

**AN ACCOUNT AND ANALYSIS  
OF IMPLEMENTING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  
COMMUNITIES IN A HIGH SCHOOL**

by

Gayle H. Rutter

An executive position paper submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

Summer 2014

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Gayle H. Rutter

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
ABSTRACT .....	viii
Chapter	
1 INTRODUCTION .....	1
2 2010 PLC IMPLEMENTATION AND THE EMERGING NEED FOR PLC IMPROVEMENT .....	10
3 SOME GAPS IN INITIAL DISTRICT-LEVEL GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT.....	26
4 INTRODUCING A VISION AND PROTOCOLS FOR PLCS AT APPOQUINIMINK HIGH SCHOOL .....	34
5 DEVELOPING A PROCESS FOR EVALUATING AND MONITORING PLCS.....	58
6 CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES .....	75
REFERENCES .....	85
APPENDICES	
A SURVEY OF PLC MEMBERS .....	88
B AHS PLC LEADER JOB DESCRIPTION .....	89
C 2012 PLC MEMBER SURVERY .....	91
D SAMPLE PAGES FROM PLC WEBSITE.....	93

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Appoquinimink High School: Demographic Characteristics .....	2
Table 2.1: Survey Responses – Teachers’ Reflections on Purposes and Time Allocation With PLC: Means By Department.....	20
Table 2.2: Survey Responses – Department Chairpersons/PLC Leaders Reflections on Purpose and Time Allocation With PLC.....	22
Table 3.1: PLCs in the Appoquinimink School District 2011-2012 Strategic Plan..	27
Table 4.1: Meeting Minutes Template (first version, 2010) .....	39
Table 4.2: Revised Meeting Minutes Template .....	42
Table 4.3: PLC Leader Meeting Checklist .....	49
Table 5.1: Changes in Monitoring and Evaluation Tools.....	59
Table 5.2: Survey Responses to question: I understand the purpose of PLCs .....	63
Table 5.3: Coded responses to Open-Ended question about the purpose of PLCs ....	64
Table 5.4: Survey Responses to question: regarding value of PLCs.....	64
Table 5.5: Coded responses to Q5 indicating reasons teachers would continue to meet in PLCs if given the option.....	65
Table 5.6: Survey Responses to questions 6-10 regarding meeting protocols .....	66
Table 5.7: Survey Responses to questions 11-13 and 15 .....	66
Table 5.8: Coded responses to Q14 indicating types of data used in the PLC .....	67
Table 5.9: Survey Responses to questions 16-21 and 23 regarding teaching and learning focus of the PLC .....	68

Table 5.10: Coded responses to Q22 indicating types of differentiated instructional strategies used in class each week .....	68
Table 5.11: Survey Responses to questions 24 and 26 regarding changing in Teaching .....	69
Table 5.12: Responses to Q25 and Q27 regarding changes in teaching practices .....	70
Table 5.13: Survey Responses – Teachers’ Reflections on Purposes and Time Allocation With PLC: Means By Department.....	70
Table 5.14: Coded responses to Q33 indicating how PLCs could be improved .....	72



## **ABSTRACT**

This paper gives an account and an analysis of a three year implementation process of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) in a high school. It is an account of an organizational change and my role as a school leader introducing change under sometimes challenging circumstances. The PLC process began relatively quickly and with little preparation and guidance. It was a mandate from the state that all schools implement professional learning communities to meet for collaboration and planning for 90 minute blocks per week. Appoquinimink School District did not have experience with PLCs before this and the state provided few guidelines and minimal support.

As the school leader, my goal has been to create effective, well-functioning PLCs. This encompasses increasing understanding of the purpose and best practices of PLCs, developing and implementing protocols to be followed in PLC meetings, and annually evaluating PLC effectiveness to provide support, resources, and/or professional development. While there has been progress, PLC development has been uneven and challenging. The paper provides lessons learned and concludes with next steps.

## **Chapter 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

This year marks my fourth as principal of Appoquinimink High School. In this role, I supervise the school programs, staff, students, facilities, and budgets. I supervise and lead a team of three assistant principals who assist by assuming various responsibilities. For example, one assistant principal supervises athletics while another serves as the school testing coordinator. Likewise, each of the administrators is responsible for supervision of one of the four core content areas. My core content area of responsibility is the English/Language Arts department. My other areas of responsibility and supervision include: supervision of the librarian, educational diagnostician, school psychologist, and assistant principals; special education; professional development; and the school budget.

#### **Organizational Context**

The Appoquinimink School District is a suburban school district in Southern New Castle County. The district serves the three communities of Middletown, Odessa, and Townsend and also draws some students from two adjacent towns, Bear and New Castle.

Appoquinimink School District has been the fastest growing district in Delaware for the last ten years. Its current enrollment is roughly 9,500 students and next year is predicted to grow. In fact, before the 2010-2011 school year, the school district opened a school every year in each of the previous ten years and anticipates five additional school openings in the next six to seven years. Appoquinimink High School is one of the newest schools in the district. The student population for Appoquinimink High School is shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1 Appoquinimink High School: Demographic Characteristics, 2011 (Total enrollment =1,513)				
Race	Caucasian	African American	Asian	Hispanic
	76%	20%	4%	4%*
Classification	Regular Education	Special Education		
	92%	8%		
Income status	Not Free or Reduced Lunch	Free or Reduced Lunch		
	83%	17%		

*\*the code for Hispanic is used in conjunction with a second race code*

Appoquinimink High School officially opened its doors in August 2008. The district transition plan for opening a second high school, in what had been a one high school town for decades, was to gradually increase the student population in the new high school by adding one grade each year. The school was supposed to open in the fall of 2007. However since the building was yet to be completed, the class of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students occupied a brand new middle school in the district. The following year, when the high school opened, those 9<sup>th</sup> graders became 10<sup>th</sup> graders and a new

class of 9<sup>th</sup> grade students joined them. In its third year, Appoquinimink High School educated students in grades nine through eleven and experienced its first graduating class in the school year 2010-2011.

Appoquinimink High School employs 88 faculty members, 18 support staff personnel (guidance counselors, an educational diagnostician, a school psychologist, etc.) as well as an ancillary group of clerical, nutrition, and custodial staff. The staff has dramatically increased during the four short years of the school's existence that began with forty-five teachers and eight support staff. This change represents almost a 100% increase in staff during the school's first four years.

I am in my fourth year as principal of Appoquinimink High School. Before that, I served for two years as an assistant principal at the school. At the end of my second year as an assistant principal, I was named the acting principal of the school.

When PLCs were beginning at Appoquinimink High School, the administrative leadership of the school had experienced turnover. I had just been named acting principal in July 2010. One of the teachers already on staff who had prior administrative experience was named acting assistant principal. In addition, an administrator from the other district high school was assigned to Appoquinimink High School approximately two weeks before the start of school. Shortly after the school year began, the second assistant principal (the one who had been reassigned from the other district high school) was promoted to principal at one of the district's three middle schools and was replaced by a guidance counselor from the other district high school. The following year, due to large enrollment increases, a third assistant

principal position was added – a teacher from a neighboring school district. This administrative flux, while not unusual for high schools, made it more challenging to provide consistent and coherent support for PLCs.

### **Background and Problem Statement**

PLCs were mandated by the state in 2010 and started in Appoquinimink High School in August 2010. As described in the state’s “Race to the Top Plan (RTTT),” PLCs include a “commitment of the LEA (district) to provide 90 minutes of weekly collaboration time for teachers and leaders to meet in small, relevant groups.<sup>1</sup> The state also mandated that schools have “data coaches.” “Data coaches are experts in both pedagogy and data analysis who will facilitate professional learning meetings with small cohorts of teachers several times a month to review each teacher’s student data and assist the teacher with developing lesson plans to address areas in need of improvement. These meetings will help both teachers and leaders build skills in using data to inform instruction.”<sup>2</sup>

As this EPP will describe, the PLC process began relatively quickly and with little preparation and guidance. Administrators learned in the spring of 2010 of the state’s mandate that all schools implement 90 minute blocks per week for PLCs. Appoquinimink School District did not have experience with PLCs before this; the

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<sup>1</sup> ([http://www.doe.k12.de.us/rttt/De\\_Ed\\_ReformPlanOverview.pdf](http://www.doe.k12.de.us/rttt/De_Ed_ReformPlanOverview.pdf)).

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/rttt/RTTTFAQFinal.pdf>).

state provided few guidelines beyond the time expectation. The DOE website provided no guidance aside from the reference to PLCs cited above. The first steps to implementing PLCs included required training for school administrators, modifications of teachers' schedules to allow more common planning time, and actions by administrators to support PLC development in each of the high school's departments. While there has been progress, PLC development has been uneven and challenging.

As I elaborate below, a number of factors contributed to the challenges of creating PLCs and making them an integrated, well-functioning part of the school's organization and culture. First, there were multiple changes in leadership at both the school and district level. As noted above, the entire building administration was new and relatively young and inexperienced and the school's teaching staff had doubled in size within the prior four years. Right at the beginning of the PLC implementation process, my role changed from assistant principal to principal. Taking the lead role in a high school has inherent challenges and the expectation of implementing PLCs added to the challenges of this new role.

Second, district leadership was also changing. Both the superintendent and assistant superintendent retired and two new district leaders were now in the top leadership positions. It was challenging for the two of them also, who were expected to develop and support this reform effort immediately upon taking their new roles. This is discussed more in Chapter 3.

Third, to provide the mandated collaboration time, the master schedule needed to be changed to ensure teachers had common planning time. Changing the master schedule at a high school can be a daunting task, difficult for teachers, and create resistance (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006) so this took careful attention and dedicated effort. The schedule changes also required a shift in mindset about when courses were offered, so time meeting with the counselors who build and work with the schedule, was pivotal in making the necessary adjustments.

Fourth, there was very little guidance about how to implement PLCs. As this paper will further emphasize, implementing PLCs represents a change in thinking about how teachers work collaboratively to improve student achievement. This is particularly challenging in secondary schools, where teachers have historically worked in isolation. Facilitating a shift in thinking takes time and requires a thorough explanation of rationale for the change, so the expectation that the implementation occur swiftly contributed to the challenges. Likewise, PLCs place an emphasis on collecting and analyzing student data, a task with which most teachers are not accustomed. To assist teachers with this task, schools were assigned (by mandate) “data coaches” to work within the PLCs. Our data coach was new person, from an external consulting organization, not from our school staff. It was a slow and sometimes difficult process for the data coach to learn what to do and how to help and for teachers to develop the needed trust and respect to work effectively with this consultant.

Finally, the whole notion that DOE mandated the implementation of PLCs is in some ways inconsistent with the philosophy behind PLCs (Dufour, Eaker, Dufour, & Fullan, 2005; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). PLCs are intended to be a vehicle to empower teachers to make decisions and control their own professional development. Yet, the state was mandating PLCs, mandating that teachers meet for 90 minutes, and that they work with a data coach and follow prescribed modules of learning during mandated meeting time. Even if PLCs are a good idea, having them mandated this way and with a short implementation timeline was very much a “top down” decision. This contradicts the self-directed idea of PLCs and in an unintended way, is inconsistent with the very professionalism it seeks to encourage.

In summary, implementing PLCs under any circumstances is difficult because it represents a significant culture change in a high school, and the conditions described above contributed to challenges encountered during implementation efforts.



### **Organizational Improvement Goal and Purpose of EPP**

The organizational improvement goal is to create effective, well-functioning PLCs. This goal encompasses the following objectives: increasing understanding of the purpose and best practices of PLCs, developing and implementing protocols to be followed in PLC meetings, and annually evaluating PLC effectiveness in order to provide support, resources, and/or professional development.

Goals for the PLC include: increasing collaboration among members of the group, increasing the productivity of meetings, and increasing the use of data to make decisions that enhance student achievement. According to research, effective implementation of PLCs can contribute to higher student achievement (Foord & Haar, 2008; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). While I believe the implementation PLCs will improve student achievement, the initial goal is to engage teachers in job-embedded professional development to improve instructional practice. A key role of PLCs is to foster collaborative discussions among teachers that examine student data in order to guide decisions about how to improve curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

Among the different PLCs in the school, the English Language Arts (ELA) PLC has struggled the most. Therefore, much of my effort has focused on helping the ELA PLC function better. My plans to do this include creating a framework for PLCs at Appoquinimink High School with accompanying protocols and monitoring tools that will improve the ELA PLC.

This paper – my EPP – gives an account of the early PLC implementation, my leadership activities, our collective efforts to try to create more effective PLCs, and lessons learned that might be useful for other school leaders involved with PLCs. The EPP will outline three key areas that surfaced as I began to try to address the problem: gaps in district-level guidance, the lack of a clear vision for PLCs and expectations for PLC work, and the difficult process for determining how to evaluate and monitor PLCs. Chapter 2 describes early implementation of PLCs at Appoquinimink High School (2010). It describes the issues that emerged as we attempted to engage in PLC work. Chapter 3 discusses challenges and needs concerning district-level guidance and support. Chapter 4 and 5 describe and reflect on building leadership efforts to guide and support PLCs to be as effective as possible. Chapter 6, the final chapter, presents continuing improvement efforts and reflects on ongoing challenges.

## **Chapter 2**

### **2010 PLC IMPLEMENTATION AND THE EMERGING NEED FOR PLC IMPROVEMENT**

#### **The Theory Behind PLCs: A Synopsis**

I begin by summarizing the rationale for PLCs from literature. This is for the reader's benefit to understand better *why* PLCs are viewed as a tool for school improvement and to improve achievement. This summary comes from my reading and learning about PLCs over the last several years, but I should emphasize that my own understanding and that of our staff as well as district leaders was very incomplete as the PLC initiative began. Basically the state issued a mandate and schools tried to do what the policy required, but most teachers and administrators questioned the idea. Many did not understand what PLCs were supposed to be a solution for or even what they were supposed to be. Research has shown this top-down "unfunded mandate" approach to reform typically leads to mixed results (Cohen, Moffitt, & Goldin, 2007) and that while PLCs are widely advocated, implementation is difficult and takes many years (Achinstein, 2002; Rousseau, 2004; Wood, 2007).

Based on my review of writings from the main PLC national leaders,<sup>3</sup> PLCs are designed to help correct what are thought to be four deficiencies of high school

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<sup>3</sup> See Cookson (2005); Foord & Haar (2008); Graham (2007); McLaughlin & Talbert (2006); Rogers & Bubinski (2002); Stoll, Bolam, McMahon, Wallace, & Thomas (2006). I have also posted additional

organizational structure and teachers' instructional practices: teacher isolation and insufficient collaboration, not enough professional conversation about instruction and student learning, lack of data use for decision making, and ineffective professional development approaches.

### *Teacher Isolation and Insufficient Collaboration*

All too often teachers have gone into the school, closed their classroom door, and done as they saw fit. This situation is exacerbated in secondary schools where teachers are teaching multiple courses and/or grade levels. Teachers working in isolation present a few issues. For example, consider two teachers in the same high school department teaching the same 9th grade ELA course. One teacher decides to focus on grammar and vocabulary, and her students read a series of short stories. The second teacher has a passion for literature and has the students reading novels like *Of Mice and Men*. So the students spend time researching the time period and reading the story. At the end of the course, students in the two classes have received drastically different instruction. If teachers work in isolation, it makes it hard to have uniform standards and hard to create a well-planned curriculum.

So, while autonomy is important for teachers, if there is too much autonomy and isolation there is no way to ensure students in the same course or grade are

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references and resources at a website I created as part of this project:  
<https://sites.google.com/site/ahsplcsghr2013/home>

learning the same skills and content. This goal is partially addressed when teachers collaborate in PLCs to decide which skills and content should be taught and assessed.

#### *Not Enough Professional Conversation about Instruction and Student Learning*

When teachers meet in their departmental groups, conversation often turns to matters other than instruction. Many a department meeting has been led astray by teachers complaining about students, parents, administration, the central office, the Department of Education and perhaps anyone else who might affect a teacher's day. Discussions regarding practices and procedures are also common topics. Debates regarding student dress code, how a discipline infraction was handled, the use of electronics throughout the school building, or what to do about tardy students are quite common and evoke teachers' passions. Likewise, since teachers spend much of their day behind the walls of their individual classrooms, many gatherings of teachers lead to social conversations unrelated to school.

#### *Lack of Data Use for Decision Making*

Historically, teachers were not tasked with honing an expertise in data analysis. NCLB forced schools and teachers to focus on results more than ever before. Ensuring that all students achieved success became a priority for school leaders. Prior to this, teachers were not typically accustomed to the formal review and use of student data to make decisions regarding instruction. Even today, while schools are identified and labeled by achievement metrics, many teachers are still not effectively using data. Most recently school systems have even begun to hire "data specialists" and "data coaches" who are charged with working with teachers to identify patterns in data,

enhance teacher collection methods, analyze student results, and generate plans based on the information received. Even with all of this assistance, many teachers are still not comfortable with the data review process, and many underestimate the importance of doing so consistently.

### *Ineffective Professional Development*

The traditional model for professional development has teachers assembled in one large group, sitting and listening as an “expert” shares methods for improving. Often teachers quickly forget the information shared at these sessions and promptly return to their teaching status quo. Teachers often feel the content of the training is not relevant to their specific content area or present level of understanding. In PLCs, teachers are collectively identifying issues and when they discover a problem for which they are unaware of solution, the group seeks information.

### **Year One (2010) PLC Implementation at Appoquinimink High School**

Appoquinimink High School is a good high school with a strong reputation and is considered a successful high school in the state. However, it is a typical large high school with improvement needs and to some degree it had all the problems described above which PLCs are designed to help address. Following is a description of the steps and challenges in the early stages of PLC implementation.

Our PLC implementation began swiftly in 2010 and was initiated with two main steps: two workshops for a selected group of administrators and teachers and a master schedule change to create common planning time during the school day for groups of teachers of similar content areas.

### **Initial Training and Preparations**

The first district-wide workshop, in early spring 2010, was attended by at least one administrator per school and a team of teachers the administrator selected. Schools were tasked with gathering a group of “teacher leaders” who could help share what was learned in the training session. For most schools, this included department chairs or grade-level leaders. The teachers from Appoquinimink High School who attended were those who would be facilitating PLCs once they began. The second workshop was two and a half months later in the spring of 2010. I participated along with a small group of administrators and teachers from our high school.

The desired outcomes for the first workshop were stated as:

- Shared understanding of professional learning community (PLC) concepts as a research-based approach to increasing student achievement
- Insights into current site culture
- Identification of next steps
- Create a mission and vision statement
- Enthusiasm for commitment to the journey!

The first workshop was a broad overview of PLC theory with little focus on specifics. Handouts with titles such as: “A Big Picture Look at PLCs,” “Key Questions for a PLC School,” and “Keys to Effective Teams” guided the conversation. The workshop participants considered ideas about how their future PLC groups might collaborate and about ensuring that all students learn.

The communication for the second workshop in late Spring 2010 indicated that “Jay Westover of InnovatED will work with school teams to develop capacity to:

effectively run meaningful meetings, utilize consensus processes, implement protocols for analyzing data and student work, and design interventions for increasing student achievement data.” Some topics and handouts, similar to those in the first workshop, were discussed. For example, goal-setting (with vision and norms) that was introduced during day one was also a focus in the second session. Likewise, SMART goals and team planning protocols were discussed. At the conclusion of the workshop, an agreed upon set of norms was developed by the group. These norms then became a guide for PLC leaders in their work with their PLC teams at Appoquinimink High School.

In addition to these two training sessions, principals were given a presentation by the Secondary Curriculum Director and a five-page article entitled, “What Is a Professional Learning Community” (Dufour, 2004). The article stresses three “big ideas” that “represent the core principles of professional learning communities.”

Dufour (pp. 6-11) writes:

- Big Idea#1: Ensuring That Students Learn. “The professional learning community model flows from the assumption that the core mission of formal education is not simply to ensure that students are taught but to ensure that they learn. This simple shift – from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning – has profound implications for schools.”
- Big Idea#2: A Culture of Collaboration. “Educators who are building a professional learning community recognize that they must work together to achieve their collective purpose of learning for all. Therefore, they create structures to promote a collaborative culture.”
- Big Idea#3: A Focus on Results. “Professional learning communities judge their effectiveness on the basis of results. Working together to improve student achievement becomes the routine work of everyone in the school.



This article was photocopied for the PLC leaders (department chairs) who were instructed to share the article with their department for the first leadership team meeting of the year in August 2010. The article, along with the two spring professional development sessions, was the preparation provided to PLC leaders for initiating PLCs in the 2010-2011 school year. The PLC leaders were also instructed to develop a PLC agenda and to record minutes of their PLC meetings on a template that was provided to them. The meeting minutes were to be kept in a binder and the binder was to be turned in to the administrative staff each week. The administrative supervisors (the principal and assistant principals) were tasked with reviewing the binders and providing feedback to the PLC leaders.

### **The First PLCs and Initial Concerns with the ELA PLC**

Over the course of the 2010 – 2011 school year the PLCs were initiated and met weekly. While teachers began to meet together and collaborate on common tasks, it became evident during this first year that there was improvement needed with respect to PLC focus, PLC process, and the products created by PLCs. The following account describes some of the struggles. I focus on issues that arose with the ELA PLC during the first year of implementation because this PLC was directly under my supervision and also because this PLC had the most difficulties functioning effectively.

First, beginning in the fall of 2010 and throughout the 2010-2011 school year, the ELA PLC leader regularly indicated to me there was a lack of productivity among the group. Issues of group dynamics, such that the group continually argued over processes, procedures, and expectations, were preventing tasks from getting completed. I sat in on a number of PLC meetings and my impression was that they did not function well as a group. Conversations were unproductive, teachers were defensive and group members did not trust in the leader or the administration.

Also, during that same time, in fall 2010, teachers from the ELA PLC began to ask for time to speak with me in regard to the way the PLC was being conducted. One teacher asked to speak with me because she was feeling overwhelmed by the workload. Two other teachers approached me as a pair to report their frustrations. Yet another teacher commented on the frustrations when I asked how the PLC was performing at the conclusion of our annual goal-setting meeting. These teachers agreed that the tasks assigned in the PLC were cumbersome –that is, they felt like they were completing tasks unrelated to their teaching and also that these tasks seemed to be misaligned with the expectations set by the administrative team at the start of the year. The teachers were also concerned that time used to work on tasks specifically for PLC meetings depleted their class preparation time.

Another piece of evidence supporting concerns about the ELA PLC was my review of the PLC minutes. All the PLCs had been asked to create agendas and keep meeting notes that would be reviewed every few weeks by an administrator. (Each building administrator had an assigned PLC.) My review of these notes indicated that

tasks were not completed and that data was rarely discussed. When data was discussed, the extent of the conversation failed to go beyond discussing students' grades. Meeting minutes indicated that progress wasn't being made as reflected by the notes on the "what didn't you get to" section of the template. Multiple times, the same topic remained on the "didn't get to it list." For example, groups were supposed to develop Learning-Focused Strategies (LFS) student learning maps for each unit they taught. The ELA PLC failed to produce any learning maps. (For comparison, it is important to note that the Social Studies department had created student learning maps for each unit taught in all four grade levels by the end of the year.) Topics listed as agenda items and meeting notes were sometimes disjointed and often not closely related to curriculum, instruction, or students.

### **Surveying PLC Members- 2010 PLC Survey**

In late fall of 2010, as a formative evaluation, I decided to assess teachers' views of their PLCs. I couldn't attend each PLC meeting, but knew it was important to gain a sense of how teachers were perceiving the PLC process. The school administration discussed surveying the staff and decided that an anonymous format would help to elicit candid opinions. The survey asked teachers to reflect on the productivity of the PLC and the value of the time committed to PLC meetings and work; teachers were also asked to report on the allocation of time spent in PLCs, the use of data in the PLC, and their understanding of purpose of the PLCs.

Overall, the survey ratings of most of the PLCS indicated progress, but the ratings of the ELA members were not positive. On the issue of PLC time use, the ELA PLC members rated that more than 75% of their meeting time was “unrelated” to what they were teaching, methods of instruction, or how to help students improve. There were also negative ratings on survey items of PLC meetings being “facilitated in a productive manner” and “focused consistently on data.” A description of the survey and a more in-depth analysis of the results follow.

### **Survey Methods**

The surveys were distributed at an October PLC meeting for each of the subject areas. All the teachers were given blank envelopes to allow them to fill in the survey and return it anonymously. The survey is attached as Appendix A.

On the survey, PLC members were asked to rate if they understand the purpose of Professional Learning Communities, their perception of the value of the time allocated to their PLC, whether their departmental PLC is facilitated in a productive and efficient manner, and the extent to which data is used during PLC meetings.

Teachers were also asked for a description of the use of time in the PLC divided by:

- a discussion of “what” is being taught,
- a discussion of “how kids are doing,”
- a discussion of “what will be done if kids don’t get it,”
- “assignments” unrelated to the three discussion topics, and
- “other.”

## Survey Results

The following survey data was obtained by asking teachers to reflect on PLC work from the fall of the 2010-2011 school year: (survey attached as Appendix A)

Table 2.1 Survey Responses – Teachers’ Reflections on Purposes and Time Allocation With PLC: Means By Department									
Department	Purpose	Value	% Time on “what”	% time on “how”	% time on “strategies”	% time on “unrelated”	% time on “other”	Facilitated in a productive manner	Use of Data
Math n=12	2.1	2.0	62.1	18.8	10.8	5.8	0.8	1.9	2.9
English n=6	2.5	2.0	7.5	10.8	5.8	35.8	40.0	3.2	3.5
Science n=11	1.9	2.3	27.3	20.0	24.5	24.1	0.0	1.9	2.4
Social Studies n=10	1.4	1.5	27.0	24.3	28.8	11.5	7.0	1.6	2.1
Scale: 1= Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree									

The survey results suggest the teachers believe they understand the purpose of the PLC. However, other results indicate they are not engaging in intended PLC work as established in our PLC training and guidelines. This inconsistency between teachers’ belief that they understand PLCs’ purpose and their report of how their PLC operates suggests that either they do not understand the true purpose of a PLC or that they experience obstacles in achieving the PLC’s intended purposes.

Ideally we would want to see the majority of PLC time allocated to the three big priorities: what is being taught, how kids are doing, what to do if kids don’t get it. However, in three of the four departments (math being the exception), large portions of PLC time are allocated to “unrelated” and “other” – 75% of the time in English,

24% of the time in science, and 19% of the time in social studies. These “off task” percentages are too high. It is reasonable to expect that 90% of time in a meeting should be on task, which in the case of PLC meetings means focusing directly on matters of teaching.

Another concern is the ratings indicate insufficient attention to data. A key focus of PLCs is supposed to be conversations about data related to instruction and learning. Yet in each of the four departments the mean scores are near the middle of the “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree” scale (2.9, 3.5, 2.4, and 2.1). In fact, the overall mean of 2.7 is slightly on the disagree side of the scale. This is troubling because PLCs using data is one of the key components of a PLC. The results therefore highlight an inconsistency with what teachers believe as an understanding of PLCs and how they actually behave during the PLC. It suggests that they either have a misunderstanding of the true purpose and tasks of the PLC or that they experience obstacles in achieving the PLC’s intended purposes.

The survey also shows quite a bit of variation among the departments, suggesting different departments are implementing the PLC with different levels of success. All the PLCs do not need to be exactly the same, but the teacher surveys indicate there is room for greater consistency across PLCs, more time spent on the three priority areas, and greater use of data to inform conversations about teaching and learning.

The responses of the department chair/PLC leader are reported separately in Table 2.2. It is revealing to compare the teacher perceptions to those of the PLC leader. I had been concerned that some leaders' perceptions differ from those of their department members about the mission and operation of the PLC. The results of the leaders are in Table 2.2. Several findings are noteworthy.

Table 2.2 Survey Responses – Department Chairpersons/PLC Leaders Reflections on Purpose and Time Allocation With PLC									
Department	Purpose	Value	% Time on "what"	% time on "how"	% time on "strategies"	% time on "unrelated"	% time on "other"	Facilitated in a productive manner	Use of Data
Math n=1	2	2	90	5	5	0	0	2	3
English n=1	1	2	60	5	25	10	0	3	3
Science n=1	1	1	50	10	10	30	0	1	1
Social Studies n=1	2	2	50	30	20	0	0	2	3
Scale: 1= Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Disagree 4=Strongly Disagree									

First, the leaders indicate understanding the purpose of the PLC. One would therefore expect the leader responses to be aligned with core PLC ideals: the majority of time spent on what we're teaching, how it's being taught, strategies, and the use of data. A review of the PLC leader responses shows most leaders' perceptions are not in line with the core PLC ideals. For example, three out of the four leaders indicated that they disagree that data is used consistently in the PLC. A true understanding of the PLC would demonstrate a consistent use of data during the PLC.

Second, in comparing the leader results to those of the members, there is a difference in the leader and teacher perceptions. For instance, the social studies leader say "zero" time is "other" or "unrelated" while the teachers say it is 19%. But the biggest difference in leader-teacher perceptions is in ELA. In the ELA department, the teacher perceptions of how time is being spent versus the leader perception of how time is being spent are drastically different. While the teachers felt only 7.5% of time was being spent discussing what was being taught, the leader felt that percentage to be 60%. The teachers felt over 75% of the time was being spent on unrelated or other topics while the leader pegged that percentage at 10%. In social studies to some extent and in ELA to a large extent, there are significant disconnects between teacher and leader perceptions of the PLC.

The results of the survey have some positives and some concerns. Overall, PLC members are favorable toward the PLC concept and three of four PLCs think their teams are functioning reasonably well. On the other hand, work is needed to increase the proportion of PLC time focused on the core task of using data as a key element of instructional planning and assessment. The survey results are an initial snapshot of the PLCs' functioning and will be followed with more inquiry into the effectiveness of the PLCs.

### **Summary of Identified Needs for PLC Improvement**

Appoquinimink High School began the implementation of Professional Learning Communities in August 2010. There was initial but limited training, background, and direction provided to the staff at the time of implementation. Though



there were some initial “protocols” that were developed (such as forms for recording minutes and binder checks) the implementation of these protocols was inconsistent and not always effective. It was soon obvious that the PLCs were not operating in ways consistent with prescriptions of PLC research. There was a survey distributed in an attempt to ascertain PLC members’ understanding of the PLC model as well as gather information about how time in the PLC was spent. This survey data revealed that there was some misunderstanding about how PLC time should be used and the focus the PLC should take.

I share responsibility for the lack of success over the first year of the ELA PLC. As the school principal I could have done more to provide support and direction for not just the ELA PLC but for all the PLCs. While the administrative team had shared the district-provided PLC literature with the teachers and developed a meeting template, this was not enough. The PLC members did not have a clear vision for PLCs, protocols for how to set goals and run a meeting, or clarity as to how the administration would monitor the meetings and overall PLC effectiveness.

The above review of early PLC implementation during 2010-2011 showed that PLCs needed improvement. The review also showed the following important next steps were needed: provide the research base for PLCs, identify the PLC model (framework) to be followed at AHS, develop PLC protocols for teachers to follow, and design methods to monitor and evaluate the PLC progress.

Another factor contributing to PLC implementation challenges was limited district leadership. This became clearer in hindsight. At the school level, we assumed the workshops, extra time, and PLC handouts from literature would be enough to get PLC's functioning well and that the members would understand what to do and how to operate as an effective PLC. District leadership also had to deal with a short timeline, administrative flux, and a lack of clear expectations about what PLCs were supposed to be. The next chapter discusses some of these issues in district-level guidance and support.

### **Chapter 3**

## **SOME GAPS IN INITIAL DISTRICT-LEVEL GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT**

As previously described, the district PLC initiative began with a Department of Education mandate that districts provide 90 minutes per week for teachers to work in collaborative groups. As explained in more detail above, the support and guidance from the district was limited to the two workshops and an article presented by the Curriculum Director. This was not nearly enough guidance to initiate and rapidly implement a change in structure and culture as big and complex as PLCs.

Dufour, citing the work of Shannon and Blysm, is emphatic about the crucial role of district guidance and support:

A synthesis of research studies on improved school districts conducted since 1990 reinforced the importance of strong district leadership. It concluded that effective district leaders establish a “clear understanding of the district and school rules” characterized by a “balance between district control and school autonomy” (Shannon & Blysm, 2004, p. 45) (2010, 212).

As far as I could determine, a district vision for PLCs did not exist beyond the district’s reliance on the two workshops and the PLC article distributed. The state mandate’s short timeline required the district to act quickly, with no extra resources, and without much preparation. The short timeline would have created challenges under any circumstances, but the PLC initiative was also occurring when the superintendent and the assistant superintendent were about to retire.

### Reviewing the District Strategic Plan

To learn more about district-level PLC expectations, I reviewed district documents for language and direction on PLCs. What I found was that the strategic plan did have some language on PLCs, but it was in four different places, under four different goals, and the language was different in each place. None of the language was in any depth or followed by specific plans. Reference to PLCs was included in the introductory statement of the plan, in both goals 2c and 5a under priority 2, and defined in the glossary at the end of the plan. The following is a summary of the four references to PLCs from the district strategic plan:

Table 3.1 PLCs in the Appoquinimink School District 2011-2012 Strategic Plan

Location in the Strategic Plan	PLC reference or definition
Introduction, p.1	Professional Learning Communities and Learning Focused Strategies. These two complimentary processes emphasize teacher collaboration and the continuous review of school data and classroom practices in order to put in place timely, directed supports for students.
Priority 2, Goal 2c, p. 4	Utilize Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) to deliver professional development on how to analyze and use data to drill-down to the root cause of student learning needs.
Priority 2, Goal 5a., p. 7	Provide 90 minutes of weekly collaboration where teachers and leaders participate in instructional improvement systems in small, relevant groups.  measurement ii: PLC records will include meeting dates, attendees, agenda minutes, and action items.
Glossary, p. 13	Professional Learning Communities- a data-driven decision making process through which teams of teachers and administrators work collaboratively to seek out best practices, test them in the classroom, continuously improve instructional practices, and focus on measurable results.

In each reference to PLCs, they were described slightly differently. I cannot say for sure whether this variation in language created specific problems for PLC implementation, but it does show a level of inconsistency that falls short of what DuFour and other experts have called for. This importance of a clear vision and common language is explained by Dufour in *Learning By Doing* (2010, 213):

But even if district leaders themselves are aware of [PLC goals] ... they face the challenge of communicating so effectively that people all throughout the organization are clear on priorities and parameters. This will not happen unless leaders help to establish a common language with widely shared meaning of key terminology. If key terms are only vaguely understood or represent different things to people throughout the district, it will be impossible to implement the PLC concept across the district. Changing the way people talk in an organization can change the way the work (Kegen & Lahey, 2001), but only if there is a common language and clear understanding of the specific implications for action regarding key terms (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). (Dufour, 213).

The district's strategic plan lacked a clear and detailed vision and plan. From the district leadership, there was meager guidance for leaders and teachers at the building level. From my own experience and conversations with other administrators at the building level, hardly anyone was familiar with the content of the PLC language in the district documents.

In addition to my review of the strategic plan, I met with the new district leaders on the subject of PLCs. I initiated a meeting to discuss how or whether the existing strategic plan had influenced their vision for PLCs in the district. I should emphasize the two new leaders had inherited this strategic plan from the former administration and so it was not a product of their own work.

### **Meeting with the District Leaders**

I asked the superintendent and assistant superintendent to discuss PLCs and to share the work I had done related to PLCs. First, I felt it was important to share with them, what I was working on and what research I had reviewed, which might benefit not just Appoquinimink High School but other leaders and schools in to the district. The meeting was intended both to share information and seek guidance and support. My agenda for the meeting included the following four topics for discussion:

- 1) Discuss my project and goals
- 2) Identify references to PLCs in the Strategic Plan
- 3) Determine district needs with respect to PLCs
- 4) Other as determined by superintendent or assistant superintendent

During the meeting, I shared my project proposal, which included the organizational context, background and problem statement, the improvement goals, the key questions I explored, and the key information learned to that point. I hoped this discussion would help contribute to a more common language for PLCs in our district.

My meeting with district leadership revealed there was clearly not yet a clear and specific district vision or a common language regarding PLCs. One indication of this is that the superintendent asked at the conclusion of our meeting, “So what you need from us is to know: What are we looking to see happen during PLC time? What’s the focus?” The superintendent wanted to be helpful and supportive, yet was

asking me if this is what they needed to do. They were new in the position, not entirely familiar with the PLC concept, or where the district was in the PLC implementation process, and or how to be helpful. Dufour writes, “If key terms are only vaguely understood or represent different things to people throughout the district, it will be impossible to implement the PLC concept across the district (2010, 213).

### **Differing Visions During Early PLC Implementation: Another Example**

During that first year of implementation (2010-2011), following the mandate and guided as much as possible by school building leaders, teachers started meeting in their PLCs, trying to look at data, discuss instruction, and collaborate in creating instructional materials. At the same time, the district (the former administration) launched a project to develop common assessments in common courses across both of the district’s high schools. This, as anyone with experience in this kind of effort knows, is a very large undertaking. High school teachers value their autonomy and most have strong opinions about their own courses, grading standards, and assessment methods (DuFour, 2011; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Rogers & Bubinski, 2002).

To get this project going, district leaders assembled representative groups of teachers in each subject area. Their charge was to “unpack” the new national “Common Core Standards” that Delaware had just adopted, review these standards to determine what was important and essential to be taught, and to work together to develop assessments that would be common across all high school courses by grade

level and subject area. The groups were comprised of teachers from both high schools and typically included one teacher from each grade level.

This process was lengthy and over time met with increasing resistance. It took many months for these subgroups of teachers to create the tests because only a small amount of time was available each week and the time allocated for meeting occurred during school days. The teachers were pulled out of their classrooms, assembled at the district office, and tasked with working on one test at a time. For the ELA department this meant creating eight different assessments, one for each unit being taught, per grade (9-12). Because teachers could not continually be pulled from their classrooms for multiple days, the days were spread out over the course of the school year. Sometimes, the subgroup teachers were expected to do some of the work on their own time, but primarily the test creation was isolated to these set aside work days.

Some at the district level viewed this as a form of PLC work, but teachers didn't see it this way. This work was not being done in PLCs. It was district committee work and had almost nothing to do with PLCs and was inconsistent with the PLC model which is based on all teachers in a subject area working as a team in their own buildings on their own defined needs, which are determined by data-driven discussions. I think this conflict with the PLC idea is a key reason the "common assessments" project lacked buy-in from the teachers. Many teachers didn't like the tests created by the committees and expected them to use in their courses. They



couldn't agree on how the tests should be scored or how they should be used to assign grades.

On multiple occasions, I raised the point that we (school leaders) said we wanted our teachers to work in a PLC, but the committee process where only a select group of teachers are making critical instructional decisions contradicts the PLC process. In my role as leader at AHS, I had adopted the Dufour PLC model (as per district directives and handouts) and assumed that this was the district vision as well.

I think the common assessment process was detrimental to first year PLC development at AHS and that teachers would have been more receptive to reading and discussing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in their own PLCs where they could have pondered important topics and common assessments. Dufour and Eaker stress that “the *process* of curriculum development is at least as important as the final product” (2010, 154). By delegating this work to a district-assembled committee, the collaborative element in the PLC process was gone, and there was not much buy-in from teachers.

In *Learning by Doing*, Dufour relays what Stephen Covey notes about the collaborative process and buy-in: “Ownership and commitment are directly linked to the extent to which people are engaged in the decision-making process. Stephen Covey was emphatic on this point: “Without involvement there is no commitment. Mark it down, asterik it, circle it, underline it. No involvement, no commitment” (2010, 73). As Michael Fullan explains, “There are no examples, as far as I know, of

district-wide high school reform where all or most of the high schools have established professional learning communities collectively as a district” (2005, 213).

### **Concluding Thoughts on District Guidance and Support**

The two issues described above – the lack of district-level clarity and a common language about PLCs and the district-assembled teacher committees assigned to unpack the CCSS and develop common assessments – worked against more successful implementation of PLCs within AHS. As explained in the Introduction and Chapter 1, a rapid implementation timeline, dictated by state policy, minimal state support and guidance, and sudden turnover in district leadership were significant contributors to these PLC implementation challenges. It was therefore very hard to develop a system-wide common vision for PLCs with widespread buy-in.

## **Chapter 4**

### **INTRODUCING A VISION AND PROTOCOLS FOR PLCS AT APPOQUINIMINK HIGH SCHOOL**

When the district began the PLC process, a consultant was brought in to meet with administrators and teacher leaders from the individual schools. The consultant presented information to teachers at the individual schools, after which teachers began to meet in PLCs. Early on it became evident to me that the concept of a “professional learning community” was exactly that, a concept. I realized that a PLC is a philosophy about teachers working together (with a set of parameters as defined by leadership); it isn’t a set of rules that I would uncover.

As described in Chapters 1 and 2, it became obvious in the early months of PLC implementation – from the 2010 survey, from PLC meeting minutes, from my conversations with teachers and district leadership, and from other observations – that staff were unclear about roles and tasks in their PLCs. This reflects implementation challenges DuFour has described: “Many schools and districts that proudly proclaim they are PLCs have shown little evidence of either understanding the core concepts or implementing practices of PLCs .... Creating configurations for teams does not ensure an effectively functioning team” (DuFour, 2005, 9, 120).

This chapter describes my work helping staff understand more clearly the purpose of PLCs and PLC members’ roles and tasks. I had to lead, but we all had to work together and develop our own vision and guidelines for PLCs in our own school.

I reviewed research on PLC best practices, shared literature with staff, led the development of PLC protocols to guide meetings, and communicated information about PLCs at meetings and in other ways.

### **The Development of the PLC Framework**

The PLC framework at Appoquinimink High School was influenced heavily by *Learning By Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (cite in APA). The book presents seven “Professional Learning Communities at Work™ Continuums.” The continuums are intended to help PLC participants “reflect upon the current conditions in your school or district and assess the alignment of those conditions with the principles and practices of a PLC” (2006, 42). Each continuum is based on a principle or practice of PLCs<sup>4</sup>. Each principle or practice has between one to three indicators of that particular principle or practice. Participants are then expected to rate each of the indicators on the continuum from pre-initiation stage to sustaining stage by choosing from a set of descriptors under each stage.

I used the continuums to gain and share knowledge about the PLC concept and to develop our framework for PLCs. First, I copied each of the principles/practices with corresponding indicators into a new document. I bold-typed each of the principles and practices and then underlined the key concept of each. Next, I reviewed each of the indicators and highlighted the primary feature of the statement. Essentially I was categorizing key ideas and trying to synthesize in a way that would reveal to me

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<sup>4</sup> Note: the first two continuums are based on a single principle, divided into Part I and Part II.

the necessary elements of PLCs as defined by the Dufour model. This analysis helped to identify the framework presented below which takes Dufour's "big ideas" and more explicitly describes the work in which PLC participants should be engaged. The framework identifies four key components of Professional Learning Communities with the primary features as identified through the continuum synthesis.

#### A Framework for Professional Learning Communities at Appoquinimink High School

- Create a Focus on Learning- clarify what students must learn and how we will monitor each student's learning.
  - shared knowledge, clarify the criteria by which we will judge the quality of student work, monitor the learning of each student's attainment of all essential outcomes, a system of interventions
- Build a Collaborative Culture- work together to achieve our collective purpose of learning for all students.
  - common goals that directly impact student achievement, articulated collective commitments or norms have clarified expectations of how our team will operate
- Create a Results-Oriented Community- assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions.
  - one or more SMART goals, identified specific action steps members will take to achieve the goal and the process for monitoring progress toward the goal
- Utilize Data to Drive Decisions- seek relevant data and information and use it to promote continuous improvement.
  - ongoing analysis of evidence of student learning, frequent and timely information regarding the achievement of their students

These four critical components became the framework for the work of PLCs at Appoquinimink High School. While there are multiple definitions and understandings of what a PLC should or could look like and do, the four components above began to guide the work of the PLCs at Appoquinimink High School.

### **Communicating the PLC Vision**

Another important step was communicating information with staff.

First, I communicated the components of the framework to the four PLC leaders. I met with the Math, Science, Social Studies, and ELA department chairpersons prior to the start of the school year in the fall of 2012 and reviewed the framework with them. Three of the four department chairs had led their respective PLC during the 2011-2012 school year. The department chair of the Math department was a new PLC leader. I reviewed the framework components and explained this to be our vision of PLCs for AHS. I noted that we had worked in PLCs in the past, but that feedback from department chairs and PLC members indicated there wasn't a clear understanding of what was expected. After reviewing the framework with the department chairs, each was tasked with sharing the framework with their PLC at their first meeting of the new school year. Likewise, a review of the framework was the basis for the discussion of PLCs at the first faculty meeting of the 2012-2013 school year.

Next, I created a website to assist with communicating important PLC information. The website included the framework as well as additional research on PLCs. The website includes a video clip of Dufour discussing the importance and relevance of working in PLCs. The website also provided a link to documents for PLC leader and members. Also on the website are resources and links for teachers to

access related to Learning-Focused Strategies (a district-supported teaching model), Bloom's Taxonomy, and Webb's Depths of Knowledge.

The last step was developing protocols to help clarify PLC leaders' and members' roles and their work and strengthen accountability for results. The following describes the evolution of a template for recording meeting minutes, the development of leader checklist to help guide and record meetings, and the creation of a job description for PLC leaders.

### **The Evolution of the Meeting Minutes Template**

One outcome of the initial training in 2010 was my realization that we needed a method to monitor the work of each PLC. I adapted a template that was used by one of the elementary school principals. To monitor the work of the PLC, department chairs were expected to complete the template at each PLC meeting. I presented the department chairs with the template for meeting minutes and asked if they felt the template would capture the discussions they anticipated having with their PLCs. As shown in Table 4.1, the meeting template included the date of the meeting, the members present, "last meeting we" statements, outcomes accomplished, outcomes not accomplished, "by the end of this meeting we will have" statements, agenda, data (data utilized and how it helped), action items (who, what, and by when), and students discussed (name, issues resolved, follow-up needed).

Table 4.1 Meeting Minutes Template (first version, 2010)

<b>PLC Meeting Template</b>		
Date:		
Members present:		
Last meeting we:		
Outcomes accomplished:		
Outcomes we did not get to:		
By the end of this meeting, we will have:		
Agenda:		
<b>Data</b>		
Data Utilized:	Helped to:	
If this box is not applicable during this meeting, please explain here:		
<b>Action Items</b>		
Who? (lead)	What?	By when?
<b>Students Discussed</b>		
Name	Issue(s) Resolved	Follow-up needed
<b>Meeting Evaluation</b>		
Name		Issue(s) Resolved



The PLC leaders agreed that the template for meeting minutes would meet their needs for recording PLC work. Since the review of data was supposed to be one of the key components of a PLC, a place to include the data reviewed at the meeting was included on the template. Department chairs were asked to keep the meeting minutes in a binder and to turn them in to their supervisor for review at the end of each week.

Reflections on year one progress, at the end of 2011, revealed shortcomings with the template. First, each of the four school administrators on the administrative team supervised a different department/PLC. Initially, department chairs were asked to turn in the binders/minutes on a weekly basis. The administrators soon realized that collecting the binders each week was not productive because often there was not enough accomplished during the week to require feedback. Binder reviews became bi-weekly or on an “as needed” basis.

The different supervisors monitored PLCs in different ways with respect to the feedback they provided to PLC leaders about the meeting minutes. One supervisor, for example, would provide comments about each of the meeting dates with a few points to be considered in the coming PLC meetings. Another supervisor looked specifically for the completion of assigned tasks. For example, one week the expectation was to complete learning maps for the current unit. The supervisor then checked to see that those learning maps were completed and included.

Conversations with PLC leaders also revealed they found the template to be cumbersome. Much time was spent making sure the minutes were completed rather than truly engaging in the conversations the form was intended to capture. One PLC member noted, “We spend more time filling in all of the boxes on the form than we do discussing teaching.”

To respond to the needs of the PLC leaders, I decided to abandon this initial meeting template. Since what I sought was teachers engaged in conversations about learning, I didn’t want to detract from this with a long form to complete. So, PLC leaders were instructed to simply record minutes of their meetings. There was no form or template for them to follow; they were just supposed to keep a record of what was discussed.

This resulted in less effective reporting of the meeting minutes (during 2011-2012). Since PLC leaders could report in way they chose, the records of meetings were less focused. Without a specified form to guide them, PLC leaders became less consistent with turning them in to their supervising administrator.

So, it soon became a priority to develop a more efficient form for guiding and recording meetings and for communication between PLCs and the building administrators responsible for monitoring and supporting PLCs. Based on deficiencies with the forms used the previous two years, the new PLC meeting form needed to:

1. accurately reflect the PLC conversations and work
2. be user-friendly (easy to complete) and not detract from the PLC work

In addition we believed that if the form was developed well it could help the PLC leader and the PLC members to focus on the PLC components. Therefore, in consultation with the data coach, I created a template intended to gauge the important components (Table 4.2).

Table 4.2 Revised Meeting Minutes Template

<b>AHS PLCs</b> <i><b>Focused on Learning*Collaborative*Results-Oriented*Data-Driven</b></i>	
Date _____	Collaborative Team: _____ _____ _____
<b>Key Learning:</b>   <b>Relation to Common Core:</b>   <b>Unit Goal:</b>	
<b>Data Review (what data was reviewed? Patterns/outcomes/observations?)</b>	
<b>Action Related to the Data:</b>   <b>For Next Time (Action Items):</b>	
At the conclusion of the unit/unit goal~ Did the collaborative team meet the goal YES/NO (circle one)	

The new meeting template (Table 4.2) contained, in its header, the four components of PLCs from the AHS Framework. This made the four framework components prominent and pervasive.

Also, the meeting template was divided into four blocks, one for each of the four components. The first box was dedicated to the component of collaboration. In order to identify collaboration, teams were asked to include the names of the collaborative team with which they worked. This method for determining collaboration (listing the names) was less of a self-report to the question, “Did you collaborate?” and more of an implication that the completion of the PLC product *was* the evidence of collaboration.

Within each core content area PLC, teachers were asked to form a “data team” with which to collaborate. The data team is a subset of the PLC of teachers teaching the same content/grade. By forming these smaller teams within the PLC and focusing on one unit at a time, teachers were able to concentrate on data specific to their day-to-day teaching.

The second box of the template was dedicated to the component focusing on learning. Related to this component, PLC members were directed to record their discussion of the standards, key learning, and unit goals. In order to focus this work, the first box includes a place for recording Key learning (what is the key topic the specific group is discussing), Relation to the Common Core, and Unit Goal.

As described, one of the issues with initial PLCs was that discussions were not focused on student learning, but on other topics such policies or schedules. By including this section for the key learning on the meeting minutes template, PLC participants were forced to at least identify learning discussed if they were to complete the form. This section also required PLC members to identify how the key learning related to the Common Core. The primary reason for adding this to this section was to help ensure that the key learning was in fact connected to the Common Core State Standards. Constantly referencing the standard was intended to force the teachers to review and include in teaching the common core standards. Finally, included in this section of the meeting minutes template is a specific unit goal.

The unit goal was relevant in focusing the PLC on learning and helped to tie together the key learning upon which the PLC is focused and a plan for teaching the identified key learning. In this way, the unit goal was also relevant for incorporating another PLC framework component, results-orientation. The data teams were asked to develop a unit goal for each unit they taught. This goal was created to help guide specific PLC work. It also helped the data team focus on the results they hoped to achieve. PLCs had reviewed data in the past, such as PSAT scores, that had little connection to what they were actually teaching on a day-to-day basis. The unit goal helped each data team stay focused on their specific curriculum relative to their specific students. It was intended to make the cycle of inquiry more realistic, more pertinent, and more efficient. With a unit goal, teachers were now able to pre-assess, review data, make a change in instruction, and then reassess to determine student

learning. The unit goal was to be directly related to both the key learning and common core as well as results from an identified assessment (pre-test, DCAS data, etc.) that had been analyzed.

The following is an example demonstrating how one data team in the ELA PLC (the 12<sup>th</sup> grade team) completed the “key learning” section of the PLC minutes.

Key Learning: Writers use narrative elements to develop and structure texts to convey purpose and meaning.
Relation to Common Core: author’s craft: RL 5, RL 3; inferences: RL 1, RL 4; multiple interpretations RL 7.
Unit goal: 85% of the students will earn a “C” on the post-test.

This example demonstrates a unit goal connected to “key learning.” After this team of 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers administered a pre-assessment, they decided within their PLC that they needed to focus on narrative elements. They connected this focus to five different Common Core State Standards. While “students earning a C” is not the most specific or desirable goal, they had at least begun to develop goals based on evaluating student work. Having teachers focus their data around a unit goal helped to promote the functionality of the PLCs. So, including the unit goal on the meeting minutes template was a positive step in improving PLCs.

The third box on the template was for referencing the data the team was using to guide their work. To address the use of data in PLC conversations, PLC members were asked to record what data was reviewed and what patterns/outcomes/observations were identified. In the example above, the 12<sup>th</sup> grade data team indicated:

Data Review (what data was reviewed? Patterns/outcomes/observations?)

Data collection from the unit one pre-test. Problems: intro of character (RL 3), context clues/ meaning (RL 4), and settings (RL 3).

In the example above, the team is specific about the data they reviewed (unit one pre-test) and patterns they observed (Problems: intro of character (RL 3), context clues/ meaning (RL 4), and settings (RL 3). This indicates the team had administered and reviewed an assessment and noticed that students demonstrated deficiencies in three specific areas. It is important to note, in contrast to past expectations that PLC teams “discuss data,” the data team in this example identified a specific assessment and detailed observed deficiencies. These were actions not previously observed in PLC data discussions.

The fourth box on the template is related to the component of results-orientation. Results orientation could be easily confused with incorporating and using data. This was the way I originally thought about the expectation of results orientation. However, the intent of results-oriented refers to setting and monitoring goals. As I explained in discussing the unit goal, the results-oriented component is first introduced in the key learning section of the template as described above. In the key learning section, data teams are expected to create a goal for the unit. To elaborate on that goal, in this fourth section of the template PLC members are asked to identify what action they would take related to the data to achieve the goal. For example, a data team might identify a deficiency such as, “We noticed from the data

that students had difficulty with XYZ.” The data team is then expected to describe the action they will take with respect to the stated problem, that is, “what will you, as the teacher, do to address the stated deficiencies?” As example of an action a team might identify includes, “We will teach a mini-lesson and administer a 4-question exit ticket to determine student understanding.” To reference the 12<sup>th</sup> grade data team again, the following was recorded in this fourth section of the template:

Action Related to the Data: incorporate the above three “problem” LEQs in explicit class instruction/analysis in other texts; in class summarization strategies.
--

This data team describes what they will do to achieve the identified unit goal.

Included in this final section is the title, “For Next Time (Action Items).” The action items intended to provide accountability to the PLC members to take action for the next meeting. It commits teachers to a specific task or responsibility for the next PLC meeting. For example, a model response to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade team above could have been: “We will bring the exit ticket responses from the mini-lesson or we will create a graphic organizer to share at the next meeting showing how I taught the analysis of the various texts.”

Finally, the template required the collaborative team to indicate if they met the unit goal at the conclusion of the unit. Again, this was information for the administrator to monitor PLC effectiveness and to help identify areas needing support. Additionally, I was optimistic that reflection on meeting the unit goal would also cause the data team to reflect on why or why not they met the goal.



### **The Development of the PLC Leader Checklist**

The template for recording meeting minutes both guided the work of the PLC members and served as a communication tool with the supervising administrator. By reviewing the meeting minutes, the supervisor could gain a sense of the work in which PLC members were participating. It was also important to enhance communication between PLC leaders and supervisors. Specifically, it was important for the supervisor to keep abreast of not only PLC discussions, but also the adherence to the norms and expectations for PLC meetings.

So, in addition to the minutes form, I also created a PLC Leader Checklist. This checklist was created in order to guide the leader in focusing the PLC and for communicating with the supervisor. Each of the checklist items was to be marked “yes” or “no” for the three PLC meetings in the week. Any responses of no were to be commented upon. The checklist appears on the following page.

The checklist had several purposes. First, the checklist was created in order to summarize the work the PLC completed throughout the week. It served as a tool for communication between the PLC leader and the supervisor. The checklist detailed administrative details regarding attendance, punctuality of the meeting, and the review of norms. Second, it served as a reminder of the PLC protocols related to the framework by requiring the PLC leader to comment on the members’ commitment to remaining focused on learning, collaborating with one another, using data, and setting

goals. Also, the checklist required PLC leaders to identify the PLC agenda for the following week. This was an additional monitoring piece for the supervisor to ensure proper focus and progress in the PLC. The agenda was also helpful for identifying which meetings might be the most beneficial for the administrator to visit. Finally, using the checklist, the PLC leader was provided the opportunity to identify questions and/or supports needed. This helped to ensure that if supports were needed (resources, professional development, specialist assistance, etc.) the leader was provided the forum to request such and the administrator was fully informed of the need.

Table 4.3 PLC Leader Meeting Checklist

AHS PLCs: *Focused on Learning\*Collaborative\*Results-Oriented\*Data Driven*

Date _____	Date _____		Date _____		Date _____		
Criteria	Y	N	Y	N	Y	N	If no, please comment
Meeting started on time.							
All team members present.							
Norms reviewed prior to the beginning of the meeting.							
Data teams completed and returned meeting minutes.							
Data teams were focused on learning, unit goals, and data.							
Data teams identified action steps for the next meeting.							
Agenda for next week:							
Questions/Supports Needed:							
Form completed and returned to [NAME OF SUPERVISOR] the end of the day each Friday.							

### **The Creation of a Job Description for PLC Leaders**

For months leading up to the end of the 2010-2011 school year, members of the English department voiced some concerns about the leadership of their department chairperson. While most recognized the vast knowledge the person possessed, they were at the same time dissatisfied with the manner in which he led. Often they questioned whether tasks or assignments were aligned with the school's priorities, or if they were personal ideas the PLC leader was promoting. It became clear to me that in at least one of the instances, the PLC leader was representing a personal idea as an administrative directive.

Also, there were occasions where the productivity of the PLC was being hindered by the mismanagement of the group. During a meeting with the PLC leader, the leader spoke of a member of the department that continued to "hijack" the PLC meetings. The leader was attempting to resolve the issues with the teacher, yet to that point had not been successful. My directive to the leader was, "Either you can address her or I will." What I learned as time began to pass was that leader was attempting to "gain trust" with the group by not sharing information with me as the principal and supervisor of the department. This was unproductive in two ways. First, it was failing to address teacher's behavior which was hindering the productivity of the meeting. Second, not sharing the information with me failed to facilitate the distributive leadership inherent in the PLC leader design. By this I mean, as the principal, I am reliant on the PLC leaders to carry my message and expectations to their respective

departments. In return, I expect them to follow through on the task and then report back to me about issues encountered or supports needed.

As principal of the school, it is crucial, as Collins (2001, p. 54) writes, to put “the right people, on the right seat on the bus. The right people don’t need to be managed.” So, making decisions regarding who holds leadership positions within the school is vital to making sure goals are addressed and achieved. Equally important, or perhaps even more so, are making decisions to change that leadership should the person not be the right fit. This is the decision with which I was faced in June of 2011.

Therefore, the difficult decision to change the PLC leadership became evident. In May, I indicated to the leader that I would be posting his leadership position at the end of the school year. The leader asked if we could have some time to discuss my decision. I indicated that I had a short time available after a meeting we had arranged for a few days later, but that if he felt he would need more time, we could set up a meeting later in the week. When we met, I asked if he would like to discuss his concerns with the leadership position. At that time, he indicated that we could meet later in the week but that he hoped that I would consider allowing him to stay in the position. I explained that I felt that the department was at a point where I thought that they would not be productive with him as a leader because the trust was at a point I found to be unsalvageable. Likewise I shared that the department had failed to complete assigned tasks during the year and due to this lack of productivity and

mistrust, I felt it was important for both me and the department to make a change in leadership.

I indicated that I could not prevent him from expressing interest in filling the position, but that at that point, my decision was made. The leader decided he still wanted to meet in a few days to discuss this further. I agreed and indicated that I would take no action regarding posting of the position, interviewing candidates, etc. before we met again.

A few days later, we had the second scheduled meeting. Since we had last met, the leader indicated that he held a PLC meeting he deemed to be highly effective. He described how he was explicit with the expectations for the meeting and had written the agenda for the meeting on the board. He also indicated that it had gone very well and that this served as evidence, he believed, that the group was not, as I suggested, too far from rebuilding the trust necessary to move the group forward.

I explained that my decision had not changed. The evidence from the past year, including the multiple conversations with teachers, the results of the survey, and the lack of products from the PLC, was too vast to be overcome by what he perceived to be one good group meeting. I offered some suggestions on how the leader might present his version of my decision to colleagues in an effort to salvage his reputation. I tried to focus on moving the department forward by attempting to value the contribution he would still have, though not in a leadership role. Later that day, I officially posted the position for PLC leader for the ELA department. Two members

of the department expressed an interest in filling the position. Interviews were conducted to fill the position. Questions in the interview included:

1. What are the strengths of your department?
2. What are some goals that you would like to see achieved in your department next year and what are the ways in which you would attempt to achieve those goals?
3. Suppose a decision was made at the administrative level that you did not agree with, how would you convey that information to your department knowing that it may not be popular?
4. Describe your leadership style.
5. How would the members of the department describe you?
6. A member of your department meets in PLCs to work on LFS strategies including KUDs, Learning Maps, and Essential Questions. This person posts the strategies in the room, appearing to comply with the district and school plans. Through conversations, you learn that the department member is not using any LFS strategies. What do you do?

### **Choosing a New ELA PLC Leader**

The teacher who was eventually the successful candidate for the PLC leader position expressed a willingness to take action. He presented an “ELA Dept. Chair Proposal” which included a definition of leadership, The Common Tasks, The Plan, Perceived Challenges, and Summary. The entire department had felt that they were unproductive throughout the school year and all members, including the leader applicants, just wanted to move forward and accomplish the tasks with which they were presented. This teacher presented a plan for moving the department in a positive direction. His philosophy is that “we are all here to work, and we should work hard every day.” He also believes that while we may disagree at the leadership table, that “once I walk out this door, what you think is what I think.” This element of trust is precisely a key element that I felt I lacked in the previous leader. Shortly after, I

communicated to this teacher that we were excited to have him serving as the new leader.

We had a few brief meetings in the summer to discuss the transition. The new leader had previously been part of the PLC under the former leader. In fact, in the preceding year, the two had actually been co-teaching partners. So while the new leader was confident that any issues with the old leader would not be a problem and would be handled professionally, he was nonetheless apprehensive about taking on his new role.

At about the same time, I communicated with the other teacher who had interviewed to serve in the leader role. She quickly responded that she was confident the other person would move the department in a positive direction and was “convinced it was a win-win.” It appeared that the transition to the new PLC leadership was successfully underway.

### **Lessons Learned and Actions Promoting Future Successful Leadership**

I once had a professor say, “As a leader, you get paid for making decisions; that’s your value-added to your organization.” Most of the decisions I have to make are routine, daily decisions dealing with discipline or other parts of running the school. However, others are more difficult and have larger consequences. Usually the most challenging kinds of decisions are those about staffing and personnel. Decisions regarding personnel are some of the hardest I have to make. We are all adults working with one another, hopefully in the best interest of children. But as the principal, I am

responsible for deciding who does what. There are often occasions when the person interested in leading a group or initiative may not be the right person for the task or situation. This is the kind of evaluation that a leader must make by weighing all facets of a situation. I think about this decision of changing leadership often and take responsibility for some of the shortcomings in leadership of the first leader. This hopefully will help me to assist the new leader, thus preventing a similar situation from arising again. As I reflect, I am able to identify two key deficiencies which may have contributed to the failure of the leader.

First, I accept responsibility for not being explicit enough with expectations of the leader and in monitoring the leader's course of action. As I've explained, a reflection of the early implementation of PLCs indicated a lack of vision for PLCs themselves, let alone expectations for the individuals leading them. Second, the structures and protocols for effectively monitoring PLCs did not exist. There was no common goal identified for or by the PLC at the beginning of the year. This then, left the decision of what was important, to the PLC leader. The monitoring process consisted of "turning in the binder" on a bi-weekly basis. However, there were no consequences by me when this was not completed.

To address these deficiencies I've taken two separate actions. First, the PLC checklist described previously was created to assist with monitoring the PLC. As I describe, it was a communication tool in which the PLC leader updated the supervisor on a weekly basis. Second, with respect to clarity in leader expectations, I developed a set of expectations as defined on a PLC Leader Job Description. The expectations



were developed in collaboration with AHS administrators, other district principals, and consultation with Dr. Ken Goodwin, the PLC Administrator who is responsible for monitoring and developed a similar set of expectations in the Red Clay Consolidated School District. (Appendix B) The description outlines the primary function of the PLC leader and delineates seventeen expectations the leader should fulfill. This job description was created to both help the current PLC leaders understand the expectations of them and to serve as a tool when seeking new PLC leaders in the future, as needed.

### **Summary of the Vision and Protocols for PLCs at Appoquinimink High School**

This chapter describes the lack of clarity surrounding several elements of the PLC process and the efforts taken to address these deficiencies. A framework for PLCs at Appoquinimink High School was developed referencing research on effective PLCs. This framework was communicated to the staff and used to guide further improvement efforts. The framework guided the revision of the meeting minutes template which helped to guide the work of individual PLC meetings. The framework also aided in the creation of the PLC leader checklist which assisted PLC leaders with focusing PLC meetings and served as an enhanced communication tool between PLC leaders and administrators. Finally, the expectations of the PLC leader were outlined in the PLC Leader Job Description and used to ensure the leaders are focused on leading the PLC in a manner consistent with the outlined responsibilities.

As chapter 4 will explain, efforts specifically related to providing clarity of expectations have shown to improve the general understanding of PLC expectations, the actions and products of individuals in the PLCs, and the consistency of reporting PLC work by the PLC leaders.

## **Chapter 5**

### **DEVELOPING A PROCESS FOR EVALUATING AND MONITORING PLCS**

Monitoring PLCs is both a critical and ongoing necessity of PLC improvement. First, it is important to evaluate the status of the PLC as they relate to the components of the framework to ensure all aspects are being implemented as prescribed. Second, it is equally important to ensure the evaluation and monitoring is ongoing and incorporates multiple sources of data, in order to sustain PLC efforts.

Several tools for monitoring have been created and/or utilized to either, directly or indirectly, evaluate and monitor PLCs at Appoquinimink High School.

These tools are outlined below:

- Annual Survey- PLC members were asked to self-report regarding knowledge of the PLC process, time allocations in the PLC, data use etc. in an anonymous survey.
- PLC Meeting Minutes- Minutes of individual PLC meetings were recorded and submitted to the supervising administrator for review on a weekly basis.
- Data Coach Report- A summary chart of individual PLCs' attainment of skills related to data analysis was reviewed.
- PLC observations- Administrators observed and/or participated in multiple PLC meetings throughout the year.
- Data Coach/PLC Leader Conversations- Individual meetings with either the data coach or PLC leader to assess progress and determine areas of need were held on an ongoing basis.
- PLC Products- Observations of the products created during the PLC were reviewed.
- Classroom Observations/Walk-throughs- Regular walk-throughs and evaluations of classroom instruction were completed.

### Improvement Results Noted from the Monitoring and Evaluation Tools

As we continue to improve upon the PLC process, both me leading the process and teachers participating in the process, the tools for evaluating and monitoring have evolved. In the following chart, I provide a summary of the changes in either the tool itself or the results gathered from the tool/method.

Table 5.1 Changes in Monitoring and Evaluation Tools		
Tool/Method	Initial Implementation	Improvement Efforts
Annual Survey	Intended to seek PLC member understanding of the PLC process and to gather perceptions regarding time allocations in the PLC. Survey results indicated a lack of understanding of PLCs and time allocated to activities unrelated to PLC goals.	Intended to ask, not only “do they understand the purpose,” but “what they understood that purpose to be.” Also served to gather information about specific data use and teaching and assessment strategies. Also gathered data of the data coach and served as a comparison to the previous survey by asking the time allocation questions again. Survey results indicated an increased understanding of PLCs and a greater commitment to the components of the PLC framework.
PLC Meeting Minutes	Reflected agendas of discussion topics. Mentioned analyzing data, but did not require or include specifics.	Focused on the PLC components. Required and included connection to standards and the Common Core. Mandated teams set goals and use data to assess progress toward the goal.

Data Coach Report	Teams demonstrating initial understanding and competence of the modules discussed.	Teams demonstrating a working knowledge of and comfort with analyzing data and identifying patterns or trends.
PLC Observations	Teachers participating in various tasks for planning, showing resistance toward the data coaching model, and lacking collaboration in many instances.	Teachers participating in discussions regarding best practices, working collaboratively to address student deficiencies as evidenced by specific classroom-level data, and developing action plans related to the data reviews.
Data Coach/PLC Leader Conversations	Discussions focused on how to engage all members of the PLC, getting teachers to “buy-in” to the data coaching model (specifically that the data coaching information was not connected to their day-to-day teaching), and the kind of work that should be engaged in during PLC.	Discussions focused on student data (DCAS, common assessments, etc.), methods to help teachers implement research-based teaching strategies, and further strengthening data analysis skills.
PLC Products	Products included (but not limited to): common assessments, book reviews, and test analyses.	Products included (but not limited to): checks for understanding (such as exit ticket questions), specific test question analysis and revision (when necessary), lessons created to focus on specific areas of need based on student data.
Classroom observations/walk-throughs	Classroom observations revealed: compliance with LFS model and limited checking for understanding and/or response to student pre-testing results.	Classroom observations revealed: greater implementation of the LFS model, attempts at regular checks for understanding, and lessons based on identified areas of weakness.

## **The Results of the 2012 Annual Survey**

In June 2012, I decided to once again survey staff about PLC progress. After reviewing survey data from the first survey in 2010 (appendix A) we made some changes in the effort to improve PLCs. The 2010 survey was intended to determine PLC members' perceptions of the functioning of their PLC. The 2012 survey was designed to yield more specific information on staff perceptions – their views of PLCs' purposes, productivity, protocols, and teaching strategies and practices.

The 2012 survey was designed in collaboration with the school's data coach and by integrating previously developed surveys, including parts of the 2010 survey and published PLC surveys. The survey is included as appendix C.

### **Methods of the Survey**

The survey was given to the PLC leaders of each of the four departments to distribute. The department chairs distributed and collected the anonymously completed surveys. The surveys were distributed at the year-end department meeting.

On the survey, PLC members were asked to rate agreement on Likert-type items with the following scale:

- 1 = Strongly Disagree
- 2 = Disagree
- 3= Agree
- 4 = Strongly agree
- X =No basis to comment

The survey consisted of 33 items, 21 of which utilized the Likert scale. Six items asked teachers to elaborate on scale response. For example, "If I were given the

option of no longer meeting as a PLC, I would still want to continue the meetings” was a question with a blank to follow-up with elaboration, prompted by “because.”

Five of the survey questions mirrored the year one PLC survey and asked teachers to identify time allocation in the PLC to total 100%. Another example of a rated response with an open-ended follow-up question included respondents being asked to rate their agreement with continuing to meet in PLC should it no longer be mandated. The open-ended follow-up question asked them to give reasons for their rating, stating, “because...”

Four other open-ended questions asked respondents to identify data sources, teaching strategies, improvements as a teacher, and improvements to teaching practices. In addition, copied from the 2010 survey, respondents were asked to provide a description of the use of PLC time in one of the following five categories:

1. discussion of “what” we’re teaching
2. discussion of “how kids are doing
3. discussion of “what we’ll do for kids who aren’t getting it,”
4. assignments unrelated to a, b, or c above
5. Other.

Finally, an open-ended summary statement asked respondents to indicate: “PLCs could be improved by...”

### **Results of the Survey**

The response rate for the survey was very good with 41 out of 45 teachers responding. Like the results of many surveys, the Likert responses were beneficial for gaining perspective regarding PLCs, while the open-ended questions and statements

provided more comprehensive and detailed feedback about teacher understanding, perceptions, and participation. In order to organize and categorize the open-ended responses, I reviewed and coded each and grouped them into categories which made them helpful to review.

The first set of survey questions were designed to ascertain understanding of the purpose of the PLC. In contrast to the 2010 survey, this survey asked if the teacher understood the purpose of the PLC and then followed up by asking what they understood that purpose to be. The ratings on question 1: “I understand the purpose of PLCs” are as follows.

Table 5.2 Survey Responses to question: I understand the purpose of PLCs	
	Average response by department
ELA	3.25
Science	3.27
Social Studies	3.66
Math	3.3
Avg. of all responses	3.3
1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= agree 4= strongly disagree	

With an average response greater than 3, the results reveal that respondents agree they understand the purpose of PLCs. In reviewing the follow-up question of “I understand that purpose to be,” 34 respondents wrote statements. Twenty of the 34 responses referred to the purpose being to collaborate. Other coded responses



described PLC purposes as planning, professional development, reviewing data and one respondent, who answered disagree to question 1, responded, “still not sure.”

Table 5.3 Coded responses to Open-Ended question about the purpose of PLCs	
	Number of responses N=34
Collaboration	20
Planning	6
Professional Development	3
Using Data	4
Didn't know	1

The next set of questions asked about the value placed on PLCs by the teachers. Question 3 stated, “I value the time allocated to PLCs within my department.” Question 4 asked, “If given the option of no longer meeting as a PLC, I would still want to continue the meetings.” The table below summarizes the results of these two questions:

Table 5.4 Survey Responses to question: regarding value of PLCs		
	Q3. I value PLC time	Q4. If given the option, I would continue meeting
ELA	3.25	3.5
Science	3.1	2.8
Social Studies	3.5	3.1
Math	3.3	3.7
Avg. of all responses	3.2	3.2
1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= agree 4= strongly disagree		

Again, the average responses indicate that teachers agree and thus value PLC time. This suggests they would choose to continue meeting in PLC if given an option. The follow-up question asked respondents to provide reasons they would choose to continue meeting. Collaboration among their department received the greatest number of responses. Planning time with their department received the second highest number of responses. Other responses indicated that the meetings were helpful. The few who would not continue meeting in PLC if given the option, said that the meetings were not helpful.

Table 5.5 Coded responses to Q5 indicating reasons teachers would continue to meet in PLCs if given the option	
	Number of responses N=34
Planning time	12
Collaboration	14
Meeting is helpful	4
It is not helpful	4

The next five questions relate to meeting facilitation and protocols for PLC meetings. The following are the results of these five questions. These questions are focused on teacher perceptions of meeting productivity, meeting norms, and dealing with disagreements in PLC meetings. The average responses are all greater than or equal to 3, showing teachers rate meeting facilitation favorably.

Table 5.6 Survey Responses to questions 6-10 regarding meeting protocols					
	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10
ELA	2.9	3.7	3.2	3.0	3.1
Science	3.5	3.5	3.3	3.0	3.0
Social Studies	3.3	3.6	3.5	2.8	3.1
Math	2.8	3.3	3.1	3.2	2.8
Avg. of all responses	3.1	3.5	3.3	3.0	3.0
1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= agree 4= strongly disagree					

Questions 11-14 reference the use of data in PLC work. The following are the results of the questions related to data. Again, the survey results of 3 or greater suggest teachers agree that data is being used in the PLC.

Table 5.7 Survey Responses to questions 11-13 and 15				
	Q11	Q12	Q13	Q15
ELA	2.75	3.2	2.5	3.3
Science	3.2	3.4	3.3	3.1
Social Studies	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.2
Math	2.6	3.4	3.0	3.4
Avg. of all responses	3.0	3.3	3.1	3.2
1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= agree 4= strongly disagree				

Question 14 was an open-ended response that asked teachers to respond with examples of data sources they used in their PLC. Many teachers wrote multiple responses to this question. The table below indicates the number of times a particular data source was indicated as a response.

Table 5.8 Coded responses to Q14 indicating types of data used in the PLC	
	Number of times a data source was indicated
DCAS	25
Class/Common Assessments	23
SAT	14
Exams	9
PSAT	6
AP	5
Formative assessments	5
Cold reads	2
Projects	1
Writing samples	1
TEL	1
Exit tickets	1

The next questions were related to teaching and learning and asked about the PLCs' focus on: the Common Core, instructional strategies, rigor, assessments, differentiated instruction, and setting learning goals with students. These questions were not specifically to evaluate the PLCs, but were important to understand more specifically what PLCs viewed as priorities in their work. Use of these questions resulted from my collaborating with the data coach since the data coach wanted information to facilitate his work with the PLCs and a survey of the PLCs was required by Wireless Generation, his contracted employer. In general, these questions reveal agreement by the respondents, with the level of agreement being weakest among members of the Science PLC and strongest among members of the ELA and Social Studies PLCs.

Table 5.9 Survey Responses to questions 16-21 and 23 regarding teaching and learning focus of the PLC							
	Q16 PLC develops and adjusts instructional strategies based on patterns of need and then evaluates results	Q17 PLC considers Common Core standards when making instructional decisions	Q18 PLC emphasizes rigor in instruction and assessments.	Q19 PLC creates and uses rigorous common assessments linked with students' instructional needs	Q20 PLC uses and discusses formative assessments	Q21 PLC teachers use differentiated instructional strategy weekly	Q23 PLC teachers set learning goals with students, using their individual data
ELA	2.6	3.6	3.3	3.3	3.2	3.7	3.0
Science	2.9	2.8	2.8	2.9	2.8	3.0	2.6
Social Studies	3.1	2.8	3.4	3.7	3.5	3.6	2.8
Math	3.3	2.8	3.1	3.2	3.1	2.8	2.8
Avg. of all responses	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.3	3.2	3.2	2.7
1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= agree 4= strongly disagree							

Question 22 was an open-ended response that allowed teachers to provide examples of the differentiated instructional strategies used in their classes. The following table shows coded responses of the types of instructional strategies indicated in responses.

Table 5.10 Coded responses to Q22 indicating types of differentiated instructional strategies used in class each week	
	Number of responses N=20
Learning modalities	12
Scaffolding	5
None	3

The next group of questions on the survey asked teachers to report the extent to which they had improved as a classroom teacher and/or made changes in their teaching practices. The average response to question 24 (I have improved as a classroom teacher as a result of the conversations and work we have done in our PLC) was 2.9, just under the 3.0 “agree” point on the scale and the average response to 26 (I have made changes to my teaching practices as a result of work that we have done as a PLC) was 3.0. Overall, then, responses suggest the average teacher agrees with both these statements, but that level of agreement is slightly weaker on the “I have improved” statement than on the “I have made changes” statement. Similar to the general pattern above on questions 16-21 and 23, the ELA and Social Studies PLCs were more positive, and the members of the Science PLC were least positive (their responses being only slightly above the 2.5 midpoint of the scale).

Table 5.11 Survey Responses to questions 24 and 26 regarding changing in teaching		
	Q24	Q26
ELA	3.0	3.2
Science	2.7	2.8
Social Studies	3.2	3.4
Math	2.8	2.8
Avg. of all responses	2.9	3.0
1= strongly disagree 2= disagree 3= agree 4= strongly disagree		

The coded responses for both questions yielded similar responses to reported changes in teaching practices, with changes to teaching strategies reported the most

frequently. This was followed closely with the response of changes to assessment strategies as the second most reported change in teaching practice.

Table 5.12 Responses to Q25 and Q27 regarding changes in teaching practices		
	Q25	Q27
Teaching strategies	15	12
Assessment strategies	7	8
Analyzing data	4	4
None	3	3

The next set of questions mirrored the 2010 survey, asking teachers to describe the time allocations of PLC meetings. The 2010 survey responses are indicated in each cell in parenthesis to serve as a comparison of results.

Table 5.13 Survey Responses – Teachers’ Reflections on Purposes and Time Allocation With PLC: Means By Department					
Department	% Time on “what”	% time on “how”	% time on Strats.	% time on unrelated	% time on “other”
ELA N=8	42.8	26.4	25.7	8.75	
(Year 1 survey n=60)	(7.5)	(10.8)	(5.8)	(35.8)	(40.0)
Science n=11	29.5	25	19.5	27	
(Year 1 survey n=110)	(27.3)	(20.0)	(24.5)	(24.1)	(0.0)
Social Studies n=12	32.75	26.5	28.1	15.1	
(Year 1 survey n=10)	(27.0)	(24.3)	(28.8)	(11.5)	(7.0)
Math n=10	28.1	37.5	26.4	7.7	
(Year 1 survey n=12)	(62.1)	(18.8)	(10.8)	(5.8)	(0.8)

The greatest difference from the 2010 survey to the 2012 survey was with regard to percentage of time spent on “what we are teaching” in the math department. In the 2010 survey, the average response in the math department was 62.1%. In the 2012 survey, the math department average for percentage of time spent on “what we are teaching” fell to 28.1%. By examining the table, it is evident based on average percentage responses that the math department was also now spending more time discussing how concepts were being taught as well as strategies to do so. The most noteworthy change – and very favorable – was in responses from the ELA department. In the 2010 survey, the ELA department indicated that they spend the majority of time on unrelated items (35.8%) and on “other” items (40%). In the 2012 survey, the average responses of the ELA teachers indicated they had significantly increased the amount of time they were spent discussing what they were teaching (42.8%, an increase of 35.3%), how they were teaching concepts (26.4%, an increase of 15.6%) and strategies they were using to teach (25.7%, an increase of 19.9%). While no one source should be used to evaluate effectiveness, the responses to the questions of time allocation by the ELA department showed marked increases from the 2010 survey.

The final item on the survey was an open-ended question asked teachers to respond to, “PLCs could be improved by...”



Table 5.14 Coded responses to Q33 indicating how PLCs could be improved	
	Number of responses N=19
Eliminate the data coach	10
Grade-level planning time	4
Time to plan	2
Provide professional development	3

Question 33 proved to one of the most helpful in continuing to make progress with PLCs. This question asked teachers to give feedback about how to improve PLCs. The response occurring most often referenced PLC members' dissatisfaction with the data coach. Most often these responses referenced the data coach's review of data which was unrelated to their everyday teaching (hence the responses in Table 5.8 regarding types of data being discussed.) When he began working with PLCs, the data coach was charged (by Wireless Generation and the department of education) to work through several modules which taught teachers how to use data. He was, however, very cognizant of making the time teachers spent in PLC useful and was open and willing to make changes to the way the modules were delivered. Responses to question 33 led to conversation with the data coach about how to make the PLCs more meaningful for the teachers. We discussed my improvement desires and efforts to that point and discussed how to make the data relevant and the PLC process beneficial. It was through this discussion that the concept of breaking each PLC into "data teams"

developed. This also addressed teachers' desire to work in grade level teams and incorporated time for planning. Likewise, from this discussion, I created the PLC Meeting Minutes template, described in detail in Chapter 4 (Table 4.2) that incorporated all of the elements of the PLC framework and the PLC Leader Checklist.

### **Summary of Monitoring and Evaluating PLCs**

Using multiple sources of information helps to create a clear picture of the current status of PLC implementation at Appoquinimink High School. While no single source of information is enough to show a direct cause and effect relationship between a particular leadership action and PLC outcomes, it is certainly clear that the combination of evidence builds a strong case that progress in PLCs has occurred and the PLCs have contributed to improvements in teacher collaboration, teachers' focus on instruction, and, presumably, classroom instruction.

With regard to the ELA PLC, there are several strengths to note from evaluating and monitoring. First, collaboration has improved dramatically in the ELA PLC. This is evidenced by observing the PLC in operation, by talking with the data coach and PLC leader, and by reviewing the minutes of the PLC as well as the products created. Each of these sources of information shows the ELA PLC teachers to be a collaborative group working toward a common goal focused on improved instruction and student learning. It is clear that the ELA PLC is far more focused on student learning than they had been in the early implementation stages. This is reflected in the survey, in the observations of the PLC and conversations with the data coach and PLC leader, but also evident in the classroom walk-throughs and

observations. Unlike the 2010-2011 PLCs, the ELA PLC had created products to be used in instruction and assessments. The products of their PLC, like graphic organizers, specific examples to check for understanding, and student learning maps, were visible in the ELA classrooms. The ELA PLC has also, in the PLC improvement phase, begun to use classroom-level data to create goals with which to help students improve.

While improvements can be identified through various sources of information, some of the monitoring and evaluation tools revealed that there were still areas for PLC improvement. The next chapter outlines continuing improvement efforts and challenges we face.

## **Chapter 6**

### **CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT EFFORTS AND ONGOING CHALLENGES**

Several pieces of evidence point to the improvement of PLCs at Appoquinimink High School. The results of the 2012 survey revealed more productive use of time in PLCs and that teachers have a clearer understanding of PLCs than in 2010. Observations of PLCs show teachers are working together in collaborative teams. The review of PLC meeting minutes, PLC leader conversations, and classroom walk-throughs/observations all indicate improvements in PLCs, and these data identify areas upon which PLCs can and should continue to improve.

Monitoring and evaluating PLC implementation is essential for ensuring continuous improvement. The tools used for monitoring and evaluating will continue to be implemented. However, even the tools themselves will be evaluated and may be changed to yield further improvements where possible. Making changes to the meeting minutes template is an example of a monitoring tool that might be modified in the future. In early 2013, the leader of the ELA PLC presented a meeting minutes template that slightly modifies the minutes template currently being used. While all of the suggestions from the ELA PLC leader may not be incorporated, it is important to recognize if further modifications to the form will facilitate even greater PLC effectiveness, these are changes I need to consider.

Currently, the meeting minutes template requires the data team to record the key learning, a connection to the standards, and a unit goal. This template is explained in detail in chapter 4. To save time, I originally told PLC leaders that if a group was working on the same key learning from one meeting to the next, they could write “same” and/or draw an arrow from the box on one day to the same section on the next day to indicate this. As I began to review meeting minutes, I saw “same” written often and started to believe this was minimizing the importance of the connection between the key learning/unit goal and the PLC work.

Also, it is not yet apparent, through observation or evaluating products, whether the PLC members have fully embraced the problem-solving cycle of determining student achievement levels, adjusting instruction to address the areas of need, and then reassessing to determine the success of the instructional strategy. Currently, the PLC process includes goal-setting (one of the framework components) but the goals tend to be vague. For example, one data team wrote the following goal: “Use and study authors’ use of techniques to persuade others.” Another data team indicated, “Analyze and synthesize a U.S. Court Case” as the unit goal. While the addition of a unit goal is an improvement from the early PLC implementation, it is not evident yet that the unit goal is always used to guide PLC work.

Likewise, the data that is being used to analyze student achievement is not always directly related to the unit goal. For example, the data team referenced above (“analyze and synthesize a U.S. Court Case”) indicated the data reviewed as follows:

“Planned court case project. Researched possible sites for students to use after Thanksgiving break.” First, and most obvious, this is not data. Second, it might suggest that there is no data indicating students need to analyze a court case. One might ask, “Do the students already know how to do this?” As a leader, my first question for this group is, “How do you know you need to teach this?” Examples such as this are not isolated to this one data team or this one goal. This example reveals a facet of PLCs in need of additional improvement.

### **Improvement Efforts to Implement**

Based on the suggestions of the ELA PLC leader and noting deficiencies of the meeting minutes template as described above, I am considering a revision of the meeting minutes template so that the record of the meeting reflects one goal, ideally until that goal is completed. This would negate the arrows or “same” being recorded under the key learning each record would be related to the stated goal. Requiring the unit goal to be a SMART goal (strategic, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, time bound), is a method to consider for increasing the specificity of some of the stated goals.

In an attempt to rectify examples of data that aren’t relevant or true examples of data, I will consider the ELA PLC leader’s suggestion of creating a check box for the type of data reviewed. In his revised template, the ELA PLC leader listed several examples of data sources the data team could consider. For example, there were choices for unit assessment, writing assignment, and exit ticket, to name a few.

Nevertheless, revisions to the template will continue if they are beneficial to the process and the work of the PLC members.

In addition, I will review the annual survey to determine which questions are relevant and perhaps any additions or deletions that might be useful. As previously indicated, some of the questions were added to the survey to combine my questions with those from the data coach. If those added questions are not needed by the data coach this year, I may decide to remove them. Also, multiple evaluation tools yield valuable information regarding the use of PLC time, so I'm no longer as concerned with the individual breakdown of time. These questions too may be removed. Like the meeting minutes template, I will continue to make revisions to the survey in order to gain the most useful information.

Further, to enhance a school-wide emphasis on improving student achievement, all teachers will be participating in PLCs. This presents some new challenges, but ones that can be overcome. For example, the original PLCs described in this paper were all members of the same department. Thus, on most occasions, there was common curriculum in which to discuss. Because the schedule can't facilitate the non-core teachers from also having a common planning period, the decision was made to place these teachers in a PLC based on the period they already have planning. These teachers then will be focused on student achievement in general by discussing good teaching strategies, literacy strategies, pedagogical approaches, and/or using the group for their own professional development.

### **Challenges to the Implementation Process**

Like most initiatives, the implementation of PLCs is fraught with challenges.

As I describe below, there are several challenges impacting our continued improvement with PLC implementation. These challenges are:

- support from the data coach,
- district-level input,
- consistency of PLC meetings,
- administrative team commitment, and
- inclusion of professional development as a PLC component.

As I explain in the introduction of this paper, the department of education mandated the practice of PLCs in all schools beginning the fall of 2010. To initiate this process, the department of education also outlined a level of support to be provided by a data coach. Data coaches would be assigned to work with schools in one of two models, either a direct facilitation school or a support facilitation school. In the direct model, schools were assigned a coach whose job it was to meet with school-level PLCs and help facilitate the PLC process. In the support facilitation model, the data coaches worked with a selected group of teacher leaders whose job was to take the information learned back to their full PLCs and facilitate the PLC meetings.

In both models – the direct model and the support facilitation model – learning about how to interpret data and developing the processes for doing so was a primary goal. AHS was assigned a data coach under the direct model. I presumed this model was chosen for AHS because of the implied level of support needed, though a



rationale for this decision was never provided. The data coach was assigned to work with the school PLCs. Prior to beginning the school year, the school administrative team met with the assigned data coach and discussed goals for PLCs. The data coach, a contracted employee from Wireless Generation (a school improvement organization), explained that he had been tasked by both our department of education and his contractor, to focus on several modules related to understanding and using data.

During that year (2011-2012), the data coach worked through the separate modules while trying to incorporate the needs of the school and individual PLCs. As one would expect, there was significant time spent building rapport with the staff at the school. The 2012 survey overwhelmingly indicated that the one thing teachers would most like to see changed was to eliminate the data coach as a co-facilitator of PLCs. However, as described in the development of the current PLC protocols, I met with the data coach to review the 2012 survey data. The collaborative discussion led to the creation of the current meeting minutes template and PLC Leader checklist. Furthermore, together we developed a plan for PLCs that we both felt would be more accepted by staff. Shortly after that meeting, he indicated to me that he had taken a different position and would not be returning as our data coach the following year.

So, the process of building rapport and gaining trust would have to begin again. Not only would it take time for the teachers in each PLC to develop trust and rapport with a new data coach, it would take time for our administrative team to share our vision with the data coach and have the new person mesh our goals with her job

expectations. Further complicating the issue was that it took several weeks for a new coach to be assigned to work with our school. When the person was assigned, I was asked if we could adjust our meeting times since the individual had young children that needed to be tended to. Since then, the new coach's schedule has been inconsistent. She has cancelled on days she has planned to work with individual PLCs and/or teachers and changed her schedule on days that she has arrived. Since the department of education's original intent for the inclusion of data coaches was a two-year plan and we were quickly nearing the end of the second year, it has been difficult to embrace the assistance of this second individual.

Another challenge to continuous PLC improvement relates to district-level support of PLCs. As the beginning of this paper explains the lack of district-level guidance in the early stages of PLC implementation contributed to some of the failures experienced as PLCs were initiated. While I shared PLC research and sought clarity from district leadership, my responsibility as school principal is to the staff and programs at the school. I have shared a survey the district leadership may consider for gaining a pulse of district PLC implementation. Dufour is clear that in order for PLCs to be successful, school leaders need support and guidance from the district level. If district-level guidance of PLCs remains inconsistent it will remain a challenge to PLC implementation.

Consistency with PLC meetings also hinders the improvement of PLCs. As I've described, PLCs need to consistently be focused on the components of the framework. Too often, a PLC meeting evolves into a "traditional" type of department

meeting. While I would like to suggest that every PLC meeting be aligned with PLC expectations, the fact remains that there are only a limited number of hours outside of class that teachers have to work with colleagues. On occasion, the PLC meeting time must be used to discuss other relevant school tasks. Of pressing concern in the 2012-2013 school year is the state's revision to the teacher evaluation system. Several PLC meetings have been spent trying to understand and meet requirements with this new version of the teacher evaluation system. So, though this work has been important and job-related, it has taken away from true PLC work.

Likewise, consistency among administrative team expectations impacts PLC implementation. Appoquinimink High School has four administrators, each supervising a different PLC. When I began to notice I had not received meeting minutes or leader checklists from some PLCs, I initiated a conversation with the administrative team about PLCs. One of the three assistant principals indicated that he didn't care about the meeting minutes or checklist. He indicated that he has regular conversations with the PLC leader and he viewed that as sufficient in monitoring the PLC's progress. As chapter 4 describes, the protocols related to monitoring meeting (the meeting minutes template and the PLC leader checklist) were designed both to focus PLC meetings and to provide regular, consistent communication with the supervisor. It will be necessary for me to reiterate my expectations of PLC leaders with the administrative team. I will also need to ensure each administrator understands the rationale for the meeting protocols and my expectation that they be completed consistently.

Finally, a challenge related to professional development remains. When creating the framework for PLCs at AHS, I thought it was critical to outline what I expected the PLC leaders and members to do. Dufour (2010) contends professional development is an individual PLC responsibility and is an important facet of PLC operation, but I didn't include it in the framework because at the beginning of PLC implementation (three years ago) teachers in their PLCs weren't ready yet to consider professional development as a personal responsibility. As indicated in the 2012 survey, teachers are still "asking" for professional development, such that they are seeking someone to impart information or knowledge of student learning onto them. As the problem-solving/inquiry process continues to become more integrated into the PLC process, I need to introduce the concept of job-embedded professional development through the PLC. While professional development is not a separate stated component of our school PLC framework, it can be seamlessly integrated in the data review and goal-setting aspects of the PLC. In this model, teachers will identify problems based on data and then collaboratively develop as professionals as they seek knowledge and implement the best course of action to positively impact student achievement. When that critical last component – PLC ownership of professional development – is fully embraced, I believe we will see the greatest gains in student achievement because more teachers will connect their own professional development to their own goals for improving student results.

When this is achieved, PLCs will resemble the models in the literature and will truly become how we operate as professionals at Appoquinimink High School.

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<sup>1</sup> ([http://www.doe.k12.de.us/rttt/De\\_Ed\\_ReformPlanOverview.pdf](http://www.doe.k12.de.us/rttt/De_Ed_ReformPlanOverview.pdf)).

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.doe.k12.de.us/rttt/RTTTFAQFinal.pdf>).



# **Appendix A** **SURVEY OF PLC MEMBERS** **(2010 Survey)**

Subject area taught \_\_\_\_\_

1= Strongly Agree  
2= Agree  
3= Disagree  
4= Strongly Disagree

1. I understand the purpose of PLC's. 1 2 3 4

2. I value the time allocated to PLC's within my department. 1 2 3 4

3. The following is a description of time allocation within my department PLC: (Total time should equal 100%)

a. Discussion of "what" we're teaching-----	_____%
b. Discussion of "how kids are doing" -----	_____%
c. Discussion of "what we'll do for kids who aren't getting it" -----	_____%
d. Assignment(s) unrelated to the a, b, or c -----	_____%
e. Other (please specify) _____	_____%
_____	
_____	=100%

4. My department PLC is facilitated in a manner that is productive and efficient. 1 2 3 4

5. There is a consistent use of data during our department PLC meetings. 1 2 3 4

6. PLC's could be improved by:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix B

### AHS PLC LEADER JOB DESCRIPTION

**Objective:** The primary function of a department leader is to support the vision of the school through consistent instructional leadership, including providing and participating in professional development opportunities. The department leader should demonstrate a strong knowledge of current district and state standards; current curriculum; current best pedagogical practices; up-to-date content knowledge; and effective uses of instructional technology. One of the primary responsibilities of the core department leaders (math, science, social studies, and English/Language Arts) is to facilitate the department Professional Learning Community (PLC). In addition to the duties of a department chair, as PLC leader, the department chair is expected to assume the following responsibilities:

1. Work with the Data Coach to incorporate effective data-driven research-based PLC practices.
2. Create weekly PLC agendas focused on effective PLC practices.
3. Ensure department member attendance at and participation in the PLC.
4. Facilitate PLC meetings.
5. Record and/or collect PLC meeting minutes.
6. Evaluate PLCs using the PLC leader checklist to be turned in to the main office at the end of each week.
7. Set measurable goals for the department.
8. Support professional development for self and others.
9. Serve as a liaison for the department members and the administration
10. Assist the school Principal in developing and maintaining a culture of shared purpose, continuous improvement and collaboration within the school.
11. Work in collaboration with the data coach, school test coordinator, supervisor, content-specialist, etc. and PLC teams to gather student achievement data to be analyzed.
12. Assist with acquiring resources for PLC teams (space, time, educational research, etc.)
13. Provide ongoing feedback to PLC teams regarding their implementation of PLC concepts and practices.
14. Work with PLC teams to develop group norms, essential outcomes, SMART goals, common assessments, meeting agendas and meeting minutes.

15. Ongoing communication with school Principal regarding the PLC teams in the school.
16. Ensure staff participate in PLC evaluation survey.
17. Other PLC duties as assigned by the school Principal

## Appendix C

### 2012 PLC MEMBER SURVEY

Department \_\_\_\_\_ years of experience \_\_\_\_\_

This survey was created to gather feedback regarding your participation in your department Professional Learning Community (PLC). When responding, please consider PLCs overall; i.e. you should consider both days that you are working with the data coach and those days that your department is meeting in PLC, not with the data coach.

Some of the questions come from the data coach in order for him to report your progress as a PLC. Others will look familiar (if you were here last year) as they were presented in a similar survey last year. The additional questions seek to gather your input on the PLC process as a whole. Information gained from this survey will be used for three purposes:

1. Improve the PLC process at Appoquinimink High School.
2. Inform the data coach about progress in PLCs, specifically with respect to accessing and using data.
3. Report on PLC implementation for graduate studies. (full disclosure)

Directions: Please respond by marking the response that best represents your view of where the PLC fits on the continuum from 1 to 4 as well as respond to open-ended questions by providing examples for your response marked.

1= Strongly Disagree (absolutely not)    2= Disagree (no, but)

3= Agree (yes, but)    4= Strongly agree (absolutely)

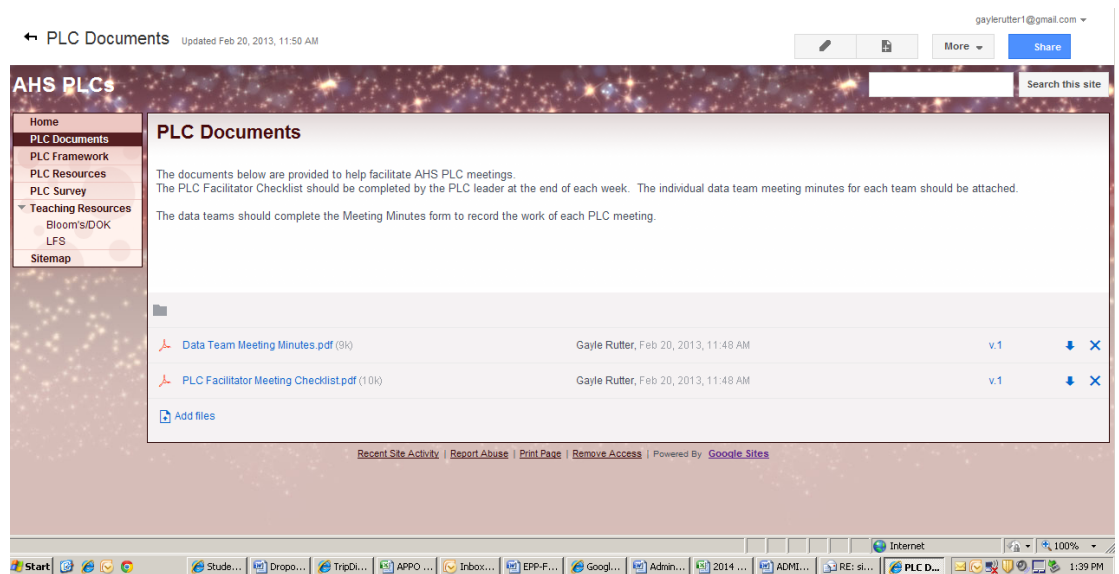
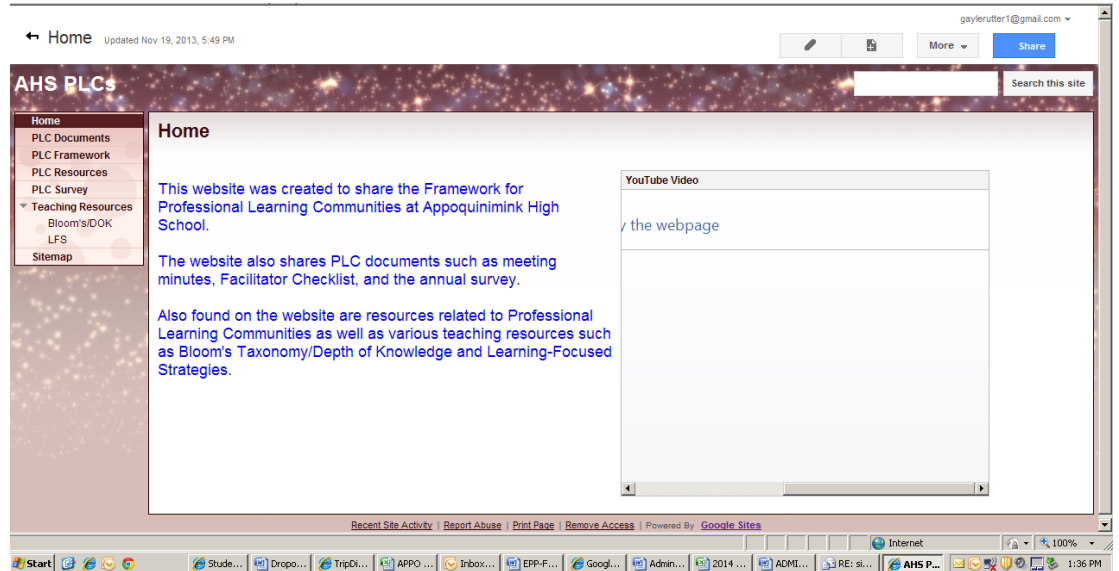
X= No basis for comment ( have not seen enough to say)

1.	I understand the purpose of PLCs.	1	2	3	4	X
2.	I understand that purpose to be:					
3.	I value the time allocated to PLCs within my department.	1	2	3	4	X
4.	If I were given the option of no longer meeting as a PLC, I would still want to continue the meetings.	1	2	3	4	X
5.	Because:					
6.	Our department PLC is facilitated in a manner that is productive and efficient.	1	2	3	4	X
7.	We have an agreed-upon set of meeting norms in our PLC team (for example, expectations for participant behaviors during meetings).	1	2	3	4	X
8.	We follow our meeting norms consistently at PLC meetings.	1	2	3	4	X

9.	During PLC conversations, team members sometimes disagree about ideas or practices.	1	2	3	4	X
10.	When team members disagree about ideas or practices, we tend to discuss those disagreements in depth.	1	2	3	4	X
11.	There is a consistent use of data during our department PLC.	1	2	3	4	X
12.	Our PLC is comfortable using and discussing data; they are able to access and interpret DCAS, Star, etc.	1	2	3	4	X
13.	Our PLC uses multiple data sources to make inferences about student data.	1	2	3	4	X
14.	Those data sources include:					
15.	Our PLC can identify pattern of need in different data sets.	1	2	3	4	X
16.	Our PLC develops and adjusts instructional strategies based on patterns of need; and then reassesses and reflects on the success of the strategy. (i.e. conducts Cycle of Inquiry)	1	2	3	4	X
17.	Our PLC is focused on Common Core standards and refers to them when making instructional decisions.	1	2	3	4	X
18.	Our PLC addresses the need for high levels of rigor in instruction and assessments.	1	2	3	4	X
19.	Our PLC creates and uses common assessments that reflect the standards, rigor, and instructional needs of students	1	2	3	4	X
20.	Our PLC uses and discusses a variety of formative assessment techniques, such as exit slips, pair-shares and common formative assessments.	1	2	3	4	X
21.	The teachers in our PLC use at least one differentiated instructional strategy in one class each week.	1	2	3	4	X
22.	The differentiated instruction strategies include:					
23.	The teachers in our PLC set learning goals with students, using their individual data.	1	2	3	4	X
24.	I have improved as a classroom teacher as a result of the conversations and work we have done in our PLC.	1	2	3	4	X
25.	For example:					
26.	I have made changes to my teaching practices as a result of the work that we have done in as a PLC.	1	2	3	4	X
27.	For example:					
The following (28 – 32) is a description of time allocation in my PLC (should equal 100%):						
28.	Discussion of “what” we’re teaching _____%					
29.	Discussion of “how kids are doing” _____%					
30.	Discussion of “what we’ll do for kids who aren’t getting it” _____%					
31.	Assignments unrelated to a, b, or c _____%					
32.	Other (please specify): _____%					
33.	PLC’s could be improved by:					

## APPENDIX D

### SAMPLE PAGES FROM PLC WEBSITE



← PLC Framework Updated Feb 20, 2013, 9:52 AM

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### PLC Framework

Adopted from the work of Dufour, Dufour, Eaker, and Many specifically in review of [Learning By Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work](#)

A Framework for Professional Learning Communities at Appoquinimink High School

- **Create a Focus on Learning**- clarify what students must learn and how we will monitor each student's learning.
  - shared knowledge, clarify the criteria by which we will judge the quality of student work, monitor the learning of each student's attainment of all essential outcomes, a system of interventions
- **Build a Collaborative Culture**- work together to achieve our collective purpose of learning for all students.
  - common goals that directly impact student achievement, articulated collective commitments or norms have clarified expectations of how our team will operate
- **Create a Results-Oriented Community**- assess our effectiveness on the basis of results rather than intentions.
  - one or more SMART goals, identified specific action steps members will take to achieve the goal and the process for monitoring progress toward the goal
- **Utilize Data to Drive Decisions**- seek relevant data and information and use it to promote continuous improvement.
  - ongoing analysis of evidence of student learning, frequent and timely information regarding the achievement of their students

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### PLC Resources

Websites with information and resources on PLCs:

<http://www.allthingsplc.info/>

<http://www.sedl.org/change/Issues/Issues61.html>

[http://www.wested.org/online\\_pubs/resource1097.pdf](http://www.wested.org/online_pubs/resource1097.pdf)

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