



The Collaborative Administrator: Working Together as a Professional Learning Community

Study Guide

This study guide is a companion to the book *The Collaborative Administrator*, introduced by Richard DuFour with a foreword by Robert Eaker. *The Collaborative Administrator* explores the nature of leadership in a professional learning community (PLC). Using insights from a variety of experts who have implemented and sustained collaborative cultures of continuous improvement in schools around the nation, this anthology offers answers to the most important questions surrounding PLCs.

This study guide is arranged by chapter, enabling readers to either work their way through the entire book or to focus on the specific topics addressed in a particular chapter. It is designed to help you benefit from and apply the ideas presented in *The Collaborative Administrator*. It can be used by individuals, small groups, or an entire faculty to identify key points, raise questions for consideration, assess conditions in a particular school, and suggest steps that might be taken to improve collaboration. You might also compare and contrast the authors' positions on collaboration.

We thank you for your interest in this book, and we hope that this guide proves to be a useful tool in your efforts to collaborate in your school or district.

Chapter 1

Walk the ‘Lign: Aligning School Practices With Essential PLC Characteristics

Mike Mattos

1. The author makes the case that professional learning communities must ensure that school culture and structure align to all six essential characteristics of a PLC. What are those six characteristics? Which characteristics are strongest in your school or district? Which are weakest?
2. The author describes three ineffective leadership approaches. Name the three approaches, and explain what each one looks like and why it is problematic.
3. The author provides probing questions and tools for evaluating the presence of the six characteristics in a PLC. Have you explored these questions with staff or scheduled a date to do so? If so, are you satisfied with the answers? If you have not discussed the questions, what prevents you from looking closer at your school’s current reality? What would be the benefits of that examination?

Chapter 2

Growing Teacher Leadership

Cassandra Erkens

1. What are you already doing that would support a collaborative culture with empowered teachers? How might your role as an administrator have to change in a collaborative culture? How do you “share” leadership?
2. Why would you engage in servant leadership to support your professional learning community, and what might such leadership look like?
3. How can you model the work of PLCs if you’ve never functioned in a PLC as a teacher?
4. Think of the most reflective practitioner/leader you know. What does he or she do that would qualify for the title “reflective practitioner”? What are you already doing along those lines? What could you add or remove to become a reflective leader?
5. How can you use the process of celebration to create a culture of accountability?
6. How *trusting* is your current culture? What can you do to increase trust across and among staff and administration?

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7. How prone to *risk-taking* and *questioning* is your current culture? What can you do to encourage risk-taking and questioning across and among staff and administration?

8. In *your setting*, what are the beliefs, practices, and structures that would best enable teachers to lead from within their classrooms?

Chapter 3

Trust: The Secret Ingredient to Successful Shared Leadership

Austin Buffum

1. According to the author, what are the six most common obstacles to building and maintaining trust in schools? Are any of these obstacles currently present in your school setting? If so, what might you do about it?
2. The author suggests that schools need to redefine themselves with new stories when bogged down by the perpetual retelling of what happened in the past. How might you go about replacing your school's old stories with new stories that are more consistent with the current reality?
3. One of the most important ingredients to building trust is delivering on promises made by the principal. Congruence between words and deeds is of paramount importance. What promises, implicit and explicit, have been made to the staff at your school by the principal? Does your school administration have plans to follow through on these promises?
4. Much of the research cited by the author focuses upon listening and communication as key ingredients to establishing trust between administration and staff. What steps might you employ to measure the extent to which staff in

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- your building feel that they are “heard” when they speak? How might you assess the effectiveness of administrator-to-teacher and teacher-to-teacher communication in your school?
5. The author underscores the importance of encouraging risk-taking on the part of teachers. How can administration encourage this kind of risk-taking by teachers, and what should happen when a new initiative or approach is unsuccessful?
 6. Building trust by confronting teachers who are unable or unwilling to comply with the will of the group might seem counterintuitive to some. Do you believe that trust is enhanced or diminished by confronting teachers unwilling to change according to the school’s mission and vision? Whose job is it to confront—teachers, administrators, or both?

Chapter 4

From C to Shining C: Relational Leadership Practices That Move Teachers From Compliance to Commitment

Kenneth C. Williams

1. The author makes a distinction between *compliance* and *commitment*; how would you describe that distinction? The author states that compliance may be a necessary stage before commitment. Do you agree with that statement? Why or why not?
2. The author describes four strategies to build commitment. What are those strategies?
3. What does the author mean by using a “can’t do” approach with staff?
4. How “close” to the work of your teachers do you think you are? Would your teachers agree with your assessment? What do you currently do that is “hands on”?
5. How comfortable are you in appearing vulnerable to your staff? Do you agree that there is value in showing vulnerability? Why or why not? In what ways have you made yourself vulnerable in your role as administrator in the past 30 days?
6. What role does celebration play in your school culture? Who drives celebrations and recognition—you or other staff members? Do your celebrations support the critical behaviors you’d like to encourage?

Chapter 5

A Passion-Driven Professional Learning Community: Putting Faith Into Action

Charles Hinman With George Knights and Jeffrey Hubbard

1. The authors suggest that “renewing the heart” is an important step to motivate staff to change. What level of resistance to change do you currently encounter in your school? What are you currently doing to address resistance?
2. In the “Fundamental Belief” activity, the authors ask what semester grade should be given to a student who has achieved a perfect score on the final exam, showing he learned all the standards, despite poor grades and behavior throughout the semester. What does current assessment practice at your school specify? Why is this a critical question for a professional learning community?
3. In the “Is This Acceptable?” activity, the authors suggest examining dropout rates, failure rates, and so on. Do you and your staff know how many students have received one or more F grades in the last school year? As an administrator, do you find the failure rate acceptable? Would parents agree with you?
4. The authors provide a long list of reforms in the “Reality Check” activity. How many of these reforms and programs has your school implemented over the years? How many resulted in improved student learning? How many are still in use?
5. Do you agree that “building a culture of support for new teachers is an important and commonly overlooked instructional responsibility”? How does

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your school currently build that support? What would you expect to see as a result of that support? Do you know whether your new and veteran staff feel there is a culture of support for new teachers? If so, how? If not, how could you find out?

Chapter 6

The Principal's Principles of Leadership in a Professional Learning Community

Lillie G. Jessie

1. The author states that according to Marzano, *situational awareness* has the highest correlation with student achievement. How would you define this term? Why do you think it has such a high correlation with student achievement?
2. The author makes reference to a quote by Doug Reeves in his definition of leadership: “Great leaders magnify their own strengths and simultaneously create teams that do not mimic the leader but provide different and equally important strengths to the organization.” How would you define your leadership style? How does this leadership style influence your leadership practices?
3. What are the five “Principal’s Principles of Leadership”? What do they mean to you? Are there other principles that you would add to this list? What are they, and why are they important?
4. In “Principle 1: Personal Mission Must Precede Organizational and School Mission,” the author describes her personal history and how it impacted her commitment to high student achievement. What aspects of your personal history

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- influenced your thinking as an educator? Have you had a significant emotional event (a SEE)? If so, what was it, and how did it impact you as a leader?
5. The challenge of present-day school leaders is balancing the managerial and educational leadership aspects of the job. How do you “Monitor What Matters . . . When It Matters”?
 6. The author reminds us of the importance of celebrating the success of students and building student efficacy. What are some ways that you ensure that this is a vital part of your daily practice?
 7. The author’s last principle emphasizes responding to students’ poor performance even when it may threaten your popularity. Have you had an opportunity to be in a room when colleagues expressed low expectations or made belittling comments about students? If yes, how did it make you feel, and how did you respond, if at all? What are some of the consequences of responding in an evaluative manner when teachers are performing at a documented low level? What are some of the rewards for that response?

Chapter 7

Teaching Matters: Leadership That Improves Professional Practice

Anthony Muhammad

1. Research shows that teaching has up to 10 times as much impact on student achievement as all other factors combined. To what extent does your current leadership focus on improving teacher quality? How? Would your staff agree with your assessment?
2. The author suggests that cultural and institutional barriers make it difficult to support teacher development. What are those barriers? To what extent do they exist in your school?
3. The author says that “upsetting teacher autonomy is a dangerous endeavor.” Do you agree with his statement? Why or why not? Why does a focus on teacher quality upset teacher autonomy?
4. The author identifies four questions regarding professional development that his leadership team would address. What are those questions? To what extent have you and your staff begun to ask and answer those questions?

Chapter 8

Professional Learning in a Professional Learning Community

Terri L. Martin

1. In this chapter, the author proposes that professional development should be collaboratively decided instead of administratively enforced. How do schools set up structures that assist teachers with making good decisions in regard to professional development?
2. According to the author, there are two different strands for providing professional development, learning that comes from outside the school environment and learning that comes from within. Describe each of these strands.
3. Why is it important to have learning from outside experts and learning that occurs within the school day?
4. The author defines ways to support shared learning in a school environment. Does your school support shared learning? If so, state how. If not, identify some ways your school can begin to utilize shared learning.
5. The author suggests that when schools use professional development to support the adult learners in schools, students are the ultimate benefactors. Why is that the case?

Chapter 9

Breaking Through the Barriers of Time: How to Find Time to Support Struggling Students

Peter Noonan

1. In this chapter, the author describes the learning process he used to build support among staff for making the necessary changes to become a professional learning community. How have you tried to build support for change? When was the last time your staff or leadership team engaged in book study on important educational topics? If recently, how have you applied your new knowledge?
2. Identify the four “non-negotiables” that the committee examining the schedule in the author’s school was tasked to follow.
3. Identify an organizational routine at your school (or a school you work with) that you believe is critical to improving the school. Then outline in six or seven sentences your theory of action for the routine; that is, how it should/ought to contribute to improvement.
4. The author’s school used a “PLUS” period to create time in the schedule. Explain how this works. What were the benefits of the PLUS period at the author’s school? Would a PLUS period work in your school? Why or why not?
5. The author makes the point that his school was already considered a “good” school. How do your staff and community view your school? Are they satisfied with the status quo? Where is there room for growth?

Chapter 10

Building a Pyramid of Interventions

Geri Parscale

1. In the opening scenario, what was Ms. Fenley’s error in thinking? Do you have professionals in your school who are better at providing interventions than others? How are interventions currently handled?
2. Prior to developing a pyramid of interventions, teachers must know what they are teaching. What steps are taken in your school to ensure that you have identified and are helping students learn the critical outcomes?
3. Why would it be important to assess the current reality of your school when it comes to interventions? How are interventions currently assessed in your school?
4. In this chapter, the author has tough conversations with a principal about what needed to happen in his school regarding interventions. How are these conversations handled in your school? Why would they be important?
5. The author identifies CPR as a life-saving strategy. Like CPR, learning interventions must be directive, timely, targeted, systematic, and administered by

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a trained professional. Do your interventions align with these qualities of CPR?

Why or why not?

6. Consider this statement: “If a curriculum is not delivered with fidelity, no amount of interventions will matter.” What do you think is meant by this statement? How does a school ensure that best practices are being implemented in the classroom?

Chapter 11

Digging Deep Into Data

Susan Huff

1. Explain why teachers need a basis of comparison for data to be meaningful.
2. Although criterion-referenced data results are received after students have moved on, how can analysis of this data improve teaching and learning after the fact?
3. What probing questions can teams ask about data to help them change data to information to improve teaching and learning?
4. How do formative assessments differ from summative assessments? What distinguishes a formative assessment?
5. Doug Reeves suggested the key to successful use of common assessments is to frequently assess a few key concepts, rather than assess many concepts infrequently. Do you agree? Why or why not?
6. Robert Eaker stated that collective inquiry is about seeking out best practice, experimenting with best practice, and then analyzing the results. How does this process improve teaching and learning?

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7. The author described three categories of different types of data. What are those categories? What sources of data are already available at your school that could be used to improve teaching and learning? What additional sources do you need? What could you do to generate that data?

8. The author described a process teachers use at her school to analyze math data (pp. 206–208). What are the steps from that process that could be implemented at your school to help teams analyze data? What other steps would you add for your setting?

Chapter 12

Win-Win Contract Negotiation: Collective Bargaining for Student Learning

Eric Twadell

1. The author compares traditional collective bargaining to win-win collective bargaining. What are the differences between them? Which more accurately describes your current contract negotiation situation?
2. What are the pre-negotiation protocols that the author describes? To what extent are you already using these (examine and rate each protocol)? If you are not using any, what could you do this week to take steps toward implementing them? Whose support could you enlist in establishing new protocols?
3. What are the negotiation protocols that the author describes? To what extent are you already using these (examine and rate each protocol)? If you are not using any, what could you do this week to take steps toward implementing them? Whose support could you enlist in establishing new protocols?
4. The author describes two difficult topics that his district successfully addressed through win-win collective bargaining. What are they? What topics would you like to see addressed through a collaborative approach in your district? Whose support could you enlist in raising those issues and creating a win-win approach?

Chapter 13

A Framework for Excellence: The Role of the Central Office

Jay Westover

1. Consider the leadership framework illustrated on page 238. To what extent have you taken into consideration the critical factors of shared knowledge, common beliefs, and collective commitments as part of PLC implementation?
2. Consider the questions on page 240. To what extent does shared knowledge exist within your district in respect to each of these critical questions?
3. Consider the manner in which leadership is distributed amongst school site principals and school leadership teams. To what extent are principals and school leadership teams directly empowered to model loose-tight leadership practices by collectively designing, implementing, and refining tools and routines to guide their collaborative work and that of their collaborative teams?
4. Consider whether principals and teacher leaders have the skills and belief in their collective ability to implement PLCs. To what extent do structures, processes, and conditions currently exist in your school that directly empower principals and teacher leaders to leverage their collective efforts for implementing PLCs?

5. Consider the shifts from fragmentation to clarity, from dependence to interdependence, and from resignation to direct empowerment. To what extent has your organization established a vision, trust, and effective collaboration as foundations for attaining these fundamental shifts?