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Establishing Professional Learning Communities

How to Use This Module:

The professional development curriculum for *Establishing Professional Learning Communities* may be used in facilitated group sessions or by individuals in self-directed study. To ensure that the professional development curriculum is properly administered, a *Facilitator's Guide* and a *Facilitator's Checklist* are provided for group sessions, and a *Self-Directed Learner's Guide* and a *Self-Directed Learner's Checklist* are provided for individuals using the professional development curriculum in the self-paced mode.

For both methods, three core teaching tools are used: *Direct Teach* content, a *Checking for Understanding Worksheet*, and an *Application Worksheet*. These core tools are augmented by a variety of materials listed in *Section Resources*. We recommend that you review the content in this section and use the professional development method that best meets your district's or school's needs.

2 Direct Teach

Section Objectives:

1. Develop an understanding of how effective Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) and data teams support and sustain a data-rich culture.
2. Develop an understanding of the characteristics of effective PLCs and data teams.
3. Understand the role of data coaches in using educational data to inform instruction in PLCs and data teams.
4. Understand the critical success factors for effective PLC and data team meetings.

Key Terms

For the purposes of this section, we are using the following definitions for PLCs, data teams, and data coaches:

- **PLCs** are structures in which teachers engage in the regular habit of working together to deepen the learning of their craft to support the goal of student academic success. In a school setting, PLCs may focus on developing standards-based curriculum and assessments, use students' educational data to monitor their progress toward mastering academic standards, and provide necessary interventions for enrichment or remediation.

- **Data teams** are similar to PLCs in that they too focus on student educational data to monitor students' progress toward mastering academic standards. Based upon the results of the data analysis process, a data team will write an action plan and identify goals for improvement. A data team often is led by a data coach, who is experienced in using a school's or district's Student Information System (SIS) and/or Learning Management System (LMS).

- **Data coaches** generally are responsible for requesting various educational data reports and collaborating with data teams to assist in explaining the reports and with tracking student progress on an individual, classroom, and school level. A data coach also may disaggregate assessment results for PLCs or data teams, translate assessment data to guide instructional practices, or provide training to teachers to assist with the development of formative assessments.

Critical to the establishment of PLCs and data teams is the development of standards-based curriculum and assessments. The most meaningful data comes from local standards-based assessments in the form of item analysis by standard reports that tell PLCs and data teams what standards students know and what standards they don't know.

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Section Objective 1: Develop an understanding of how effective PLCs and data teams support and sustain a data-rich culture.

One of the most meaningful structures for promoting learning and increasing student achievement is for a team of teachers to meet regularly to review assessment data, discuss areas of strength and weakness in students' progress toward meeting standards, and develop action plans to remediate weaknesses and build upon strengths. Teachers report that when they review data in data team meetings or in PLCs, their instruction becomes more focused on standards and more goal-oriented toward helping students meet or exceed standards (Sindelar, 2011, p. 139). In these kinds of meetings, teachers foster data-based changes in curriculum, "share the wealth" of what has worked for them, and learn new strategies from their colleagues.

Rick DuFour, who lectures and writes extensively on PLCs at work, likes to point out that "when done well, assessment [data] can help build a collaborative culture, monitor the learning of each student on a timely basis, provide information essential to an effective system of academic intervention, inform the practice of individual teachers and teams, provide feedback to students on their progress in meeting standards, motivate students by demonstrating next steps in their learning, fuel continuous improvement processes—and serve as the driving engine for transforming a school" (DuFour, 2007, p. 266-267).

Thus, many schools have realized that grade-level and/or subject-matter teams are more than just the sum of their parts and that a successful face-to-face group is more than just collectively intelligent. In James Surowiecki's book *The Wisdom of Crowds,* he reflects that "[i]t makes everyone work harder, think smarter, and reach better conclusions than they would have on their own" (Surowiecki, 2004, p. 176). As a result, many teachers now share their ideas and the results of their teaching rather than work in isolation behind closed doors. With the use of educational data in PLC or data team meetings, teachers see the strengths and weaknesses in their teaching, their students' learning, their curriculum, and their assessments. Rather than just moving on to the next unit of instruction, they work with their colleagues to develop action plans that build on strengths and make changes to remediate the weaknesses of their teaching as well as their students' learning.

Recommendations in the *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations* (p. 4-6) emphasize the importance of teachers having direct access to data experts, while the *Education Community Attitudes Toward SIS/LMS Solutions* report (Gartner, Inc., 2011, p. 14) encourages teachers to initiate discussions with their peers and PLCs to brainstorm ideas for more effective training and professional development options for using data to strengthen their instructional practices. Both of these documents support

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the notion that to build capacity in the regular use of data to inform instructional practice, it is important for teachers to have access to a data expert on a regular basis and to collaborate regularly with their peers.

Section Objective 2: Develop an understanding of the characteristics of effective PLCs and data teams.

The power of teacher data teams and PLCs to use educational data to improve learning and student achievement is impressive. Combined with data analysis, PLC meetings are a very effective method of professional development that supports the improvement of both teaching and learning.

The following suggestions outline the characteristics embraced by successful data teams and PLCs:

- **PLCs and data teams are organized according to grade level and/or subject area.** Depending on the size of the school, PLCs and data teams fall into different, but logical patterns of membership. In a grade school setting, all fifth-grade teachers would have common time to meet to discuss their common curriculum and the results of common fifth-grade assessments. In a high school setting, teams would be organized according to courses taught. For example, all algebra teachers would be on one team and geometry teachers would be on another, or in a small high school, a team might be composed of the entire math department because there are not multiple teachers teaching a particular course. Whatever the structure, team membership should match the team's purpose of improving the teaching and learning of a particular grade or subject area.

- **PLCs and data teams meet on a regular basis and establish protocols for collegial action.** Though there is no predetermined formula for how often a team should meet, successful teams meet on a regular basis and establish protocols or team norms in order to make team meetings a setting for collegial action. Protocols may include getting to meetings on time and making certain all participants have an equal voice. Actual meeting time depends on the structure of the school's schedule and calendar and the state of the curriculum and assessments when teams are formed. Some schools are able to schedule weekly team meetings. Others have been successful at adjusting start and end times to the contractual day in order to gain time for data teams and PLCs to meet. The number or frequency of meetings is not as critical as the fact that there must be enough time allotted to review data and develop next steps and action plans to inform work with students.

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- **PLCs and data teams begin by focusing on data.** The analyzed results of a standards-based formative or summative assessment at any grade level for any subject will generate team discussion on the need for curriculum revision, changes in instruction, changes in teaching materials, changes to the assessment, professional development needs, student interventions, and more. However, team meetings must begin with a focus on educational data. Without data from formative and/or summative assessments, discussions lose focus and don't meet the goal of using educational data to strengthen classroom practices.

- **PLCs and data teams have a simple agenda and work to accomplish goals and action plans.** Because time for educators to meet is precious, it is important to have an agenda to focus the discussion as well as to alert teachers regarding the materials they should bring to the meeting. The challenge of teamwork lies in the interplay of people, tasks, and processes. High-performing teams tap into the unique talents of individual members and value diversity of opinion and the act of bringing creativity to process. Yet team members need to work together, be clear about a common purpose, and be committed to goals and action plans. Having a simple agenda helps to identify responsibilities and goals, and enables teams to be more productive and effective. For possible agenda topics and ways your PLC and/or data team can identify team responsibilities and structure its work to be most effective, see the Lesson Planning and Delivery scenario in the *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations*.

- **PLCs and data teams end every meeting with a defined action plan.** Effective teams do much more than merely look at educational data. Teachers improve learning by identifying actions they can take collectively and individually to improve teaching and learning. An important part of every team meeting is an action plan that documents students' learning needs and stimulates improvement in student achievement (Sindelar, 2010, p. 113-115).

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Section Objective 3: Understand the role of data coaches in using educational data to inform instruction in PLCs and data teams.

The role of the data coach is to provide PLC and data team members with meaningful, user-friendly educational data reports that help team members see the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching and of their students' learning. Effective team meetings focus on the results of assessment-based, data-driven instruction. Thus, it is critical that teachers have easy access to analyzed assessment reports and understand what they mean. The role of the data coach is to make both of these things happen. Reports need to be provided to and understood by teachers after common assessments are administered to students so that teams can develop timely action plans, and teachers can give meaningful and timely feedback to their students and reteach as necessary. In many schools, data coaches are required to have state teaching certification, experience in teaching and supervision, knowledge of national and state assessments, a strong understanding of formative assessments, and good communication and relationship-building skills.

The *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations* notes that using data for instructional improvement is a topic of interest to teachers, but that professional development differs depending on the type of data. For example,

- Assessment of learning data is data from a teacher-made unit test, final exam, or state test of standards that are summative in nature. Assessment of learning data have implications for teachers' knowledge of both the weaknesses and strengths in their students' learning when the school year begins, when a unit or semester ends, and/or for remediation purposes.

- Assessment for learning data serves to more regularly inform instructional practices so instruction can be modified on a more regular basis. Students are more aware of where they are academically and where they have gaps in their learning. This data is gathered from formative assessments that take place during instruction or from diagnostic assessments.

Both assessment *of* learning and assessment *for* learning data serve to inform decisions at the district, school, and classroom levels. It remains important that they are easily accessible in data solutions.

To provide the various forms of educational data used by PLCs and data teams, many data coaches work with school- or district-based assessment centers to collect and analyze data. Other data coaches train teachers to use software from textbook publishers to collect

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and analyze data from standards-based assessments paired with a text. Regardless of the source of the analyzed data, it is the role of the data coach to train PLCs and data teams to understand the reporting capability of the systems and give them the analysis skills needed to benefit from the assessment reports.

Modern assessment software creates data reports to allow educators to analyze students' answers by learning target or standard. These reports provide teachers, students, parents, and administrators with valuable information regarding what a student knows and what a student doesn't know, and serve an important role in determining next steps for instruction, changes in the curriculum, and/or in student self-help activities.

The reports are often provided to teachers by accessing data from SIS and/or LMS solutions. Producing the reports requires that districts acquire and deploy SIS, LMS, and assessment systems. The *Project Charter* template provides guidance in describing the scope, objectives, and stakeholders involved in acquiring and implementing an SIS or LMS. The *Instructional Data Collection and Use Plan* provides guidance to districts on identifying the information to be collected and how the data reports can be used to inform district decisions at classroom, school, and/or district level(s).

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Section Objective 4: Understand the critical success factors for effective PLC and data team meetings.

Effective PLC and data team meetings are based on four critical success factors.

- **Standards-based curriculum and assessments.** The alignment of learning targets, assessments, and curriculum to an agreed upon set of standards is the driving force of a data-driven instructional system. It powers a PLC or data team's ability to gather, analyze, and use meaningful student assessment data to increase learning and student achievement.

  Identifying standards-based learning targets is key to answering the question, "What should students know?," and the analysis of students' answers to standards-based formative and summative assessments is how PLCs and data teams answer the question, "How will I know if they know it?" This process of assessing learning targets gives PLCs and data teams regular and timely feedback regarding students' attainment of key standards and fosters consistent instruction and assessment across grade levels and courses. More importantly, formative assessment results enable PLCs and data teams to diagnose students' learning needs accurately and in time to make meaningful instructional modifications.

- **Teacher-friendly data analysis reports.** Data analysis reports by standard or learning target tell PLCs and data teams how an individual student, a class, or a group of classes performed on a specific learning target or standard. These reports provide teachers, students, and administrators with valuable information regarding what a student knows and what a student doesn't know, and serve an important role in determining next steps for instruction, changes in the curriculum, and/or student self-help activities.

- **Regularly scheduled meeting times.** Successful PLCs and data teams develop a collaborative culture that is enhanced by regularly scheduled meeting times. Collaboration provides a mechanism for sharing responsibility for student learning and a means for working together toward a common purpose. Teachers share experiences, observe each other, and discuss teaching. Shared practice and collective inquiry help sustain improvement by strengthening connections among teachers, stimulating discussion about professional practice, and helping teachers build on one another's expertise.

- **A team's commitment to action plans.** Action plans are the results of productive team meetings, where student assessment data is reviewed and steps to guide the instructional improvement process are discussed and defined. Action plans identify what each teacher on the team will do next, identify the resources (including time and

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administrative support) that are needed, and specify when checks for progress will be done. Action plans provide "next steps" for teachers once a PLC or data team meeting has concluded (Sindelar, 2010, p. 122-123).

The district from both the organizational and technical side must support each critical success factor. On the organizational side, this means providing structures and resources to develop common curriculum and assessments and allotting sufficient time for PLC and data team meetings. On the technical side, this means implementing effective data systems, such as providing SIS and/or LMS data analysis reports to teachers in a timely and efficient manner.

In terms of human resources, PLCs and data teams benefit from the establishment of a nurturing and supportive environment. Establishing a nurturing environment fosters trust and helps to overcome initial barriers to the development of effective PLCs and data teams. Often these barriers include the fact that some teachers may be reluctant to join a PLC or data team because they feel their current teaching methods are sufficient or that PLC meetings may not be an effective use of their time.

Though, initially working in PLCs or data teams may be resisted by some teachers, it doesn't take long for even the most reluctant PLC or data team member to discover the power that comes with reviewing test data and regularly collaborating with colleagues on best instructional practices. They also learn that teams are not inherently inefficient. With time, identification of team protocols and specific responsibilities are established, PLCs and data teams move through their agendas with purpose, and time taken for deliberation becomes worthwhile because it's centered on educational data and ultimately serves to improve learning.

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Gartner, Inc. (2011). *Education community attitudes toward SIS/LMS solutions*. Retrieved from *Closing the Gap: Turning Data Into Action*.

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Surowiecki, J. (2004). *The wisdom of crowds*. New York: Doubleday.

Closing the Gap Templates

Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations

Instructional Data Collection and Use Plan

Project Charter

District Case Study

Sanger Unified School District Case Study

District Video

Katy Independent School District Video Exemplar

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Direct Teach Reflection: As PLCs and data teams are trained in SIS and LMS utilization, it's important to remember the power that data teams and PLCs gain from the use of data to improve students' learning by informing instruction and developing interventions. Though SIS and LMS programs can produce reports and graphs in a timely manner, the reports are not the end product. Rather, they are the roadmaps for PLCs and data teams to plan and implement action plans and interventions to improve teaching and learning with the goal that students will be more successful.

After reading and reflecting on the *Direct Teach* content, apply what you have learned in the following *Checking for Understanding Worksheet* exercises.

1. Explain why it is important for PLCs and data teams to begin their meetings with educational data. Then describe what might happen if a PLC or data team meets but does not use data.

2. Explain why it is important for PLCs and data teams to end their meetings with an action plan. Then describe what might happen if a PLC or data team meets but does not leave with an action plan.

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Application Worksheet

> Direct Teach Reflection: As PLCs and data teams are trained in SIS and LMS utilization, it's important to remember the power that data teams and PLCs gain from the use of data to improve students' learning by informing instruction and developing interventions. Though SIS and LMS programs can produce reports and graphs in a timely manner, the reports are not the end product. Rather, they are the roadmaps for PLCs and data teams to plan and implement action plans and interventions to improve teaching and learning with the goal that students will be more successful.

After reading and reflecting on the *Direct Teach* content and completing the *Checking for Understanding Worksheet*, apply what you have learned in the following *Application Worksheet* exercises.

1. PLCs and data teams are organized according to grade level and/or subject area. However, depending on the size of the school, PLCs and data teams fall into different, but logical patterns of membership. List the PLC and data teams by grade or subject area for your school, and identify a potential data coach by name for each PLC or data team.

   PLC/Data Team (Grade Level or Subject):   Potential Data Coach:

2. For PLCs and data teams to operate cohesively, it is important to agree on protocols. List three protocols for cohesive operation of a PLC or data team.

Application Worksheet

3. The power data teams and PLCs gain from assessment is the *use* of assessment data (for example, formative, common, interim, and/or summative data) to improve students' learning by informing instruction and developing interventions. List the specific types of assessment data your PLC or data team will regularly review in meetings and the reasons for using this type of data in your school.

4. Given the elements listed for No. 3 above, develop a draft agenda for an *initial* data team or PLC meeting, including who would attend (role) and discussion time for each topic.

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Meeting Objectives

1. Develop an understanding of how effective PLCs and data teams support and sustain a data-rich culture.
2. Develop an understanding of the characteristics of effective PLCs and data teams.
3. Understand the role of data coaches in using educational data to inform instruction in PLCs and data teams.
4. Understand the critical success factors for effective PLC and data teams meetings.

Meeting Preparation

The professional development process for turning educational data into action should be led at every level by a team that pairs an instructional leader with a district- or school-level information technology (IT) leader. These chosen facilitators will participate in the identification of other district, school, and classroom leaders, who will form the Professional Development Facilitation Team. This cadre of professional development facilitators will be responsible for leading professional development at the district, school, and classroom levels. These leaders should consider the vision and goals that the district and schools have for building a data-rich culture prior to administering the professional development curriculum.

To help the trainees prepare for the meeting, the facilitators should ask them to complete the following assignments before attending the meeting:

- Read *Direct Teach* content for Section Two.

- Complete the *Checking for Understanding Worksheet*.

- Read the *Sanger Unified School District Case Study*.

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Meeting One: Develop an understanding of how effective PLCs and data teams support and sustain a data-rich culture.

(Approximate meeting time: 2 hours.)

1. Review *Direct Teach* content.

2. At the beginning of the meeting ask participants to share their two answers to the questions on their *Checking for Understanding Worksheet*. Promote discussion about the importance of using data to develop action plans.

3. Next have participants watch the *Katy Independent School District Video Exemplar*. Ask participants to identify ways educational data is being used at Katy Independent School District and discuss how the data coach is helping teachers to use that data. Augment this discussion with references to the *Sanger Unified School District Case Study*, giving special emphasis to the following quotation about the use of data in PLCs:

    After Sanger USD restructured into Professional Learning Communities, a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement was born. Students' mastery and achievement of concepts were continuously measured by progress and state assessments, where the results were housed in the data and assessment tool. The tool enabled users to view reports on students' results and facilitate discussions within the PLCs. The district was constantly providing information at the site level to ensure the PLCs had the information they needed to answer questions about each student's performance and to make informed decisions on how to improve a student's score by creating formative lessons.

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Meeting Two: Develop an understanding of the characteristics of effective PLCs and data teams.

(Approximate meeting time: 2 hours.)

1. As data teams and PLCs begin a new way of doing business, they also need to be trained about the roles and responsibilities of being a PLC or data team member, ways to communicate within a PLC, as well as the basic components of an effective PLC. Begin the meeting by reviewing the components of effective PLCs and data teams discussed in the *Direct Teach* section, reviewing the plans for PLC and data team organization by subject area or grade, and identifying the planned meeting time.

2. To help participants understand the value and importance of each team member's contributions to the group's ultimate success in using data to inform curriculum and improve student achievement, review the Lesson Planning and Delivery template on page 11 of the *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations*. Use the template to help participants identify the roles and responsibilities associated with a hypothetical objective identified by the group.

3. Suggest the following questions for PLC and data team members to consider and discuss in training:

   • Who/which role(s) will perform this act today?

   • Who/which role(s) will perform this act after the solution is implemented?

   • How does the process change for each of the subroles?

4. At the end of the meeting, ask participants to complete and share the *Application Worksheet* questions, and then draft a protocol document that all PLCs and data teams will use to build trust, reduce apprehension, as well as implement their use of data. Information about building trust contained in *Direct Teach* for *Section One: Building a Culture for the Effective Use of Educational Data* may be used to facilitate this part of the professional development training.

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Meeting Three: Understand the role of data coaches in using educational data to inform instruction in PLCs and data teams.

(Approximate meeting time: 2 hours.)

1. The facilitator and someone knowledgeable in the school's data analysis system should lead this meeting. This person could be a district- and/or school-level information technology (IT) person or the system's vendor. At the beginning of the meeting, ask participants to review Objective 3 from the *Direct Teach* section, which speaks to the different types of educational data reports that are available to PLC and data team members. Then ask the IT person or vendor to explain the reports that are available from the data analysis system in place. Recommendations for the use of data that will be helpful in identifying useful reports are outlined on page 7 of the *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations* and listed below:

   • Using data for instructional improvement.

   • Determining student growth.

   • Determining effective response to interventions.

   • Identifying which digital asset(s) best meets the needs of specific learners.

   • Projecting success on successfully meeting curriculum standards.

2. When assessments and curriculum are aligned with standards, a school or district is ready to begin collecting and reporting on the kinds of data that are meaningful to PLCs and data teams. Thus the next step is to identify data coaches and train PLC and data team members to retrieve, analyze, and use data. The *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations* makes the following recommendations (pages 4-5):

   • **Link training and professional development to change management.** SIS and LMS solutions can be complex, and as such, the educational process changes that accompany the application implementation can also be complex. Training on the new system is not enough to ensure success in improving instructional practice. Districts will need professional development sessions to assess the impact on staff and process and create a comprehensive change management program. This includes professional development, as well as the other aspects of the process of change, such as building a culture for the effective use of educational data, job, and organizational changes.

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- **Consider conducting training in phases.** Basic functionality that everyone must use in order to capture standard data should be delivered first (for example, taking attendance or capturing grades). Training on more advanced functionality can be delivered once the staff has developed a level of comfort with basic functionality. More advanced functionality might include creating an assessment or regularly generating reports for improving instructional practice.

3. Next ask the participants to agree on the item analysis report that will be used in PLC and data team meetings. Oftentimes, PLC and data team members find that item analysis by standard reports are the most helpful in determining what students know, what they don't know, and what the next steps should be.

4. At the conclusion of the meeting, determine future meeting dates to monitor PLC and data team progress and answer questions regarding data use and reports. Remind PLC members that the power data teams and PLCs gain from assessment is the use of assessment data to improve students' learning by informing instruction and developing interventions. Though SIS and LMS programs produce reports and graphs in a timely manner, the reports are not the end product. Rather, they are the roadmaps for PLCs and data teams to plan and implement action plans and interventions that will improve teaching and learning and help students to become more successful.

Meeting Four: Understand the critical success factors for effective PLC and data team meetings.

(Approximate meeting time: 2 hours.)

1. Lead participants in reviewing and discussing the recommendations for effective PLC meetings and data teams listed in the *Direct Teach* section.

2. At the end of the meeting, ask participants to draft a plan for PLCs and data teams to take action.

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Q&A Recommended Answers to Questions Presented in the *Checking for Understanding Worksheet*

QUESTION 1:

Explain why it is important for PLCs and data teams to begin their meetings with educational data. Then describe what might happen if a PLC or data team meets and does not use data.

ANSWER:

Student assessment data provides evidence regarding what students know and what they don't know. Thus, data helps PLCs and data teams to evaluate specific, standards-based next steps for improving student achievement. Data also is needed to effectively evaluate and re-evaluate action plans, including changes in curricular materials, pacing, methodology, and interventions. Without the use of data, action plans are based on opinion rather than evidence of learning.

QUESTION 2:

Explain why it is important for PLCs and data teams to end their meetings with an action plan. Then describe what might happen if a PLC or data team meets but does not leave with an action plan.

ANSWER:

Action plans identify what each teacher on the team will do next to improve learning, identify the resources (including time and administrative support) that are needed, and specify when checks for progress will be done. Action plans provide "next steps" for teachers once a PLC or data team meeting has concluded. Without a specific action plan, teachers leave meetings with good intentions, but often nothing changes. The same methods are used and the same results occur.

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2 Facilitator's Checklist

Tasks	Target Date for Completion	Status (Not Started, In Progress, Completed)	Person Responsible/Notes
WORKSHOP PREPARATION			
1. Workshop facilitators have been selected: one IT leader and one instructional leader.			
2. Professional development participants have been selected to train PLCs and data teams.			
WORKSHOP EXECUTION			
1. Professional development participants have read and discussed the *Direct Teach* content and the *Sanger Unified School District Case Study,* and have viewed and discussed the *Katy Independent School District Video Exemplar*.			
2. Professional development participants understand the characteristics of effective PLCs and data teams discussed in *Direct Teach*.			
3. Using their *Check for Understanding Worksheet*, participants have discussed the role of beginning meetings with the review of educational data.			
4. Professional development participants understand the role of establishing protocols and have completed the *Application Worksheet*.			
5. Using the *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations,* the participants understand the importance of ongoing training in data collection and use of data.			

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SD2

Self-Directed Learning Materials

Enclosed are a *Self-Directed Learner's Guide* and a *Self-Directed Learner's Checklist*. These supplemental tools provide customized instructions for individuals choosing to use the *Toolkit* in self-directed study. The materials are designed to be used in conjunction with the *Direct Teach* content, *Checking for Understanding Worksheet*, and *Application Worksheet* included in this section.

Learning Objectives:

1. Develop an understanding of how effective PLCs and data teams support and sustain a data-rich culture.
2. Develop an understanding of the characteristics of effective PLCs and data teams.
3. Understand the role of data coaches in using educational data to inform instruction in PLCs and data teams.
4. Understand the critical success factors for effective PLC meetings and data teams.

Step One: Develop an understanding of how effective PLCs and data teams support and sustain a data-rich culture.

1. Read *Direct Teach* for Section Two and the *Sanger Unified School District Case Study.*

2. Complete the *Checking for Understanding Worksheet* and reflect on the importance of using educational data to develop action plans.

3. Next watch the *Katy Independent School District Video Exemplar.* Identify ways educational data is being used at Katy Independent School District and reflect on how the data coach is helping teachers to use that data. Also think about the *Sanger Unified School District Case Study,* giving special consideration to the quotation on the use of data in PLCs:

    After Sanger USD restructured into Professional Learning Communities, a culture of collaboration and continuous improvement was born. Students' mastery and achievement of concepts were continuously measured by progress and state assessments, where the results were housed in the data and assessment tool. The tool enabled users to view reports on students' results and facilitate discussions within the PLCs. The district was constantly providing information at the site level to ensure the PLCs had the information they needed to answer questions about each student's performance and to make informed decisions on how to improve a student's score by creating formative lessons.

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Step Two: Develop an understanding of the characteristics of effective PLCs and data teams.

1. As data teams and PLCs begin a new way of doing business, they also need to understand the roles and responsibilities of being a PLC or data team member, learn to communicate within a PLC, as well as identify the basic components of an effective PLC. Review the components of effective PLCs and data teams discussed in the *Direct Teach* section, draft plans for PLC and data team organization by subject area or grade in your school, and identify the planned meeting time.

2. Then in order to understand the roles and responsibilities of being a PLC or data team member, use the Lesson Planning and Delivery template on page 11 of the *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations* to describe and identify team members' roles in contributing to an effective PLC or data team that uses data to improve teaching and increase the achievement of all students.

3. Consider the following questions:

    *   Who/which role(s) will perform this act today?
    *   Who/which role(s) will perform this act after the solution is implemented?

4. Complete the *Application Worksheet* questions and then draft a protocol document that PLCs and data teams could use to build trust, reduce apprehension, as well as implement their use of data. Information on building trust contained in *Direct Teach* for *Section One: Building a Culture for the Effective Use of Educational Data* may be used to facilitate this part of your training.

Step Three: Understand the role of data coaches and data teams in using educational data to inform instruction in PLCs and data teams.

1. Review Objective 3 from the *Direct Teach* section, which speaks to the different types of data reports that are available to PLC and data team members. Then learn what data reports are available from the data analysis system in place in your school or district. Recommendations for the use of data that will be helpful in identifying useful reports are outlined on page 7 of the *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations* and listed below:

    *   Using data for instructional improvement.
    *   Determining student growth.
    *   Determining effective response to interventions.

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• Identifying which digital asset(s) best meets the needs of specific learners.

• Projecting success on successfully meeting curriculum standards.

2. When assessments and curriculum are aligned with standards, a school or district is ready to begin collecting and reporting on the kinds of data that are meaningful to PLCs and data teams. Data coaches often train PLC and data team members to retrieve, analyze, and use data. Review the following recommendations from pages 4-5 of the *Guide to Professional Development and Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations*:

   • **Link training and professional development to change management.** SIS and LMS solutions can be complex, and as such, the educational process changes that accompany the application implementation can also be complex. Training on the new system is not enough to ensure success in improving instructional practice. Districts will need professional development sessions to assess the impact on staff and process and create a comprehensive change management program. This includes training, as well as the other aspects of the process of change, such as building a culture for the effective use of data, job, and organizational changes.

   • **Consider conducting training in phases.** Basic functionality that everyone must use in order to capture standard data should be delivered first (for example, taking attendance or capturing grades). Training on more advanced functionality can be delivered once the staff has developed a level of comfort with basic functionality. More advanced functionality might include creating an assessment or regularly generating reports for improving instructional practice.

3. Identify an item analysis report available in your school or district that will be useful in PLC and data team meetings. Oftentimes, PLC and data team members find that item analysis by standard reports are the most helpful in determining what students know, what they don't know, and what the next steps should be.

4. Consider this: The power data teams and PLCs gain from assessment is the use of assessment data to improve students' learning by informing instruction and developing interventions. Though SIS and LMS programs produce reports and graphs in a timely manner, the reports are not the end product. Rather, they are the roadmaps for PLCs and data teams to plan and implement action plans and interventions that will improve teaching and learning and help students to become more successful.

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Step Four: Understand the critical success factors for effective PLC and data team meetings.

1. Review the recommendations for effective PLC meetings and data teams listed in the *Direct Teach* section.

2. Draft a plan for PLCs and data teams to take action.

Recommended Answers to Questions Presented in the *Checking for Understanding Worksheet*

QUESTION 1:

Explain why it is important for PLCs and data teams to begin their meetings with educational data. Then describe what might happen if a PLC or data team meets and does not use data.

ANSWER:

Student assessment data provides evidence regarding what students know and what they don't know. Thus, data helps PLCs and data teams to evaluate specific, standards-based next steps for improving student achievement. Data also is needed to effectively evaluate and re-evaluate action plans, including changes in curricular materials, pacing, methodology, and interventions. Without the use of data, action plans are based on opinion rather than evidence of learning.

QUESTION 2:

Explain why it is important for PLCs and data teams to end their meetings with an action plan. Then describe what might happen if a PLC or data team meets, but does not leave with an action plan.

ANSWER:

Action plans identify what each teacher on the team will do next to improve learning, identify the resources (including time and administrative support) that are needed, and specify when checks for progress will be done. Action plans provide "next steps" for teachers once a PLC or data team meeting has concluded. Without a specific action plan, teachers leave meetings with good intentions, but often nothing changes. The same methods are used and the same results occur.

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Self-Directed Learner's Checklist

Tasks	Target Date for Completion	Status (Not Started, In Progress, Completed)	Notes
1. I have read the *Direct Teach* content and the *Sanger Unified School District Case Study*, and have viewed the *Katy Independent School District Video Exemplar*.			
2. I understand the components of effective PLCs discussed in *Direct Teach*.			
3. Using the *Checking for Understanding Worksheet*, I have reflected on the importance of beginning meetings with the review of educational data.			
4. Using the *Application Worksheet*, I have reflected on protocols needed to build cohesiveness in PLCs and data teams.			
5. Using the *Guide to Professional Development* and *Training Planning: A Focus on SIS/LMS Implementations*, I understand the importance of ongoing training in data collection and use of data.			

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