements. All uses of PLC funds are local decisions.

HOLDING COLLABORATIVE MEETINGS

Development Status	In this stage PLC members are:	Consider using PLC Aid to:

BEGINNING	• Working to increase collaboration
	• Developing a clear purpose and structure
	• Identifying meeting norms
	• Improving meeting facilitation
	• Working to meet regularly
		• Distribute and analyze climate/culture surveys on:
		  o Levels of collaboration
		  o Structures to support PLCs
		  o Degrees of trust
		• Perform an audit of your district to identify existing structures, policies and activities that support PLCs
		• Provide resources (e.g., books, articles, media, workshops) on:
		  o Meeting facilitation skills
		  o Effective collaboration and teamwork
		  o Communication skills

EMERGING	• Working to have regularly scheduled, outcomes-oriented meetings
	• Establishing meeting norms, policies and procedures
	• Acknowledging stage of team development and focusing on progress
		• Plan a retreat for PLC team members
		• Provide a skilled facilitator to model best practices in meeting management
		• Provide resources (e.g., books, articles, media, workshops) on:
		  o Establishing meaningful goals and objectives
		  o Stages of team development
		  o Developing trust
		• Audit current organizational and scheduling structures to maximize time available for PLC work and common planning

DEVELOPING	• Holding regular meetings with consistent attendance • Focusing meetings on goals and outcomes • Sharing meeting participation equally among members • Working on developing functioning subcommittees	• Provide opportunities to attend relevant conferences and symposia on PLC teamwork Assess the committee's impact on the school using surveys, interviews and other data • Provide opportunities for committee members to celebrate successes and recharge • Share positive PLC results with the district and school communities • Enable committee members to visit and observe successful and sustaining committees
SUSTAINING	• Using PLC structures and practices that are well documented • Using established protocols to conduct meetings • Maintaining consistent PLC operations throughout administrative and personnel changes • Orienting new members in an organized and systematic manner	• Provide opportunities for committee members to present workshops and otherwise disseminate their practice (e.g., develop videos, blogs, podcasts) • Provide materials and supplies for the committee to produce high quality documentation and resources • Maintain high capacity computer networks and technical equipment for collaborative and instructional purposes

FOCUSING ON STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

Development Status	In this stage PLC members are:	Consider using PLC Aid to:

BEGINNING	• Identifying issues critical to improving student learning
	• Identifying existing data on student performance
	• Prioritizing curricular and instructional goals based on student performance
	• Working to represent all student content and grade levels
		• Provide resources (e.g., books, articles, media, workshops) on:
		  ○ The purpose and functions of a PLC
		  ○ PLC best practices
		  ○ Types of student assessment data
		  ○ Use of data to inform and assess effectiveness of instruction
		• Provide resources for team to disseminate information on the PLC student learning goals throughout the building/district
		• Enable a PLC member to present information on the PLC goals at various school and district level meetings

EMERGING and DEVELOPING	• Using guiding questions related to student learning to focus discussions
	• Using data to address the guiding questions
	• Beginning to align assessments and instructional practices to standards
	• Communicating student learning issues across grade levels and content areas
		• Put together a team to assess all the types of data collected
		• Continue to build resources (e.g., books, articles, media, workshops) on:
		  ○ Setting goals and objectives
		  ○ Collecting, analyzing and using data to drive instruction
		• Identify technology that supports PLCs
		  ○ Subscriptions to telecasts and podcasts
		  ○ Devices to access media

SUSTAINING	• Maintaining work focused on addressing guiding questions related to student learning • Maintaining collaboration across grade levels and content areas in developing student-learning-focused goals	• Provide opportunities for PLC members to compare data and student learning goals with PLC members across the district • Develop communications systems that enable PLC members and all staff to share ideas, information and successes (consider electronic media such as on-line bulletin boards, blogs, newsletters, etc.)

ALIGNING TO STANDARDS AND STUDENT LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Development Status	In this stage PLC members are:	Consider using PLC Aid to:
BEGINNING	- Beginning to unpack standards - Learning to write outcome focused, "SMART" goals - Using shared content and curriculum knowledge to convert standards to student-friendly learning objectives (SLOs) - Learning to use SLOs to develop aligned assessments	- Provide resources (e.g., books, articles, media, workshops) on: - Writing student learning objectives - Developing scope and sequence - Identifying formative and summative assessments - Give PLC members access to skilled curriculum developers - Support cross-curricular and vertical collaboration for developing curriculum - Provide means to establish assessment "warehouses" to share successful, aligned evaluation tools
EMERGING and DEVELOPING	- Consistently collaborating with staff to update and refine curriculum that is standards aligned - Working with staff and administration to ensure clear and outcome oriented SLOs - Reviewing formative and summative assessments on an ongoing basis to ensure they are aligned with SLOs - Collecting and analyzing data on progress towards meeting SLOs to revise curriculum where needed, based on assessments	- Provide resources (e.g., books, articles, media, workshops) on how to: - Analyze data - Unpack standards - Identify effective instructional strategies - Identify effective assessment strategies - Support events to promote the work of the PLCs - Provide incentives to work with the PLCs on curriculum development
SUSTAINING	- Working closely with district and building administration to align student learning goals to standards - Consistently using student data to reflect on and revise all components of the curriculum - Using a well-documented approach to designing, implementing, assessing and revising curriculum	- Provide high quality resources to create, share and effectively use data - Access high quality media resources for outreach, documentation and publication - Access resources and PD on creating effective presentations - Provide opportunities to present PLC work to the school and greater community - Provide opportunities to present and share PLC work at workshops and conferences

DRIVING EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION

Development Status	In this stage PLC members are:	Consider using PLC Aid to:

BEGINNING	• Working collaboratively to identify effective instructional strategies to accomplish student learning objectives (SLOs)
	• Being supported by district and administrative personnel to review and assess instruction
		• Provide opportunities for PLC members to meet with staff to develop mutual trust
		• Provide resources (e.g., books, articles, media, workshops) on how to:
		   o Perform non-evaluative walk-throughs and observations of instructional practices
		   o Differentiate opinion from observation
		   o Provide constructive and productive feedback

EMERGING and DEVELOPING	• Using formative and summative assessment data to guide instructional practices
	• Developing a database of resources for innovative and effective instruction
	• Sharing instructional strategies with colleagues
	• Use consistent data collection and analysis protocols to drive instruction
	• Developing strategies on how to adjust instruction to meet student needs
		• Provide resources (e.g., books, articles, media, workshops) on how to:
		   o Model instructional strategies
		   o Research based instructional practices
		   o Embed the most effective instructional elements into units of study
		   o Use student work as a reflective tool for improving instruction
		   o Develop formative and summative assessments that effectively measure achievement of SLOs
		   o Revise and implement instructional strategies to improve student outcomes
		   o Assess effectiveness of teaching strategies
		• Provide tools and technology to improve use of formative assessments
		• Enable and support peer modeling of successful instructional strategies
		• Support collaborative teaching practices (e.g., co-teaching, team teaching)
		• Provide access to resources to support effective instruction

SUSTAINING	• Communicating the impacts of their PLC work on improved instruction • Assessing the long-term effectiveness of their work • Able to turnkey best practices to the school and district	• Provide opportunities for PLC members and peers to assess implementation of PLC decisions • Support ongoing PD on data collection and analysis • Provide opportunities to network and share PLC ideas, progress and strategies beyond the district