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Leading PLCs at Work® Districtwide: From Boardroom to Classroom

By Robert Eaker, Mike Hagadone, Janel Keating, and Meagan Rhoades

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Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *Leading PLCs at Work® Districtwide: From Boardroom to Classroom* by Robert Eaker, Mike Hagadone, Janel Keating, and Meagan Rhoades. *Leading PLCs at Work Districtwide* provides district and school leaders with tools and strategies to create a districtwide culture of continuous improvement and to ensure high levels of learning for every student.

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

Starting at the Top: The School Board and Superintendent Team

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1. Why do district leaders often shy away from top-down practices? In what ways does the school board and superintendent team align the work of the professional learning community (PLC) districtwide?

2. When proposing and initiating change, why is it important that all stakeholders understand the *why*? What steps did the school board and superintendent team at White River School District take to ensure all members of the team had a solid grasp of PLC at Work® concepts and practices?

3. What is the *expectation-acceptance gap*? How does an effective collaborative team react when it encounters challenges during the PLC journey? How can a positive mindset impact the PLC journey? How can a negative mindset impact the PLC journey?

4. What is the TACA process, and what are the steps in the process? List the different sections of the TACA form.

5. Why is developing a districtwide calendar so important for effective planning? Does your district already implement a districtwide calendar and plan? If so, who creates them, and

how are they shared districtwide? Do they ensure the work of each team is aligned with

PLC concepts and practices?

6. What do the authors mean when they state, ". . . every district must have a districtwide

    guaranteed and viable curriculum" (page 42)? How can leaders ensure and support a

    guaranteed and viable curriculum?

Chapter 2

Setting the Stage: District Leadership Team

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1. Compare the traditional district office team to the district leadership team at White River School District. Why is it important for principals to be viewed as district leaders?

2. Describe the pipeline issue that schools in White River experienced. What steps did the district leadership team take to address the issue? What types of conversations took place?

3. Richard DuFour (2015) states, "The job of principal is daunting yet doable" (p. 247). In what ways did White River School District make the job of the principal doable?

4. Compare the flow of information in figure 2.1 (page 62) to the flow of information in figure 2.2 (page 63). Is one model more effective than the other? What is the role of the building learning coordinator?

5. What are the steps of the fishbowl process the White River district leadership team uses to observe the work of effective teams? During district leadership team meetings, list some other ways the White River district leadership team creates an environment of continuous learning.

6. Are timely and frequent celebrations a consistent theme in your school or district? Why is it important to recognize and reward accomplishments?

Chapter 3

Leading the Work at the School Level: The Building Leadership Team

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1. Who makes up the building leadership team in White River School District? What are the benefits of having layers of leadership? What is the role of the team leader?

2. Consider the messages from White River's principals regarding team leader training. Why is team leader training so vital for successful collaboration? Why does White River conduct districtwide principal and collaborative team leader trainings instead of doing individual school trainings?

3. How do the principal and collaborative team leaders lead the learning in the school? What does it mean to have a "these kids are our kids" attitude?

4. How often does the building leadership team meet to review end-of-unit common formative assessment data? Describe what one of these meetings would look and sound like. What types of information and data are shared? What information is measured and monitored?

5. Define *school culture* using your own words. The authors state, "A healthy culture must also be built on trust" (page 86). What are some ways the building leadership team can aid in building trust?

6. Why should principals and team leaders engage in the collaborative tasks of unwrapping standards and setting SMART goals? To what degree have these tasks been done in your school?

Chapter 4

Improving the Learning: Teacher Collaborative Teams

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1. Define and provide examples of *controllable variables* and *uncontrollable variables*. How would you respond if team members stated they wanted to focus time and energy on an uncontrollable variable?

2. Consider the eight controllable variables discussed in this chapter. Which of these variables do you believe your team needs to focus on first because it needs the most improvement? Briefly describe how the teams at White River addressed this variable, and then identify next steps you and your team can take to impact this variable.

3. Describe the collaborative team meeting process. What does this meeting look and sound like? What items and information do team members share, and what kinds of questions do they ask?

4. Collaborative teams at White River use a Google platform, which they call *The Work sites*, to save and share files districtwide. What are the advantages to using this platform? Are there disadvantages to using this platform? If so, what are they?

5. Consider the example of Molly Curran and her team (page 124). How did Molly and her team adapt the district-developed unit plans to fit their needs? Describe the process the team used to decide what needed to change within the unit plans.

6. Define *singletons*. What are some ways singletons can engage in collaborative work?

Chapter 5

Envisioning an Aligned District

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1. Imagine you are asked to participate in an interview. How would you respond if the reporter asked you, "What is a district-aligned PLC?" Reflect on how others in your school or district might respond to this question.

2. Summarize how the work of collaborative teams in a PLC district is both a bottom-up and top-down cyclical process.

3. Consider a team on which you are now serving. What is one thing your team could do to improve trust and learning immediately?

4. What obstacles and challenges stand in your district's way of becoming a high-performing PLC?

5. What professional development opportunities are available to you and teams in your district? Are there any workshops or conferences you would like to learn more about that will support high levels of learning for adults and students?

6. Consider the fourteen-year journey of PLC implementation in White River School District. What are your main takeaways after studying the ideas, examples, and artifacts of this district-aligned PLC?