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Aligning School Districts as PLCs

By Mark Van Clay, Perry Soldwedel, and Thomas W. Many

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to *Aligning School Districts as PLCs*, by Mark Van Clay, Perry Soldwedel, and Thomas W. Many. The strategies in this book are designed for district stakeholders to use in realizing their district's full potential by aligning its policies, procedures, and practices around the three big ideas of a professional learning community.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way sequentially through the entire book or to focus on topics addressed in a particular chapter.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to bring your district into alignment as a professional learning community.

Chapter 1

The Case for Districtwide Alignment

1. What is the authors' definition of districtwide alignment, and how can a school district benefit from it?
2. What are the three big ideas of a PLC?
3. In the scenario described in this chapter, what were the superintendent's misgivings about implementing the board's targets for increased academic rigor?
4. Why was the teacher's association president so upset?

Chapter 2

Alignment's Essential Components

1. What are the four essential elements of district alignment? Which ones currently need the most attention in your district? Which are the strongest in your district?
2. What are the three district roles, and in general, to which area or level of a district does each belong?
3. What are role bridges? Name several positions in your district that function as role bridges.
4. What is the cascading effect? How can one avoid the potentially negative impacts of the cascading effect while still pursuing needed changes?
5. What is “loose” vs. “tight” leadership? Is leadership in your district currently loose or tight? How could your district achieve a greater balance between them?

Chapter 3

Aligning to a Focus on Learning

1. The authors say teachers need to be less concerned with what they are teaching than with what students are learning. Is your district's current focus on learning or teaching? What could be done to ensure that learning is the priority?
2. According to DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, what are the four critical questions of learning?
3. What are the three non-negotiables for ensuring a focus on learning? In your district, who is accountable for the strategic, tactical, and operational responsibilities associated with each of these items? How well is this system working?
4. When Nirvana School District principals pointed out the need to build a common PLC vocabulary, the superintendent responded, "This plan has already been approved," and suggested that they "find some courage and fast!" What message does this send? How is this counterproductive to the goals of PLCs?

Chapter 4

Aligning to a Collaborative Culture

1. Why should teachers' collaborative planning time be thought of as distinct from their class preparation time?
2. What are the three non-negotiables for building a collaborative culture?
3. Name several ways that that strategists, tacticians, and operationalists can each support the building of a collaborative culture?
4. In discussing the elements of highly effective collaborative teams, Lencioni mentions the importance of "unfiltered conflict." What does he mean by this, and why is it so important to collaboration?

Chapter 5

Aligning to a Results Orientation

1. What are the three non-negotiables for a results orientation?
2. How do strategists, tacticians, and operationalists each contribute to aligning the district toward a results orientation?
3. What is your district's current relationship with data? How are data collected and used? Are there steps your district could take to make this process more productive?
4. In the Nirvana School District, the assistant superintendent chose items for a semester exam but retained sole access to them. Why was this problematic?

Chapter 6

An Alternative to Dead Reckoning: Assessing PLC Alignment

1. Name some of the reasons that district-level appraisal tools are so important in appraising the progress of a district toward alignment.
2. Print out and use the Big Idea Assessment Instrument to evaluate your district's progress.
3. How could you use the findings to improve your district alignment?
4. Why should these tools be used for formative assessments rather than summative assessments?