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Charting the Course for Leaders: Lessons From Priority Schools in a PLC at Work®

Edited by Sharon V. Kramer

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Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Charting the Course for Leaders: Lessons From Priority Schools in a PLC at Work®* edited by Sharon V. Kramer. *Charting the Course for Leaders* describes how K–12 school and district leaders can effectively address common priority school struggles by implementing the Professional Learning Community (PLC) at Work process.

This guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire team to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school or district, and suggest steps that might be taken to promote a healthy school culture.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope this guide is a useful tool in your efforts to create a healthy culture in your school or district.

Chapter 1

Leading School-Improvement Work With Intention

By Karen Power

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1. What is tight/loose leadership? How can this leadership approach clarify and communicate priorities and expectations to staff?

2. Define *heartprint*, and reflect on how you model and communicate your priorities to staff. How might your staff respond if you asked them, "What is most important to your leader?"

3. What are the fours skills transformational leaders need as described by Anthony Muhammad and Luis F. Cruz (2019)? What improvements can you make in these skill areas that will positively impact your leadership practice?

4. Reflect on a crucial conversation you engaged in recently. Were you intentional in communicating your message? If not, why do you think this was the case? What are some habits to consider when preparing for crucial conversations, and why is it important to consider these habits before having crucial conversations?

Chapter 2

Building District Culture

By Karen Power

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1. What is positional leadership, and how does it differ from leadership based on permission? How might each of these leadership styles look and sound like in a district or school? How does one move from positional leadership to leading with permission?

2. Define *technical change* and *cultural change*. Why is cultural change much more difficult to accomplish?

3. What steps did the Huntsville Independent School District take to begin understanding and changing its culture?

4. Study figure 2.4 (page 34). What are some examples of school and district leaders sharing the work of school improvement? Why is it important to celebrate successes throughout the improvement process?

Chapter 3

Employing High-Level Strategies From the District Office

By Gerry Petersen-Incorvaia

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1. What are some important principles and philosophies to remember and model when leading a cultural shift in a priority school district? How might leaders foster collective efficacy during the improvement process?

2. Has your district identified and shared its tights? If so, do you think your principals and collaborative teams understand how to work collaboratively to address the implementation of the right work? How might the district support schools in this work?

3. What does the author mean when he says that "support must precede monitoring" (page 52).

4. Why is it important to enact a communication loop throughout the continuous-improvement process? How might your district improve its current communication plan?

Chapter 4

Building Collaborative and Passionately Agreed-to SMART Goals

By Jack Baldermann

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1. What are SMART goals? Why are they important to the continuous-improvement process?

2. List the steps of the SMART goals process. In what ways does this process address barriers to the development of SMART goals? Why is it important to learn about and respond to staff's concerns about SMART goals?

3. How might staff use a survey like the one shown in figure 4.2 (page 72) to gauge SMART goals support?

4. Does your school have a process in place for building schoolwide SMART goals? If so, to what degree does your current process meet the standards of the process outlined in this chapter? How might you improve your current process to ensure your goals are meaningful?

Chapter 5

Aligning the Arrows for Continuous-Improvement Planning With SMART Goals

By Kimberly Rodriguez Cano

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1. What does school improvement refer to at the school and district levels? What may it refer to at the classroom level?

2. What are SMARTer goals and SMARTest goals? How do these goals relate to schoolwide SMART goals, and how do they establish a culture of shared responsibility for learning?

3. Why are meaningful SMARTest goals vital to student learning and achievement? In what ways can leaders support individual teachers in developing SMARTest goals?

4. At your school, what processes are in place to monitor goals? What data are available to you? How might you improve your school's goal monitoring schedule?

Chapter 6

Focusing on Collective Responsibility

By Joe Cuddemi

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1. What is collective responsibility? List the five-step process to create and sustain a culture of collective responsibility.

2. Describe what a healthy school culture looks and sounds like, and then describe what a toxic school culture might look and sound like. How would you describe your school's culture? What kind of response might your staff have if they completed the School History Map activity (page 96)?

3. What are the three criteria principals should consider when selecting members for the guiding coalition? After studying the essential competencies listed in figure 6.1 (page 99), who would be some of the key staff to recruit for a guiding coalition in your school?

4. What protocols, if any, does your team use to help reach consensus? How do you ensure all voices are heard?

Chapter 7

Leveraging Shared Leadership in the Priority School

By Robin Noble

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1. What are some reasons for why a principal might not establish a guiding coalition? What response would you give to a principal who says that he or she prefers to go it alone than share decision-making responsibilities? What evidence and research might you share in your response?

2. Define *authentic shared leadership*. What steps have you taken to build authentic shared leadership at your school?

3. What is fear-based leadership? Why is this leadership style prevalent in priority schools?

4. Why is it important to support the social-emotional needs of staff? How often do you check in on your staff's well-being? How might you encourage staff to engage in self-care techniques and activities?

Chapter 8

Ensuring the District Guiding Coalition and School Learning Team Have Impact

By Gerry Petersen-Incorvaia

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1. What is a school learning team, and who should be included on this team? Compare the purpose of the school learning team to the purpose of the district guiding coalition.

2. What does the author mean when he says, "*Failing forward* allows for results" (page 136; (Maxwell, 2000)? Do you agree? Why or why not?

3. What steps can you take to ensure your district guiding coalition and school learning team build reciprocal accountability?

4. Define *problem of practice*. What are some examples of a problem of practice?

Chapter 9

Monitoring Productivity Instead of Activity

By Rebecca Nicolas

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1. Consider the five archetypes of teacher teams shared in this chapter. Have you participated in or worked with one of these teams? If so, reflect on your experience. What dysfunctions and challenges did you encounter? If you encountered this type of team again, what support and feedback might you offer?

2. What is the purpose of the instructional leadership team (ILT), and who should be included on this team? Who would be some of the key staff to recruit for your school's ILT?

3. The author states, "The products our ILT now monitors are categorized by the four critical questions" (page 153). Why is this important to the team's productivity?

4. Outline the ILT's data-analysis cycle. How does this process ensure teacher teams receive timely feedback and support?

Chapter 10

Providing Feedback on the Right Work

By Sarah Schuhl

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1. Review the learning cycle model shared in figure 10.1 (page 166). How does this cycle clarify the work of teams before, during, and after a unit?

2. How can the guiding coalition provide meaningful feedback to teams? Is your guiding coalition monitoring the work of teams in a productive way? Why or why not? In what ways does your guiding coalition celebrate the work of teams?

3. Consider a time when you sat in on a collaborative team meeting. What roadblocks to doing the right work did you notice? How did you share feedback with the team? Did the feedback strengthen the learning of the team? If not, what would you do differently?

4. How can you give feedback after walkthroughs of collaborative team members' classrooms? What practices and evidence should you look for to determine any needed professional development?

Chapter 11

Giving All Teachers the Coach They Deserve

By Michelle Marrillia

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1. List the roles and responsibilities of the instructional coach in a PLC. How can school leaders assist instructional coaches in this work?

2. What are some things to keep in mind when implementing a whole-school coaching plan? What can you do to ensure a whole-school meeting is meaningful to staff?

3. Describe the importance of implementing a group coaching plan.

4. How would you create a meaningful and realistic coaching schedule in your school? What are some major components to consider when creating this schedule?

Chapter 12

Challenging Proficient Students

By Michael Roberts

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1. Have collaborative teams in your school determined which standards are essential for all students to learn and how to assess those standards? Have teams discussed how to build on essential standards to create extensions? If not, what could you say to communicate to teams the important role extensions play in student learning?

2. Why do educators in priority schools often ignore data? Why does the author advocate that leaders should analyze and dig into data?

3. What professional learning and resources are available to your teams to help them build extensions?

4. Research how your state or provincial department of education scores school report cards. Does your state or province award bonus points to schools that extend students' learning beyond proficiency?

Chapter 13

Taking the First Five Steps in High School Improvement

By Tamie Sanders

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1. Consider your school's master schedule. Do teams have time during the instructional day to meet? Is there time in the daily schedule for interventions? Do you see room for improvement?

2. Reflect on your school. What process do you use to determine teacher placement? Is placement determined by seniority and politics or by endurance, leverage, and readiness?

3. The author states, "Celebrations should start small with small wins, building confidence in a struggling student population" (page 220). What are some examples of small wins you can celebrate with students and staff immediately?

4. Review the ten-day learning cycle. What support and resources would you need to provide teams to aid in implementing the cycle?