System-level Instructional Leadership –
A District-level Leadership Case:
Implementing PLCs in Schools

This instructional module has been peer-reviewed, accepted, and endorsed by the National Council of Professors of Educational Administration (NCPEA) as a significant contribution to the scholarship and practice of school administration and K-12 education.

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Objective of the Case - *The is a large volume of theoretical and "how to" literature on professional learning communities (PLCs), but little documenting the challenges of implementation and even less on the challenges of system-wide implementation of PLCs. This case is about the role of the central office in initiating and supporting system level change to improve student learning through the implementation of PLCs. Change of this nature and scope raises many difficult challenges – decisions affecting resources, staff relationships, union policies, school scheduling, curriculum, professional development, and instruction – and these are challenges and decisions that prospective school and district leaders need to understand and anticipate in order to lead successful change.*

This case is intended to deepen learners' understanding of the theory and research behind PLCs and the complexities and challenges of implementing change at the district level. The case is also intended to promote skill development: in <u>communications</u> (writing, speaking, tailoring messages to specific audiences), <u>strategic planning</u> (clarifying objectives, analyzing options and consequences, allocating resources, budgeting, adapting to stakeholders' interests, establishing timelines), <u>instructional leadership</u> (professional development, curriculum improvement, best practices for instruction) and <u>human relations</u> (empathy, supportiveness, self-efficacy).

The case has three main portions: (1) theory and research background; (2) the case narrative concerning the initiative to implement PLCs in Marshall County School District; (3) and the list of discussion questions and tasks to extend and apply the learning from the case. The case could be covered in three class sessions: the first session, discussing the background readings and understanding the theory and research related to system level leadership and implementing instructional change; the second, discussing the case narrative and the end-of-case discussion questions; and the third, presenting and debriefing on tasks selected for more in-depth assignments to complete.

Synopsis of PLC Theory

The concept of professional learning communities (PLCs) in schools stems from theory and research dating to the 20s when organizational psychology emerged as a field of study. One question central to this field is, "how does organizational structure affect productivity?" For instance, where in the hierarchy should decisions be made? What kinds of decisions should be made at which levels? And who (or what entity) should make the decisions? A related question is, "how does organizational structure relate to organizational culture (beliefs and attitudes)?" People are interested in these questions because there are so many different ways an organization can be structured, because structure affects culture (and vice versa), and because both structure and culture are drivers of productivity.

This case explores challenges of changing organizational structure and culture at the building level with a central office-driven initiative – PLCs. PLCs are viewed as a means to change structure and culture to improve productivity – student achievement. Since advocacy of any solution presumes a problem, it is helpful to consider how the problem is viewed.

Advocacy of PLCs reflects a perspective that schools have a problem of structure and culture: too much teacher isolation and too little collaboration (Conley & Cooper, 2013; Cookson, 2005; Davidson & Dwyer, 2014; DuFour, 2011; Mirel & Goldin, 2012; Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Rogers & Bubinski, 2002; Samuelson-Wardrip, Gomez, & Gomez, 2015). What is structural isolation? It means that most teachers work by themselves. They have little contact with other adults at work. A typical teacher is by himself or herself almost all day long. "Too often in the history of schools, teachers have worked alone with discrete groups of students in separate classrooms with little time to engage in dialogue with colleagues about teaching practice" (Samuelson-Waldrip et al., 2014 p. 448). A recent Gates foundation study conducted Scholastic indicates teachers are involved in collaborating with peers for only about 3% of their workday. Workers in other professions, by contrast, spend much more time engaged in teamwork, joint planning, or other forms of collaborative interaction. It is not just the limited time that teachers spend with other adults that is striking; it is also that much of the time that is spent with other adults, isn't really "teamwork" or "joint planning" or other types of interaction we would think of as professional collaboration. It is likely to be during breaks, lunch duty, or in the teachers' lounge.

DuFour (2011, p. 57) a former superintendent and leading proponent of PLCs, writes:

> Teachers work in isolation from each other. They regard their classrooms as their personal domains, have little access to the ideas or strategies of their colleagues, and favor being left alone rather than engaging with their colleagues or principals. Their professional practice is hidden in a veil of privacy and personal autonomy and is not a topic for collective discussion or analysis. Their schools provide no infrastructure to support collaboration or continuous improvement, and in fact the very structure of their schools acts as a powerful force for preserving the status quo. This situation will not change by simply encouraging teachers to collaborate and will require embedding professional collaboration in the routine practice of the school.

One barrier to collaboration is architectural: schools' "egg carton" structure. Each teacher is sheltered within four classroom walls for most of the day. Compounding this are

master schedules that do not make collaboration easy to accomplish. Think of other organizations and the relatively easy opportunities they provide for meetings and informal discussions. In business, law offices, government agencies, or university departments for instance, people meet frequently and often on short notice to discuss ideas and get group work done. In schools, with each teacher tethered to the classroom and unable to leave, it is hard to have these kinds of meetings, collaborations, and impromptu discussions.

Also, there is the matter of collective bargaining contracts. These agreements always stipulate prescribed working hours. A typical contract will specify the length of the work day and the allowed minutes per week for planning, preparation, and after school meetings. If, for instance, a bargaining agreement specifies 250 minutes per week for planning, preparation, and meetings, and of this 250 minutes, teachers spend 90% of their time doing individual prep and catch up work, this leaves little time for professional collaboration.

Norms of teacher autonomy also play a role, first spotlighted in Lortie's (1975) seminal study, *Schoolteacher.* This study and many others since have documented compellingly the paradox of staff cultures that protect teachers' dominion over the classroom, but at the same time can foster detachment from the school community as a whole (Conley & Cooper, 2013; Davidson & Dwyer, 2014). "Professional autonomy" and "academic freedom" are principles of pride and self-efficacy for teachers, ideals often celebrated in stories and part of professional lore (e.g., Jaime Escalante).[1] Autonomy for teachers is certainly important, but can be counter-productive when used to justify detachment from organizational priorities.

Advocates of PLCs view teacher isolation as a problem and professional collaboration as a solution (Cookson, 2005; Conley & Cooper, 2013; Davidson & Dwyer, 2014; DuFour, 2011; Hoaglund, Birkenfeld, & Box, 2014; Hord & Tobia, 2015; Lippy & Zamora, 2012; Moir, Barlin, Gless, & Miles, 2010; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006; Pirtle & Tobia, 2014; Roby, 2011; Rogers & Bubinski, 2002; Samuelson-Wardrip, Gomez, & Gomez, 2015; Schlichte, Yssl, & Werbler, 2005). Research – not just in schools but in other organizations as well – shows that working in a group can heighten productivity in several ways. First, reflecting the adage, "two heads are better than one," groups can make better decisions because combined expertise is better than individual expertise. We all know and do some things well, but everyone has gaps. For teachers faced with classrooms of diverse abilities, behaviors, and personalities and with covering a broad curriculum, exchanging tips and techniques can be valuable. But it is more than just exchanging ideas on classroom practice. Group-based work can lead to superior quality designs for curriculum, plans for staff training, and analyses of productivity data. While group work like this may not have direct and immediate effects on practice, it builds group and organizational capacity – what some call "organizational learning" (Kearns, 2014; Kirwan, 2013; Senge, 2014; Silins, Mulford, & Zarins, 2002).

The second rationale behind PLC advocacy is based on research on worker motivation (Braun, Peus, Weisweiler, & Frey, 2013; Katz & Miller, 2013; Körner, Wirtz, Bengel, & Göritz, 2015; Malone & Gallagher, 2010; Muindi, 2011; Rosen, 2014; Tam, 2015; Yoon & Kayes, 2016). A PLC is intended to motivate productive work by strengthening teacher-to-teacher social ties and creating an emotional connection to a small group. Ideally, workers should be individually motivated to deliver maximum effort "for the organization" with each individual motivated by and loyal to the entity that is the organization. Some organizations are able to generate this kind of commitment and motivation, like championship sport teams or small

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[1] Movies like, "Stand and Deliver," "Mr. Holland's Opus," "Dead Poet's Society," "Dangerous Minds," and "To Sir With Love," are among the better known.

schools with strong identities and stellar leadership, but in typical schools, especially in large schools, this ideal is hard to reach. There are not enough leaders of this caliber, and, anyway, most schools are too large and have too much turnover in leadership. So if a school can get a lot of teachers affiliated with groups and the groups function well, then that means there are a lot teachers motivated to achieve goals of a small group they identify with. They will work hard and do tasks because they want to cooperate, help colleagues, and do meaningful work (Bronson & Dentith, 2014; Conley & Cooper, 2013; Cranston, 2011; Dussault, Deaulelin, Royer, & Loiselle, 1999; Schlichte, Yssel, & Merbler, 2005).

Third, productive group work contributes to individual learning. It is not just that better decisions can be made by the group; it is that the experience – the process – of intellectual collaboration is edifying. Hearing other peoples' ideas, having our own ideas challenged, presenting and defending our ideas, thinking long and hard about ways to solve problems – these and many other ways of doing intellectual work in groups strengthens individual capacity. Key to the theory behind PLC is the teacher returns to the classroom better off from four one-hour PLC meetings than, say, one four-hour workshop – especially because the PLC work is likely to be focused on salient, immediate, and localized concerns as opposed to a "topic" treated relatively abstractly in a workshop. Thus, PLCs are heavily promoted as an instrument of professional development.

In theory, then, PLCs can get people to work smarter and harder which should translate into greater student learning. That is the theory anyway and there is research to support it (Ferguson, 2013; Fulton, Doerr, & Britton, 2010; Smith, 2012; Vescio, Rossa, & Adams, 2008; Wells & Feun, 2008); research and experience also warns us that PLCs do not automatically produce great results (DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Elbousty & Bratt, 2010; Kilbane, 2009; Stanley, 2011; Wood, 2007). If group leadership is weak, if a group's objectives are ill-defined, if a group's objectives are unrelated to larger organizational goals, if group members are not given time and support for their work, then time spent in group work can be unproductive, failing to benefit either the participants or the organization. Worse, unproductive group work can be detrimental – a bad experience damaging morale and souring people to future collegial efforts. The important question is how to implement PLCs to create and sustain good results for the individual, the organization, and the bottom line, students.

Large, Decentralized Organizations and the Challenge of Planned Change

Our thinking of PLCs must also take into account research on the challenge of organizational change in schools and districts. Change in any large organization is never easy; it is especially complicated in school districts due to organizations characteristics making change inherently difficult.

Years ago, Weick's (1976) influential research developed the conception of educational organizations as "loosely-coupled systems," a term much used ever since (Fusarelli, 2002; Louis, Thomas, & Anderson, 2010; Wanat & Zieglowsky, 2015; Young, 2006). On the one hand we think of the school district as a bureaucratic organization: hierarchically organized to achieve production goals; centrally controlled with executives, managers, professional workers, and production processes (i.e., instruction). On the other hand, there are these realities: teachers and schools do their work with a great deal of autonomy and are not easily controlled by district and state authorities; classroom and school "output" (productivity) is intangible and difficult to measure; education goals are subject to much interpretation, subjectivity, and dispute; and we often do not know in any given situation (e.g., this school, this subject, this district, this

community, this time) what is the most effective approach to management or instruction because each situation is complex. These conditions justify the term, "the challenge of change."

Here are key characteristics that make educational organizations difficult to manage:

1) Multiple goals, diffuse goals. Many think of schools as technical enterprises – an organization that develops basic, academic, and vocational knowledge and skills. However, this a incomplete perspective, for schools have multiple functions and goals, some clearly enunciated, some more covert, and some in competition with others (Ball, 2012; Newberry, Gallant, & Riley, 2013). Schools must teach all students an academic curriculum, but also try to insure graduates are prepared for employment and schools must cover well the "core" academic subjects, but also insure that students participate in art, music, health, and physical education. Schools must instill values of academic cooperation and teamwork, but at the same time students are in competition against each other for grades, academic rankings, and high test scores. Schools must develop students' independence and creativity, but also teach obedience and conformity; teach critical thinking, but be politically neutral; teach diverse cultural values, but try to instill a common "American" culture. Schools seek to adhere to principles of equal treatment of all students, but at the same time schools differentiate students into different classifications for remedial or gifted program, special or regulation education, vocational or college preparatory curriculum, and lower or upper track courses. These different goals, functions, and values are in tension with each other and make managing schools difficult and political. That schools have so many goals and functions and different constituencies prioritize them in different ways insures that schools are organizations perpetually in flux. At the local level, this is manifested in the ongoing politics impacting schools and the periodic eruption of significant tensions and conflicts.[2] School leaders are frequently in the middle of all this.

2) Open systems, porous boundaries. As alluded to above, schools are among the most "open systems" of organizations (Scott & Davis, 2015). By definition an "organization" has a boundary demarcating the organization as an entity separate from its environment. In some organizations that boundary is very clear and well controlled. In schools the boundary is porous; the line, blurry, between "the organization" and "outside the organization." From the U.S. President to the neighborhood parent, everyone has influence over what happens in schools (Anyon, 2014; Epstein, 2004; Hess & McShane, 2014; Howell, 2005; Kearns, 2014; Manna, 2006; Wanat & Zieglowsky, 2015). Business people, community leaders, politicians, lobbyists, researchers – a long list of constituents and stakeholders are involved in schools and have a say in the educational process and mission. This situation insures dispersed control, unpredictability, and unceasing change – the unending "waves" of education reform and, within states, the constant parade of new education programs and policy. Leaders at the building and district level must become adept at mediating between frequent policy changes and need for stability and continuity among the practitioners within their organization.

3) Decentralized structure. The organizational chart in education looks hierarchical. Hierarchical control operates – to a degree. But there is a great deal of dispersed decision making and autonomy at the classroom, school, and district level. There is a lot of variation

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[2] There is a large literature and many different theoretical orientations on the role of schools in society, on schools and cultural socialization, and on education reform and politics. Important contributions have been illuminating connections between social, political, economic, and cultural forces, education reform policies, and the organizational structures, policies, practices, and outcomes within schools and districts. It makes clear how schools are buffeted by many forces and how goals and functions of schooling are manifold and often in tension or conflict. See, for instance, Ball (2012), Fusarelli & Boyd (2004), Kerckhoff (2000), Kliebard (2002), Manna (2006), and Sergiovanni, Kelleher, McCarthy, & Wirt (2004).

across schools and, within schools, across classrooms in curriculum, instruction, school culture, management styles, and student achievement (Louis, Thomas, & Anderson, 2010; Madda, Halverson, & Gomez, 2007; Nye, Konstantopoulos, & Hedges, 2004; Rowan, Harrison, & Hayes, 2004; Smith, Lee & Newmann, 2001; Young, 2006). Dispersed, decentralized decision making results from many factors: traditions of local control, norms of professional autonomy, physical isolation of classrooms and schools, minimal monitoring of performance, and the unpredictability of events on the ground. The system looks and acts hierarchical in some ways; but control over what goes on in schools and classrooms is much more limited and dispersed fragmented then hierarchical charts suggest (Bauer & Brazer, 2013; de Lima, 2007; Cohen, Mofftti, & Goldin, 2007; Elmore, 1989-1990; Werts & Brewer, 2015).

Compared with the degree of production control by management in other types of organizations, principals' direct control over teachers is very limited. There are no "bonuses," or merit pay increases, profit sharing strategies to incentivize certain outputs or practices a principal may seek; and, conversely, dictates and "do this or else" commands lack force because, except for the most egregious forms of malfeasance or incompetence, teachers' salaries, employment conditions, and jobs are fixed by union contracts (though not so much in private or charter schools).

4) Large scale. Educational organizations are big. There are some small schools and districts, but most districts have student enrollments in the thousands and many are the size of cities. Almost three-quarters of high school students, for instance, are in schools with more than 1,000 students; many are in high schools with over 2,000 students (Cutshall, 2003; NCES, 2003). An average district with 20,000 students is likely to have over 1,000 teachers in 20 or more schools with annual expenditures of a quarter of a million dollars or more. A district this size may cover a dozen square miles. But that is just geographic scale: legally and officially, each district is a branch of its state education system, with the state education agency formally in charge. Add to this various other intermediate and municipal agencies providing services, regulations, and political pressure.

5) Uncertain "methods of production". Education is not manufacturing, engineering, or medical technology; it is about human psychology, cognitive development, values, and socialization. Teaching, leadership, and management are a mélange of art, craft, personality, and science. Children are enormously variable as amply demonstrated by the vast literature on learning style differences, multiple intelligences, individualized instruction, differentiated instruction, multicultural instruction, bilingual education, and special education. What is the implication of this human complexity and variation? Formal education methods are an imperfect and uncertain technology and even though education bureaucracies "manage" schools and deliver "instructional methods," the reality is that control over outcomes is far weaker and more unpredictable that most people think. The "command and control" model of management prevalent in corporations and other bureaucracies gets twisted and diluted by the loose-coupled structure of school system.

So, what are the implications for creating and managing change in school systems? Clearly, the district is *a system* and it needs to be managed; classrooms and schools need to follow policies set centrally and there needs to the capability of efficient, coordinated, and goal-oriented action if the system is to operate as an organization; otherwise a school district is little more than a symbolic entity – a name given to collection of independently operating classrooms and schools. Change can happen at the system-level and it can be managed, but it is not easy and success is by no means certain (Duffy, 2003; Elmore, Grossman, & Johnson, 2007; Supovitz,

2006). One of the biggest challenges facing districts today is initiating and leading structural and cultural changes in schools to develop well-functioning PLCs. Many are trying; only some are succeeding.

Most of the literature on PLCs is theory, advocacy, and "how to." Absent from much of this literature is discussion of the great challenges in implementing harmonious and well-functioning PLCs in schools. Significant organizational structure and culture shifts must take place. Several studies bear this out (de Lima, 2007; DuFour & Reeves, 2016; Elbousty & Bratt, 2010; Ferguson, 2013; Smith, 2012; Stanley, 2011; Wells & Feun, 2008) – studies documenting, not glowing successes, but difficulties and uncertain outcomes. This brings us to the present case to understand and deliberate over the challenge of PLC implementation.

You are in a management position in a school district. (In this case, it is the character: Bob Hotchkins, Director of Curriculum.) You have many years behind you as a teacher and a building administrator. You know what schools are like. You know that right now in your district, some schools have few or no operating PLCs, others have some but are struggling, and still others PLCs function well. State and district leaders want to see ALL schools have well-functioning PLCs and want this soon as reflected in a recent state initiative. You are the point person to make this happen. This is the challenge of leadership for change.

The Setting:
Marshall County Consolidated School District

District Enrollment: 13,129 (2015)
Percent eligible for free/reduced lunch: 34 %
Percent ELL (English Language Learner): 5%
Percent Special Education: 14%
Racial/Ethnic Percentages:
      White 55%
      Black 31%
      Hispanic 12%
      Asian/Pacific Islander 2%
Schools in the District (Table 1)

Table 1
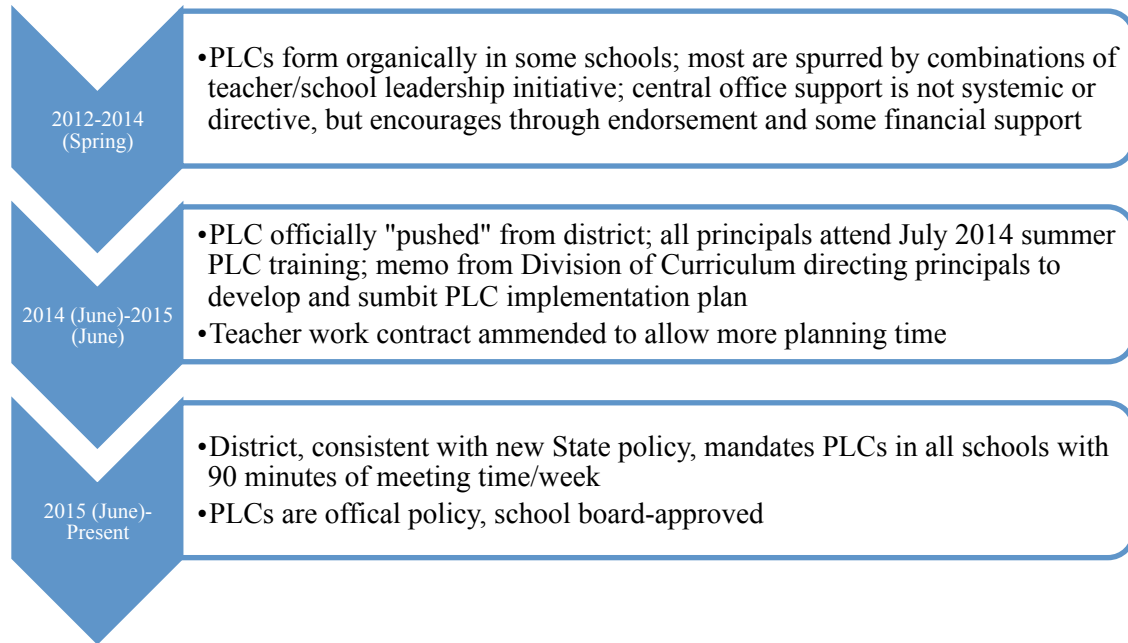*Marshall County Schools School Academic Performance (SAP) Ratings**

School Name	Grade Level	2015 Enrollment	2014 SAP Ratings
Johnson City High School	9 – 12	2697	Below Standard
Monroe High School	9 – 12	1983	Approaching
Canyon Middle School	6 – 8	945	At Standard
James H. Frost Middle School	6 – 8	965	At Standard
Frita Mayfield Middle School	6 – 8	889	Approaching
Rose Marino Middle School	6 – 8	1286	Approaching
Arcadia Elementary School	K – 5	651	Exceeds
Chandler Elementary School	K – 5	829	Approaching
Michael Madden Elementary School	PreK – 5; Special Needs; K – 12	716	At Standard
Mount Olive Elementary School	K – 5	1294	Below Standard
Windsor Hills Elementary School	K – 5	874	Exceeds

* Ratings issued by State Dept. of Ed based on testing at grades 3, 5, 8, and 10 in reading, writing, and mathematics. SAP rating utilizes a composite, scale-based score.

District Organization (Key Actors)

School Board
Superintendent
Director of Schools
Director of Curriculum
Director of Human Resources
Director of Finance
Teachers' Association Leader
Principals and Assistant Principals

Timeline of Key Events in PLC Implementation

2012-2014 (Spring)	• PLCs form organically in some schools; most are spurred by combinations of teacher/school leadership initiative; central office support is not systemic or directive, but encourages through endorsement and some financial support
2014 (June)-2015 (June)	• PLC officially "pushed" from district; all principals attend July 2014 summer PLC training; memo from Division of Curriculum directing principals to develop and sumbit PLC implementation plan • Teacher work contract ammended to allow more planning time
2015 (June)-Present	• District, consistent with new State policy, mandates PLCs in all schools with 90 minutes of meeting time/week • PLCs are offical policy, school board-approved

Superintendent Carter & CD Conversation in District Office (April 2015)

***Superintendent*: Dave Carter**
***Director of Curriculum* Bob Hotchkins**

"Hey Bob, DOE got the RTTT grant," Superintendent Carter said, poking his head into Bob Hotchkins's office.

Bob knew that the state department of education was a strong contender for the federal grant, but hadn't heard yet the outcome. Bob knew the state had been working intensely since last year on the proposal and that preliminary reviews were favorable. The news of success in winning the grant was just reported.

Carter continued, "We'll need to meet this week because there's going to be a lot going on. We'll need to figure out our next steps and prepare people. The state's really going to push on the PLC initiative." Carter, paused, and then added, "Let me think... by my estimate, we're going to want to see about 50 well-functioning PLCs by next year at this time. That shouldn't be too hard."

Bob understood Superintendent Carter's message, though it was laced with wry humor. Bob realized the PLC initiative was going to land largely in his hands.

One Year Earlier...
Summary of March 2014 "Directors Council Meeting" in District Office

Preface to March 2014 conversation: For several years (2012 – 2014), some of Marshall's schools had planning teams of teachers who met regularly and focused on curriculum, instruction, and professional development. These teams at their inception were not called PLCs. They developed from the actions of school principals and the participation of teachers. In these schools, the team meetings and collaborative work became part of their culture. New teachers to these schools became part of the teams and learned the expectations, practices, and roles of these schools' organizational culture. Leaders in the district office started to notice a positive change – both in school achievement and building culture.

Setting: A meeting of central office directors:
Superintendent: Dave Carter
Director of Schools: Sam Smith
Director of Curriculum: Bob Hotchkins
Director of Human Resources: Mary Gilford
Director of Finance: Joe Armstrong

After preliminary announcements, Superintendent Carter turned to Bob Hotchkins, the Curriculum Director, "OK, let's turn to the first item. Bob's going to talk about some ideas to support professional learning communities in the schools."

 "Aren't the students supposed to be the ones doing the learning?" As he often did, Joe Armstrong (finance director) jumped in with a comment he thought humorous, but with a mildly sarcastic overtone. Joe had never heard of the term, "professional learning community." Bob was familiar with the term, but he realized to some, it could sound like new jargon.

 "I think," Bob started, "we should move more assertively in developing PLCs in the schools." Superintendent Carter paused for a second and responded, "I've been thinking about that too, Bob… what are your ideas?" "Yeah Bob," Joe added, "what's it going to look like?"

Bob started by describing two schools with strong cultures of collaboration, and how they developed. He emphasized that the principal dedicated time each week for teachers to discuss student work. Joe, skeptical, pressed Bob for details. "I'm not saying it was easy," Bob added as he recounted how the principals worked to persuade staff of the importance of collaboration and to adjust schedules to create time for meetings during the day. They even encouraged staff to stay after school periodically to finish their work. "If all teachers had 90 minutes a week for collaborative work and planning, that'd be pretty ideal. This wouldn't have to be all during the day; some could be after the school day."

"The union's not going to go for that," interjected Mary Gilford, the Human Resources Director. "That goes beyond that allowable time in the bargaining agreement." Anticipating this issue, Bob replied that the district would need to discuss the matter with the union leaders to see if there could be some flexibility or exceptions made within the contracted hours. He was aware of being euphemistic in saying "flexibility" – more likely added planning time, if it was going to

happened, would be made mandatory.

"Also, we should consider summer training for building leaders; I've got materials I could share with folks now. And, also I think we should have a communications plan so central office staff are on the same page – using the same language in messages to schools. "Bob continued with suggestions for communications over the next several months to be both informative and encouraging to building leaders to communicate that developing PLC in the schools was an emerging priority. "I think it is important that we communicate that this is for the long term."

Joe then asked, "What's this going to cost?" Bob hadn't thought much about this, but added, "I see this as mainly a shift in building culture, but, yes, we'll need to spend money on training and I'm sure other expenses will come up. I don't know the details."

The Schools Director then asked, "How will this impact each school's master schedule?" Again, Bob had not yet thought this through in detail, but believed that the principals would be ultimately responsible for their own schedule. Bob knew that Sam Smith, the Schools Director, was sometimes difficult to work with; but at the same time, Sam was the main supervisor of principals. Sam would be pivotal in any initiative involving directives to principals and changes in school schedules. This concerned Bob because his division rarely collaborated with the Schools Division. "I'm not sure, but this will have to be figured out. They did it at Canyon and Marion, so we know it can be done. And other districts have figured this out."

Superintendent Carter added, "You know, Parsons [the state education commissioner] has been talking about making PLCs a major state priority." Bob, responded, "I know, I heard her talking about this last month at the university partnership meeting. She talked about PLCs and also about revamping the state's testing system, improving teacher evaluation, and changing regulations for charter schools."

"More charter schools… awesome!," Joe exclaimed with unmistakable sarcasm.

Carter explained further, "These initiatives are probably going to be in a federal grant proposal the state is writing." Bob added additional insights based on what he knew about PLC initiatives in other districts, although he admitted his information was fragmentary, at which point Mary Gilford, the Human Resources Director, recounted a conversation she'd recently had with someone from another district where they were experiencing "major pushback" from teachers. "I've got to admit," she continued, "I've got some big reservations about this… sounds like it might be another fad." Aware of this perception and sensing some apprehensiveness in the group, Bob tried to be reassuring: "It all depends on planning, being clear in our own minds about what we want to accomplish, and making sure we support the schools. Obviously doing something like this isn't easy and there are going to be bumps, but it's definitely the right way go. We need to have teachers taking more responsibility and having more say about training and curriculum and working more like teams. In some of the schools, you wouldn't believe, there's almost nothing going on between the teachers…. it's almost like they work in separate little cells." After more back and forth, a mixture of affirmation, cautions, and concerns, the group turned to other items on the agenda.

After covering the other agenda items, as the meeting drew to a close, Superintendent Carter concluded with a comment that Bob interpreted as supportive, but cautious: "Bob, why don't you and the council talk more about what we can do this summer to lay some groundwork to support PLCs, and we'll wait and see what happens with the state. I don't want to get too far out in front and I think Mary's got a point that teachers have a lot on their plate right now and aren't always enthusiastic about this new stuff coming down from the central office. Anway, let me know by next month's meeting more about what you decide for the PLC stuff going on in summer."

Back in his office, Bob reflected on the meeting. While he believed PLCs could help, he knew others in the meeting were less knowledgeable about PLCs, were not clear on what their own roles might be should the PLC initiative rise as a district priority, and were concerned about negative reactions from schools. Having been in the district for 22 years, Bob knew the challenges and the history of district led initiatives. It was a sparse history – neither successes nor failures. The district office never had been a major driver of school improvement.

In Marshall's history, the central office focused on district management: payroll, personnel contracts, hiring, supplies, facilities maintenance, budget allocations, bond issues, federal programs, and transportation. Central office supervisors with responsibilities for overseeing schools mainly were concerned with insuring schools were clean and orderly, parent complaints were minimal, and teacher evaluations were in on time. Monthly principals' meetings at the central office dealt mainly with issues related to staffing, schedules, budgets, facilities maintenance, and transportation. Rarely was there much focus on instructional leadership and improving teacher practices.

The central office was not an agent of change in curriculum or instruction. Superintendent Carter, now six years in his position, started with the district 25 years ago as a middle school guidance counselor. He also worked as a coach, a building administrator, and human resources director. He had little background in curriculum; none in classroom teaching.

Both Bob and Superintendent Carter knew that a PLC initiative was going to be a big culture change in the district. Based on the council meeting, Bob knew there would be a lot of pieces to coordinate and that progress would depend heavily on his own leadership. This included maintaining the support of the superintendent and key central office colleagues, as well as aligning central office efforts and contributions productively. Bob also thought ahead about the key meeting between Carter and the teachers' union. He pondered the broad scope of his tasks and wondered how effectively he could manage all this while maintaining attention to his other duties and not giving up his family life. It was daunting to think about.

Communications Between Superintendent Carter & Bob Hotchkins
(April 12-13, 2014)

Three weeks have gone by since the previous Directors' Council meeting. The April meeting is next week. Bob had spent a few hours a week gathering more information about PLCs, including published literature – research, case studies, and "how to" literature. This was not just to build his knowledge, but also to identify key readings to distribute to teachers and principals. Bob also spent time on the phone talking to colleagues in other districts to hear their ideas and experiences.

In preparation for the upcoming Directors' Council meeting Bob emailed Superintendent Carter with preliminary ideas for forthcoming communications to school leaders about PLCs and about summer training for school leaders.

To: David Carter
From: Bob Hotchkins
Date: April 12, 2014
Subject: PLC planning; prep for council mtg

There are two good choices for a summer PD training for building leaders on PLCs. One is a two-day conference event at the Sheraton Harbor in Baltimore and the other is a retreat DOE is hosting. I imagine most of the principals would prefer the Baltimore conference, but it's going to cost about three times as much. The DOE retreat is structured around four workshops at the Park Lane conference center on a Friday and Saturday on the weekend following the 4th.

Both have a pretty good line up of presenters and workshop trainers, but the Baltimore conference has a few of the "big names" nationally that people would probably like to see.

Also, I've been mulling over how best to communicate to the building leaders about this. The next principals' meeting is May 12th. If you want to announce this, I could follow with more about the district's PLC plans, the justifications, etc. If I'm going to be doing coordination and support down the line, it might be useful for me to start leading now.

On the other hand, maybe it's better coming from Sam as the Director of Schools. I'm not sure at this point how strongly he feels about supporting PLCs in the schools and dealing with the principals on this.

Let me know what you think

The next day, Bob received a reply from Superintendent Carter:

To: Bob Hotchkins
From: David Carter
Date: April 13, 2014
Subject: plans for council mtg

        Thanks for your work on this. Both summer training options look great – I'll support whatever one you choose. Talk with Joe [finance director] and let me know the costs. Also, we need to make sure there is follow up after the training. What did the principals get out of the experience? What are they going to do to start working on this in their schools?
        Concerning bringing up PLCs at the next principals' meeting. Email Sam with copy to me about the need to add announcements about PLC plans to the agenda for the principals' meeting.

Two days later, Sam Smith (Director of Schools) received an email from Superintendent Carter.

To: Sam Smith
From: David Carter
Date: April 15, 2014
Subject: Bob's role in PLC initiative; plans for council mtg

I'm asking Bob Hotchkins to oversee much of the PLC support from the district office. How about we meet and you and I can go over this and talk if you have any questions.

Dr. Carter's goal for the meeting was to explain to Sam why Bob would have primary responsibility for the PLC initiative – Carter wasn't sure how much Sam would care, but Carter felt an explanation was warranted – and to try to make sure that this decision wouldn't leave Sam feeling like his leadership was being questioned or that his authority was shrinking.

At the meeting Dr. Carter made several points: He explained the importance of Bob's curriculum background in the PLC initiative and the Bob knew a lot about PLC's "since Bob has been taking university courses and doing a lot of reading on PLCs." Carter also explained that he didn't want Sam's reputation and working relationship with the principals to suffer from the inevitable "bumps in the road" that would happen as schools implemented PLCs. "Frankly, I think this thing could raise a bit of trouble and it's better if Bob deals with this stuff since we need you to have their cooperation when and if we get into some of the redistricting and transportation decisions coming down the road."

Sam didn't say much during the meeting other than to communicate, outwardly at least, that he didn't have a problem with the superintendent's decision and with Bob Hotchkins' role as point person in leading the PLC initiative. In fact, as Carter anticipated, Sam was relieved that the PLCs wouldn't be a major responsibility for him.

At the same time, Sam left the meeting with some apprehensions. Sam didn't disagree that Bob's curriculum experience and knowledge of PLCs surpassed his own; but, at the same time, Sam knew the PLC initiative would consume significant resources and would cast the spotlight on Hotchkins – the curriculum director who was many years Sam's junior, who's profile had been rising in the district leadership ranks, and who Sam thought of in some ways as his competition. It didn't help Sam's undercurrent of concern that Bob was a hard worker and almost always gung-ho on new ideas and innovations.

 Also, Sam wasn't fully convinced about PLCs. More than a few times his informal remarks to others included references to PLCs as "the latest fad." In contrast to Bob's perspective, Sam was a strong believer in top-down management. He was unapologetically "old school" in his values, especially concerning the role of the principal. He viewed the principal as the "boss" of the school and saw in PLCs the potential for diluting the principal's authority and powers. Bob had, on occasion, communicated this perspective to principals. Almost all of them viewed Bob favorably – as an ally. Most of the principals had heard stories of Sam's legacy as a principal – a guy who "ran a tight ship," who had little patience for "touchy feely" initiatives, and who in his tenure as principal had ousted more people from his school – staff and students – than anyone else in the district.

April 21, 2014 Directors Council Meeting:
Bob Hotchkins Reviews Plans for Upcoming Summer Training and
Announcing PLC Initiative to Principals

After opening the meeting, Superintendent Carter announced to the council:

-that he was charging Bob with managing preparations for the summer PLC training for the building leaders;
-that Bob would present the long term PLC plans to the principals as well as summer training;
-that he would contact soon the teacher union leader to discuss a one year revision to the existing collecting bargaining agreement – a revision that would create more planning time for PLC work, but without reducing teaching time.

Without much discussion, the meeting moved on to the next agenda item.

May 12, 2014 Principals Meeting:
Bob Hotchkins Announces District Plans to
Encourage PLC Development in Schools

Sam Smith, Director of Schools, opens the meeting and reviews the agenda. "Greetings everyone. Good to see you again. We'll start with two items of old business – the air conditioner situation in the high schools and where we are with the new crisis response hotline – and then we've got two items of new business – the proposal to change the late bus out of the high schools and summer training on PLCs. Bob will talk about the PLCs." Sam then proceeds with the agenda items. An hour later, he turns the meeting over to Bob.

Bob began with a 10 minute presentation announcing the initiative, discussing the summer training, and the expectation that principals develop PLCs starting as soon as possible the following school year. He also told the principals that they would need to submit a PLC implementation plan by August 5, 2014. Aware this would raise some anxiety, Bob offered some qualifying comments, saying, "I know it can be hard to predict how the implementation will unfold – everyone's school is in a different place and has different challenges – but it's really important to get a plan down on paper, to set goals and some benchmarks." Several principals raised questions about the current collective bargaining agreement, explaining that it didn't allow for adequate meeting time for PLCs. Bob responded that the superintendent was aware of this and that a meeting with the union was planned shortly to discuss what could be done.

Other conversations reflected principals' concerns about current master schedules making common planning time difficult to accomplish. Bob replied, "difficult… yes, it can be; but do-able; we have schools in our district that have already gone down this path and we know it can be done; sometimes you have to think outside of the box." He added that, "we will expect a building PLC schedule; this isn't a request, it is essential. Please get it done by early August." Bob noticed some principals glancing at each other and heard a few sighs.

May 24, 2014 Meeting: Superintendent Carter, Director of Curriculum, Director of Schools, & Union Leaders

Superintendent Carter, Bob Hotchkins, and Sam Smith meet with the leadership of the teachers' union to explain the need to modify the current collective bargaining agreement to permit increased "minutes per week" outside of classroom time.

The group reviewed the stipulations of the current agreement:
the teacher work day is 7.5 hours (2250 minutes per week)
planning and preparation allotment is 10% of work week (225 minutes per week)
approximately 1.6% (150 minutes) of per month contract hours are for after school meetings, such as faculty and departmental meeting.

The district leadership explained the priority of the PLC initiative and its potential benefits for student learning and teacher empowerment; they stressed that without a formal addendum permitting extra time for PLC work, the initiative would be severely hampered.

The superintendent also explained that these extra minutes would need to be without extra pay, but stressed that their request is for just a one year waiver of the collective bargaining agreement.

The meeting concluded with some discussion. The union leaders asked a number of clarifying questions, expressed their favorable opinion of the PLC concept, and stated their intention to try respond within a week with a draft "memorandum of understanding" (MOU).

June 1, 2014 Collective Bargaining Addendum is Developed and Approved

A week later, the MOU from the teachers' union arrived agreeing to a one year addendum to the current collective bargaining agreement. The union agreed to a requirement that a portion of planning time during the week be used for PLC purposes and an added 30 minutes per month (no extra pay) be add to the existing 150 minutes per months allotted for after school meetings. See Appendix A.

June 4, 2014 Memorandum Explaining Collective Bargaining Addendum Sent to All Staff

On June 4th, a memorandum was sent from the superintendent's office to all staff in the district explaining the district's commitment to support PLCs in all schools and announcing the addendum to the collective bargaining agreement contract to increase time for PLC planning and use more of the existing time available for PLC planning. The memorandum also mentioned the summer training for principals.

July 29 - 31, Marshall Principals Attend PLC Training Conference

All but a few of the district's principals participated in the two-day PLC training conference. Bob had requested that principals not able to attend notify him in advance and to participate in a

locally sponsored series of workshops on PLCs. That the conference was held at an attractively located Sheraton, but not too far away, contributed to the high level of participation. The feedback on the conference was very positive.

August 15, 2014: Rose Marino Middle School

"Bye Dr. Allen!" Penny Chu shouted from the school foyer as she headed toward exit doors. She scurried to catch up with math colleagues Brandon James and Pam Stanley. The four of them just finished a 45 minute meeting discussing the math team's new, and still developing, plan to help more 6th graders transition effectively into Algebra. Dr. Allen mostly listened, but his enthusiasm and promises of support left Penny energized about what they could accomplish. Catching up with her peers, the three of them lingered in the parking lot and discussed "instructional innovation" grants program that Pam had recently found out about.

In Rose Marino Middle School, PLCs started to develop in the fall of 2011. While there was no single impetus, the arrival of a new principal was a key event. Dr. Jake Allen had recently completed a ten-day residential principals' leadership academy affiliated with a major university; in this program he read extensively on the subject and networked with peers from other districts also interested and involved school PLC initiatives. A major theme of the academy was labeled "individualism to collegiality." Dr. Allen then used his influence in hiring priorities to favor candidates committed to collaborative work and decision making; he also was lucky. Two teachers who he knew would not have been supportive were no longer on the staff – one retired and the other one transferred to a different school.

One of Dr. Allen's first moves when he arrived at Marino Middle School was telling the faculty that he would have exploratory teachers create "time" in the morning for teachers in the content areas to meet. He also adjusted the building schedule to increase the amount of common planning time each day and distributed readings on PLCs.

The staff of Marino middle school understood clearly that having productive PLCs was a high priority. Dr. Allen attended many PLC meetings, routinely asked how each group was helping struggling learners in their area, and he held each PLC group to high standards.

August 15, 2014: Frita Mayfield Middle School

Joan Deerdorf walked into the teachers' lounge, scanned the setting, and sat next to her good friend, Betty White. Joan sighed and asked loudly so others could hear, "So … you excited? … we're all going to be in *pro…fes…sion…al* learning communities?" For effect, she stretched out the word "professional" emphasizing each syllable to insure others would not miss her derisive intent. Joan glanced around and noted a few approving smiles. Betty just groaned, "Oh lord, it's always something isn't it." Joan replied, "I don't know about you, but I'm not doing it. I can't believe the union went along with administration on this. I didn't even hear about it until a few weeks ago."

"I got a letter in the mail about it in June," another teacher piped in. "It's an arrangement they made for one year – I guess the district wants to move forward on this – and then the new

contract will be adjusted so we'll be covered for the time." "Well I hope so," said Joan, "but I'll believe it when I see it." Another teacher added, "We'll probably now spend three hours a week in circles sharing our feelings," and then still have to do the same amount of teaching time and get no time anymore for prep work." Other teachers nodded in assent and chimed in with similar comments, continuing the tenor of the conversation. After a few minutes, talk shifted to the traffic congestion due to construction on the road running past the school and after this to the state of the air conditioning in the building – some of the teachers felt the system was on its last legs because classrooms on their side of the building often got too hot during the dog days of summer.

Mayfield Middle School's staff culture is dominated by beliefs and attitudes of its veteran teachers, many of whom long ago became set in their ways; they are used to being left alone in their classroom and want to keep it this way. More than a few of them are counting down the retirement clock.

The teachers at Mayfield have gotten used to a large measure of curriculum freedom. This sentiment is embedded in the culture of the school. Several years ago there was much grousing when the district mandated that teachers use a pacing guide. The teachers feel they know what they need to do for their students and view directives from the district office as intrusive. There had not been a staff meeting focused on curriculum in at least three years.

In the principal's office, Sandra Jasper mulled over how to announce that she needed to develop and submit to the district a PLC implementation plan for her school. In a few days a staff meeting was planned and perhaps she would announce it there. Or maybe she would just send an email around. The main thing she wanted to let teachers know was that they needed to be prepared to spend time each week in a PLC, but she also wanted to make it clear that this wasn't her idea.

Jasper is aware from conversations with other principals that some schools in recent years have started to develop PLCs. She also knows that other schools have not made this a priority.

Jasper's leadership style can be characterized as "laissez-faire." She has chosen to let teachers be in charge of the curriculum and exercise dominion in their classrooms. In staff meetings, which are generally short, conversation is typically about upcoming school events, the operations of the school, and student discipline issues.

Principal Jasper is well liked by Mayfield's teachers, not least because she leaves them alone.

August 15, 2014: Canyon Middle School

Canyon Middle School has a largely middle income student body, above average annual achievement scores, and reputation for a hard working staff. The school has a lot of after-school programs with high attendance – academic, social and athletic programs. Parents are supportive of the school and active in a variety of roles.

Teachers' understanding of and attitude toward PLCs is mixed, but mostly accepting. Many view it as common planning time; they do not have a lot of experience working collaboratively on instructional improvement.

There is some grumbling about the amount of paperwork demanded by the principal, Mrs. Gallagher. They understood that teachers should get together, but not all understood why. Some teachers questioned the principals' personal commitment to the PLCs because Mrs. Gallagher did not attend PLC meetings.

At the same time, the PLC meetings were not particularly onerous and so the majority of the teachers had no problem with continuing the PLC initiative and remained committed to participate and plan together throughout the school year.

Back to the Present (April 2015):
Bob Hotchkins Reflects on the Last Year and Contemplates Plans for PLC Implementation Next Year

Following his conversation with Superintendent Carter, and now alone in his office, Bob reflected on the recent year and what lay before him in the year ahead.

Superintendent Carter wanted Bob to develop a yearlong implementation plan. He communicated to Bob that "this will be one of your major priorities this coming year." Bob knew that he was going to have to work with the School's Division, but was still unclear of how much collaboration would be expected by the superintendent.

Over the past year, each school's implementation of PLC's was shaped by the unique structure, culture, leadership, and staff of each school. Directives from the district were minimal, other than the requirement that each principal had to submit a plan and commit to initiating PLCs. Beyond this, there was no central dictate as to how to construct PLCs and how they should operate.

Each school had the freedom to develop their own plan. Last school year, at principal meetings, the topic of PLCs was rarely mentioned or discussed. There was only one district-wide meeting in which PLCs were discussed. At a district-wide academic achievement meeting the prior November (where each school sends teacher leaders), Bob presented the "language" of PLCs. Participants were encouraged to go back to their school and continue the discussions. Some schools embraced the idea, others didn't. Bob was aware that PLC implementation at many schools was minimal and many staff hoped that the initiative would go away.

Although no single person could know in detail the current status of PLCs among all the district's schools, Bob had as good an understanding as anyone. In his three years as curriculum director, he visited all the schools multiple times. It was part of his job to ask questions and gather information. He knew there was progress, but most schools had a long way to go.

Bob contemplated the gap between the current conditions of PLCs in the district and the goal of full implementation in approximately 16 months. Bob wondered how much could be accomplished in this time frame (May 2015 through August 2016).

Sketch of Conditions and Progress (September 2014 – March 2015):
Eleven Schools Implement PLCs

Table 2
Selected Characteristics of Schools: Demographic Percentages, Culture, Status of PLCs

School Name	Scenarios
Johnson City High School School SAP rating is "Below Standard." Minority: 63 Free lunch: 22 SpecEd: 14	Very large high school with a diverse student population. There is a lot of frustration in the school and a lot of resistance to change. Administration has recently been changed in an attempt to drive school improvement. PLC groups have different agendas; outcomes are rarely measured.
Monroe High School School SAP rating is "Approaching." Minority: 27 Free Lunch: 35 SpecEd: 9	Large high school with a mostly rural student population. If school achievement scores stay at same level for two more years (or drop), they are likely to drop into the "Below Standard" rating. If proficiency rates increase by around 15%, they will likely reach the "At Standard" rating. There administrative team has been in place for over five years and there is low turnover among the administration and staff. Teachers are willing to try anything and have embraced the PLC model; however, are unsure what to do.
Canyon Middle School Principal: Tracey Gallagher School rating is "At Standard." Minority: 22 Free Lunch: 8 SpecEd: 6	Suburban school. Staff works hard and is willing to continue the PLC initiative. School has a lot of after-school programs with high attendance – academic, social and athletic programs. There is also a large amount of parental involvement. During the 2014 school year, the principal (Mrs. Gallagher) was directive and supportive of staff PLC meetings. She asked that the staff get together at least once a week as a department for at least 30 minutes. She required teachers to examine student data and made sure they documented their meetings and tried to develop a useful product from each meeting. To decrease the amount of extra work time, principal Gallagher had only two after school faculty meetings all year. All other faculty meetings were held during in-service days. The outcome of this first year of PLC was that the teachers collected a lot of data and submitted a lot of paperwork to the principal. They are, however, unsure of any actual impact on student achievement. They are not too worried as their school continues to be rated "At Standard." They attribute a lot of that to students being "ready" for school and high parental involvement. The principal rarely attended any of the PLC meetings. As the school year went on, the meetings became less frequent.
James H. Frost Middle School Principal: Luanne Marinelli The school's SAP rating is "At Standard." Minority: 33 Free Lunch: 39 SpecEd: 10	The teaching staff is relatively young and willing to comply with the principal's directives. They are unsure of what to do in PLCs but understand that it's worth trying to improve student achievement. There were no formal PLC meetings in 2014 school year. Ms. Marinelli, in her first year as principal at this school, visited few PLC meetings and did not consistently monitor PLC work. The administration in this building has historically been "hands-off," although not closed off to responding to teacher's requests, concerns, and questions. The school recently hired five new teachers; most professional development time was dedicated to classroom management, learning new curriculum series, and scheduling issues. The building was unique in that it had a high number of Special Education and ELL students. Most of these students did not meet proficiency on state exams, and most were in their own separate programs. Principal Marinelli was not exactly sure what her responsibilities were going to be in this new school year with mandated PLC meetings. She also did not know how she was going to organize and manage the process.
Frita Mayfield Middle School Principal: Sandra Jasper The SAP rating school recently dropped from "At Standard" to "Approaching."	A middle school encompassing both rural and low-income residential areas. The large majority of the staff is tenured; the staff averages about 20 years of service. Teachers are reluctant to try new initiatives and a large contingent view the central office with a dismissive attitude. The culture is dominated by teachers who are prone to complain

Minority: 26 Free Lunch: 34 SpecEd: 10	about "more work" when new initiatives are attempted. The principal has struggled unsuccessfully trying to change the culture of the building. During the 2014 school year, principal Jasper did not mandate any collaborative time, but simply told the staff at the beginning of the school year that they should "try their best to collaborate as much as possible." She did not document any collaborative events. This principal rarely did "walk-through" visits to monitor teacher practice or student achievement. At the end of the school year, she was surprised and disappointed that the school's SAP rating was "Approaching" and is now worried about what to do. Faculty meetings rarely mentioned student achievement or curriculum; they were always on student discipline and the operations of the school. The staff likes the principal. Jasper does not bother them in their classroom. Most teachers do not collaborate or do common lesson planning. A few new teachers in the building want to collaborate for improvement, but they are outnumbered by the large number of "strong personalities" of the teachers accustomed to the status quo. Principal Jasper has a history of good relationships with parents and promotes the school as a positive and safe environment for kids, but the recent lowered school rating looms as a problem.
Rose Marino Middle School Principal: Dr. Jake Allen The school's SAP rating is "Approaching." Minority: 69 Free Lunch: 65 SpecEd: 19	Marino middle school is the district's largest middle school; it has a diverse student population. The staff gets along well with the principals and has embraced the PLC model; almost all attend district professional development on a regular basis and commit well beyond the required 90 minutes of PLC time per week. The principal (Dr. Jake Allen) believes in the importance of teacher collaboration. During the 2014 schoolyear he made master schedule changes to increase time for teacher collaboration. For example, all exploratory teachers rotated throughout the building for the first 30 minutes of the day and had "enrichment" time (outside of the actual exploratory classes). This allowed the core content area teachers, by grade level, to meet for two 30 minute periods per week. This way, no one had to stay after school and work "extra". He required each grade level team to develop both teacher and student goals. He collected monthly reports from each group. He attended many of the PLC meetings, making sure his assistant principals were managing the school during the morning. The staff knows that the school has many students struggling with math and reading and is concerned about this. The school recently dropped into the SAP rating of "Approaching." The staff has expressed determination to adjust some programs, continue the PLC movement, and help as many students meet standard as possible.
Arcadia Elementary School The school's SAP rating is "Exceeds." Minority: 24 Free Lunch: 17 SpecEd: 12	Teachers work hard and care about student achievement. There is a lot of parent participation. The school has many after school events with students and parents. Teachers are willing to use PLCs to collaborate and talk about student learning. They attend a lot of the district professional development and are eager to share their successes and failures.
Chandler Elementary School The school's SAP rating is "Approaching." Minority: 60 Free Lunch: 65 SpecEd: 20	Chandler has never met the "At Standard" SAP (School Academic Performance) rating in the Special Education category. They have made this their priority. They usually meet SAP in all other categories, despite the large and diverse student population. Teachers are generally favorable toward the PLC initiative, but also say that there's simply too much to do at the elementary level. They focus PLC meetings just on reading.
Michael Madden Elementary School Minority: 63 Free Lunch: 59 SpecEd: 81	This is a combined elementary school and special needs school for the most severe Special Education students. Most of those students take the alternative state exam. This building has a very positive school culture. Teachers are eager to work together and improve student achievement.
Mount Olive Elementary School SAP rating is "Below Standard." Minority: 41 Free Lunch: 50 SpecEd: 14	Mount Olive is the only elementary school with a "Below Standard" SAP rating. There is low parental involvement and a predisposition among many teachers to blame the community and parents for the low levels of student achievement and engagement. The teachers are generally compliant with the PLC initiative, having meetings and discussing work, but they do not take the extra steps to monitor student progress and attempt specific instructional interventions. Teachers from this building rarely attend district professional development.

Windsor Hills Elementary School The school's SAP rating is "Exceeds." Minority: 18 Free Lunch: 5 SpecEd: 3	Teachers are mostly tenured with about 20+ years of experience on average. Staff morale is good and the majority of teachers are very committed to their work and students, but not so convinced about the value of the PLC initiative, as their school achievement scores are already above average. The principal has not pushed the PLC initiative, either.

Discussion Questions

• How would you describe the PLC rationale? That is, what, specifically, is the *theory* about why this particular structure and process should produce greater levels of student learning? Could you create a causal map diagram to illustrate the theoretical concept of the PLC?

• How would you describe the problem PLCs are intended to solve? In other words, if a skeptical teacher were to ask – "What's wrong with the old way? – how would you characterize "the old way" and how would you describe the limitations of the "old way." If you were leading a school expected to implement PLCs schoolwide and teachers said – "We're already doing this?" – what questions would you ask to see if this is true? What evidence would you want?

• Turning to the case of Marshall County, do you think the key central office administrators (the key characters) are managing well the beginning steps and processes of this initiative? Why or why not? Are there particular actions or decisions that you might have approached differently?

• What aspects of district culture, organization, or history in the Marshall County district do you see as helpful or as possible hindrances to the likely success of the PLC initiative?

• Do you agree with the teacher union's actions in accepting the one year addendum to the collective bargaining agreement? Did the union have to accede to the administration's request? How do you think the union leadership viewed the pros and cons of their various options? What do you see as the pros and cons of different positions the union leadership could have taken? What do you think are possible positions the union could take when a new contract is negotiated?

• If you were Bob Hotchkins and a community leader or board member asked – "How will you know whether or not this initiative has been successful?" – how would you respond? What type of data would you want (ideally) to measure the progress and outcomes of the initiative? What type of data do you think would realistically be available to measure the progress and outcomes of the initiative?

• If you were Bob Hotchkins and a principal asked you if only <u>teachers</u> should be involved in PLCs, what would your answer be? If your answer is people in other roles should also be involved, what, for instance, would a counselor, interventionists, or paraprofessional do? How should building principals handle PLCs with "singleton" teachers (health teacher, band teacher, etc.)?

• How would you (in Bob Hotchkin's role) respond to Sandra Jasper, principal of Mayfield Middle School, if she emailed you and told you her school's PLCs were not functioning well at all. She didn't know what to do.

Creating a Plan for PLC Implementation

You are Bob Hotchkins and the superintendent has asked you to submit to him, in a page or two, a 16 month (May 2015 to August 2016) plan on how you will support district-wide PLC implementation. He's not asking for an elaborate plan because he knows that's not possible given the complexity and unpredictability of implementation. But Carter would like to know your intentions and ideas, so he is informed and can provide feedback.

You (Hotchkins) can commit about a third of your time to managing the PLC implementation. The rest of your time is spent on other job duties. You have secretarial assistance, a $50,000 budget to use as you wish, and, for teacher training purposes, two half-days in the next six months: one in late August and the other during the fall semester (these are as part of the normal "inservice" days in the district).

For your plan, describe:
how you will spend your time and use your budget;
your sequence of steps and rough timeline;
what you will do, with whom (i.e. what schools or specific personnel); and what products and outcomes you are aiming for.

Also, provide explanation or justifications as needed where they will help Carter understand your reasoning and strategy. Reviewing the information in Table 2 will be helpful in formulating your plan; it has information on PLC outcomes to date as well as different schools' capacities and culture, demographics, and current academic ratings.

Persuasive Communications

A key element of leadership for change involves persuasion. As explained in the above section, "Large, Decentralized Organizations and the Challenge of Planned Change," school administrators do not have strong mechanisms of control like those available to managers in private organizations or many other types of public service organizations. Persuasion, therefore, is an important part of the principal's role. This becomes particularly important when strong leadership is required to change practices and culture in ways consistent with PLC theory. While a principal can change a master a schedule to increase meeting time among teachers (within contractual stipulations), the principal cannot "command" successful PLCs into existence. Training and support must be provided, but, at the end of the day, teachers must *want* to do what is required.

• *A speech or presentation to motivate teachers*. You are Sandra Jasper, principal of Frita Mayfield Middle School. It is late August, 2014. A faculty meeting is planned shortly, and you want to energize the staff about PLCs.

• *A brochure to inform and motivate teachers about PLCs*. Add a "FAQ" section (Frequently Asked Questions) that anticipates and answers the audiences' main questions and concerns. There should be 4- 6 FAQs with your responses.

Here are three basic principles to consider for constructing and deliver a good presentation[3]:

(1) <u>Structure and organization</u>. There is an old adage about public speaking that goes like this: "Tell'em what you are going to tell'em, Tell it to them, and then Tell'em what you told them." In regular language, this means, (a) start with an introduction – an "agenda" or set of goals for the presentation; (b) then provide the content; (c) then summarize the presentation and reiterate key points (e.g., conclusion(s), lessons, "take aways," next steps).

(2) <u>Stories</u>. Academic speakers, by nature, are disposed to present and cover a lot of information – arguments, facts, charts, tables. But audiences are people and people like stories. A story or anecdote is a good way to start presentation. A good anecdote can illustrate a problem with clarity, feeling, and impact in a way that simply "telling" the problem can't.   Vignettes or anecdotes can be used in any part of a presentation – to illustrate a point, to teach a lesson, or to motivate action.

(3) <u>Avoid the TMI problem</u>.   The audience's memory and attention are limited. Unless you're at absolutely riveting speaker, you can be sure that at any given time in your presentation, many in the audience are not paying attention.   And even when paying attention, people don't remember a lot of what they have heard because of normal limitations of memory and the ability to comprehend new, complex information.   Therefore, don't overwhelm people with too many disparate ideas and too many facts and details. Know exactly what your 3 to 5 main points are; make sure they stand out and are repeated and each key point has appropriate elaboration; and summarize at the end.

Additional Resources

Below are some resources to provide ideas and guidance for the exercises listed above.

Guidelines for Effective Central Leadership
for PLC Implementation

Those at the district level responsible for overseeing and supporting PLC implementation should:

•   Be able to explain exactly what model PLC practice looks like in high schools, middle schools, and elementary schools. It is reasonable to expect PLC teacher teams to (a) create a significant amount of common, standards-based learning expectations and assessment and (b) review assessment and other data to evaluate student progress and plan instruction

•   Provide the necessary time, incentives, and support for building-level leaders to understand PLC theory and know what exemplary PLC practice looks like. District level officials should expect from principals periodic progress reports presented in face-to-face meetings with corroborating evidence (like curriculum artifacts from PLCs, meeting minutes, meeting protocols, etc.).

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[3] As the reader is surely aware, there is a vast literature and scads of YouTube videos on the "how to's" of effective public speaking and presentations.

•   Restrict from interfering with PLC implementation other competing district initiatives, so building are not distracted or pulled away from PLC implementation

•   Have a system to monitor the progress of PLC implementation, which requires monitoring the steps building level leaders are taking to implement PLCs

Also see: **Appendix b**
Your Professional Learning Community Implementation Rubric
Adapted from *National College for School Leadership, Nottingham, England*.
http://www.upsd.wednet.edu/cms/lib07/WA01000687/Centricity/Domain/57/Professional%20Learning/PLC%20Implementation%20Rubric.pdf

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Appendix A
Memorandum of Understanding
Marshal School District and Marshall Education Association

This will serve as an agreement between the Marshall School District and the Marshall Education Association to modify the current collective bargaining agreement which ends on June 1, 2015. The modification is to "Article 10 - Time Requirements." Teachers will be required to attend 180 minutes per month of building meetings beyond the normal school day (changed from 150 minutes per month). This modification is necessary to create additional planning time to support a district initiative of Professional Learning Communities (PLC). These 180 minutes can be used for PLC meetings. In addition, a reasonable and appropriate portion of the 225 minutes of planning time per week will include PLC time, with, on average 45 minutes per week allocated to PLC planning. This is not be used as individual ("personal") planning time, but rather time for planning and preparation with respect to PLC tasks. EPER positions are not exempt from this modification.

Appendix B
Professional Learning Community Implementation Rubric
Adapted from *National College for School Leadership, Nottingham, England*.

5 ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTICS OF A PLC				
PLC Characteris-tics	**Starting Out**	**Developing**	**Deepening**	**Sustaining**
ONE: Shared Mission: Purpose, Values, Goals	Team members have diverse values and goals related to mathematics instruction. May still work in isolation, on lessons, assessments, and improving instruction.	An increasing number of team members share values and goals related to math instruction, and participate actively in collaborative work to improve student math achievement.	Most team members are committed to improving student math achievement. Most staff work collaboratively to improve mathematics achievement through the PLC structure.	High degree of commitment to continuously improve student math achievement. General agreement on best practices for math instruction, and eagerness to implement best practices. High degree of commitment to collaboratively improving math instruction through the PLC structure.
TWO: Learning-focused Collaboration	Many staff work in isolation. They focus on their own goals, value self-reliance, and rarely share practices and strategies.	Some staff work together across the PLC, with joint planning, sharing strategies, and engaging in whole- school-wide projects.	Staff increasingly plan together, collaborate and share ideas through meetings, website/e-mail resources, etc.	Collaborative planning of learning and teaching activities is taken for granted.
THREE: Collective Inquiry	There is little reflection or inquiry into practice. Data collection and the use of data to inform and develop learning and teaching practice are limited. Data may be seen as an end in itself and often as someone else's problem.	Some team members are involved in activities to investigate and improve learning and teaching (e.g. peer observation and coaching action research, review and moderation of pupils' work, etc.) Data collection and use of data to inform and develop learning and teaching are variable across the school.	Many team members are actively involved and show increasing confidence about using different methods to explore and improve learning and teaching. Data collection and the use of data to inform and develop learning and teaching are increasingly consistent across the school.	A questioning orientation to practice and 'need to know how we are doing and how we can improve' is pervasive. Team members confidently use a wide range of methods to investigate learning and teaching, using findings to inform and develop their practice. Data are collected, analyzed and used to support this process.

PLC Characteris	Starting Out	Developing	Deepening	Sustaining
FOUR: Action Research	Team members resist changing their instructional practices in mathematics, even when evidence shows they aren't working. They may be reluctant to learn new strategies even when research supports them. Emphasis is given to how teachers liked various approaches, rather than if they improved student learning.	Some team members are changing their instructional practices in mathematics, and are willing to learn new research-based strategies.	Many team members are seeking better instructional practices for teaching mathematics, and working collaboratively with others to improve instruction.	Team members routinely seek to improve instructional practices for teaching mathematics, and work collaboratively with others to improve instruction. Effects on student learning are the primary basis for assessing improvement strategies. PLC members constantly turn their learning and insights into action. They rigorously assess their efforts, demanding evidence in the form of student learning.
FIVE: Results Orientation	Team members do not assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. They do not analyze results to find evidence of improvement, and do not use evidence of success to improve their practice.	Team members sometimes assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. Sometimes they analyze results to find evidence of improvement, and do not use evidence of success to improve their practice.	Most team members assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. Most team members analyze results to find evidence of improvement, and use evidence of success to improve their practice.	All team members routinely assess their efforts on the basis of tangible results. They are hungry for evidence of student learning and use that evidence to inform and improve their practice.

3 BIG IDEAS OF A PLC

PLC Characteristics	Starting Out	Developing	Deepening	Sustaining
PLC Big Idea #1 What do we want students to learn, and what prerequisite skills do the students who aren't getting it need in order to learn?	Little or no focus on these questions in plc	Some focus on these questions in plc	Team is usually focused on these questions in plc	Strong focus on these questions in plc
PLC Big Idea #2 How will we know if students have learned?	Little or no focus on this question in plc	Some focus on these questions in plc	Team is usually focused on these questions in plc	Strong focus on this question in plc
PLC Big Idea #3 What will we do if students don't learn? How will we scaffold core instruction to better support them; how will we provide small group instruction so they can learn what they need?	Little or no focus on these questions in plc	Some focus on these questions in plc	Team is usually focused on these questions in plc	Strong focus on these questions in plc

OTHER				
PLC Characteristics	**Starting Out**	**Developing**	**Deepening**	**Sustaining**
Collective Responsibility	Staff do not feel a sense of whole-team shared responsibility for ALL students.	Some staff members feel a sense of collective responsibility for ALL students in the school.	There is a growing sense of collective responsibility through the team and school for the learning, progress, development, and success of ALL students.	A desire to do the best for ALL students pervades the PLC team's work.
Positive Orientation	Lots of 'why we can't', complaints/blame about students, administration, parents, etc.	Some team members hold a positive orientation and 'can do' attitude toward helping all students learn; others are skeptical or resistant.	Most team members hold a positive orientation and 'can do' attitude toward helping all students learn; a few are still skeptical or resistant.	Positive focus on action oriented solutions. Strong collective belief that all students can learn what we are teaching them.
Mutual trust, respect, and support	Staff relationships highlight issues around trust and conflict. A blame culture may exist. Trust and respect exists among some members of smaller groups or departments, but staff may be defensive about classroom practice, and reluctant to seek team support for improvement. Improvement issues are viewed as a threat by a number of staff.	A moderate level of trust exists school-wide, with increasing mutual respect, although there is some anxiety about being open about practice and asking for team support for new learning. There is mutual trust and respect among some groups of staff who work closely together.	Trust, respect, and positive professional relationships are developing school-wide. Staff are increasingly open about their practice, and seek the team's support to improve practice.	Staff relationships are characterized by openness, honesty, mutual trust, respect, support, and care. Staff are very open about their practice, feel safe sharing their practice, and easily ask for the team's support for professional learning and improvement.

PLC Characteristics	Starting Out	Developing	Deepening	Sustaining
Established norms for procedures, including use of agendas, protocols, reporting mechanisms, etc.	The PLC team does not routinely follow an agenda, set and follow group norms, use protocols to foster collaborative work, or report and share progress with other teams, and building/district leaders.	The PLC team sometimes follows an agenda, sets and follows group norms, uses protocols to foster collaborative work, and reports and share progress with other teams, and building/district leaders.	The PLC team usually follows an agenda, sets and follows group norms, uses protocols to foster collaborative work, and reports and shares progress with other teams, and building/district leaders.	It is standard practice for the PLC team to routinely follow an agenda, set and follow group norms, use protocols to foster collaborative work, and report and share progress with other teams, and building/district leaders.