

Demystifying Professional Learning Communities



PLC
ASSOCIATES

Demystifying Professional Learning Communities

Module III:

District Support for Professional Learning Communities in Schools

Module III

provides information on...

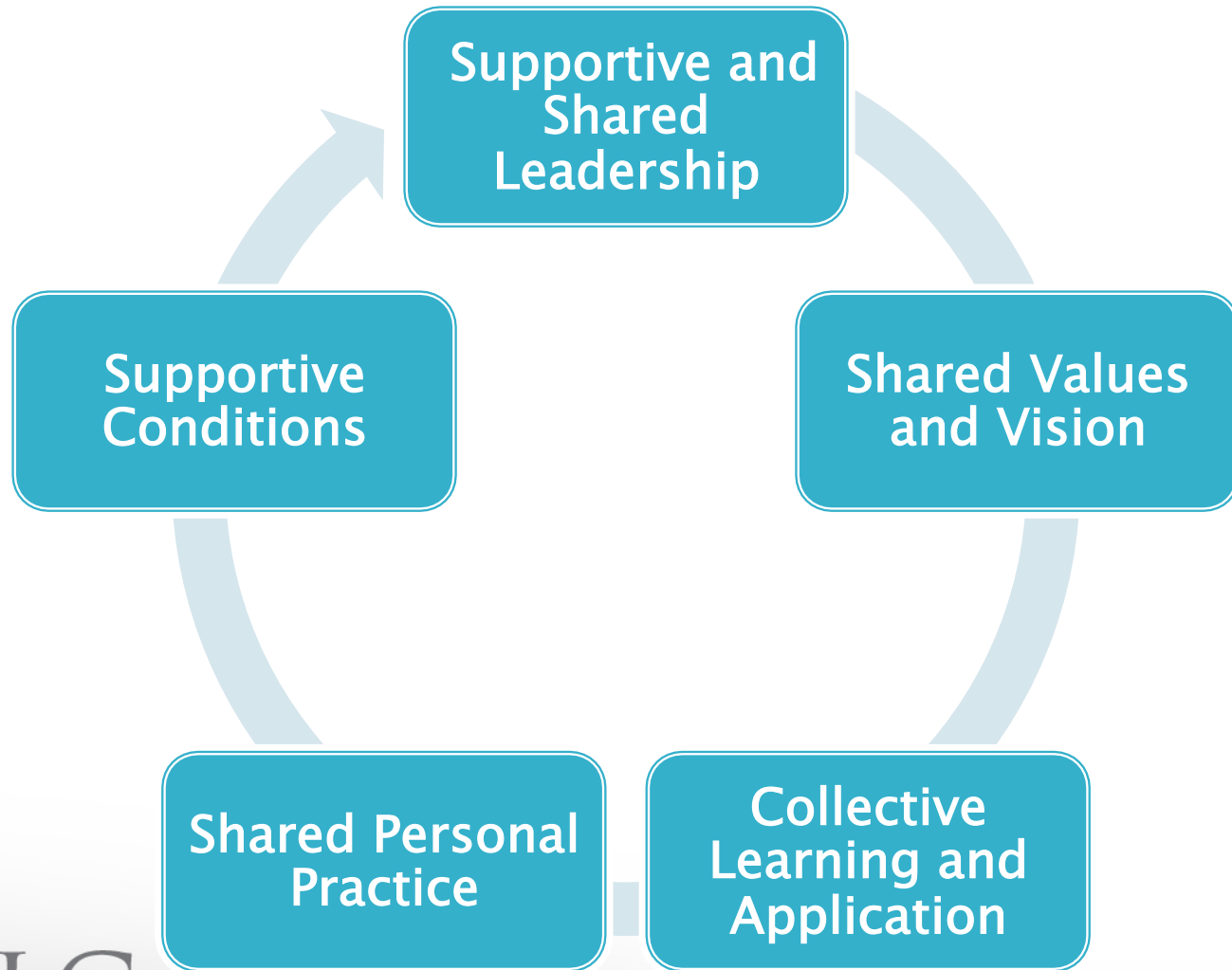
- Research on district-level support of the PLC framework in schools
- The Professional Learning Community Assessment-District Support (PLCA-DS), an assessment to determine perceptions of district-level support for the PLC framework in schools

PLC Defined

“Professional educators working collectively and purposefully to create and sustain a culture of learning for all students and adults.”

Hipp & Huffman (2010)

PLC Conceptual Framework



Primary Research Questions

- How do school district leaders (central office staff) support PLC development in schools?
- How does the PLCA-DS inform district and school leaders about district-level support for PLC development in schools?

Qualitative Methodology

- 2 school districts – Louisiana, Texas
- Interview protocol based on PLC Dimensions
- **20 interviews** - 6 district staff; 12 principals, 2 focus groups (teacher leaders)

Qualitative Methodology

Thematic approach for analyses

- ***Initial analysis*** – major themes and indicators within each PLC dimension
- ***Secondary analysis*** – major themes across all interviews and dimensions

Shared and Supportive Leadership Themes

- Planning and decision making
- Sharing and delegating leadership
- Maintaining autonomy and accountability
- Modeling and collaborating
- Supportive leadership and capacity building

Shared and Supportive Leadership

“Never making an important decision without engaging all of my cabinet-level people and bringing it through them first and then out to all of our principals...It has been an evolution where people are understanding that distributive leadership is absolutely essential... And we have required of our principals as we’ve moved into the PLC process...they indeed empower their teachers to make instructional decisions.”

~ Superintendent

Shared Values and Vision Themes

- Establishing and communicating the vision
- Prioritization of the PLC process as an infrastructure

Shared Values and Vision

“We finally got to the point where we said everything is PLCs. Everything is. So we just basically put everything together. And we said, this [PLC process] is what drives everything.”

~ Principal

Collective Learning and Application Themes

- Focused learning and dissemination of the PLC framework
- District actions related to professional learning
- District actions related to student achievement
- Collaboration

Collective Learning and Application

“The district...had instructional meetings where they might talk about learning targets or examining student work that administrators...teacher coaches...teachers would go to...all the professional development they were doing just folded right into the PLC process.”

~ Principal

Shared Personal Practice Themes

- Administrators as participants in sharing of practice
- Teachers as participants in sharing of practice

Shared Personal Practice

“We all are responsible for the students and I think looking at data and putting it out on the table in the group brings that to life for teachers.”

~ Teacher Leader

Supportive Conditions Structures Themes

- Providing multiple opportunities for collaboration within and across all levels of the system
- Providing resources and expertise to enhance leadership and instruction
- Communicating expectations for collaboration while allowing flexibility

Supportive Conditions Relationships Themes

- Establishing a culture of openness
- Trust at all levels of the system

Supportive Conditions Structures and Relationships

“...part of the PLC process remove teacher isolation...you are with a group of people and you need to collaborate...I feel like this was the answer for reducing isolation for the leadership and for the teachers.”

~ Assistant Superintendent

Data Focus Themes

- Developing data management and retrieval systems
- Modeling effective use of data
- Providing staff to organize and share data
- Facilitating data discussion

Data Focus

“We’ve invested a great deal in making sure there’s a data-rich environment...”

~ Assistant Superintendent

“...the evidence clearly shows that you just gather data and lay it in front of you and it tells the story.”

~ Curriculum Coordinator

“When you make decisions based on data, you’re going to get a better response and better product.”

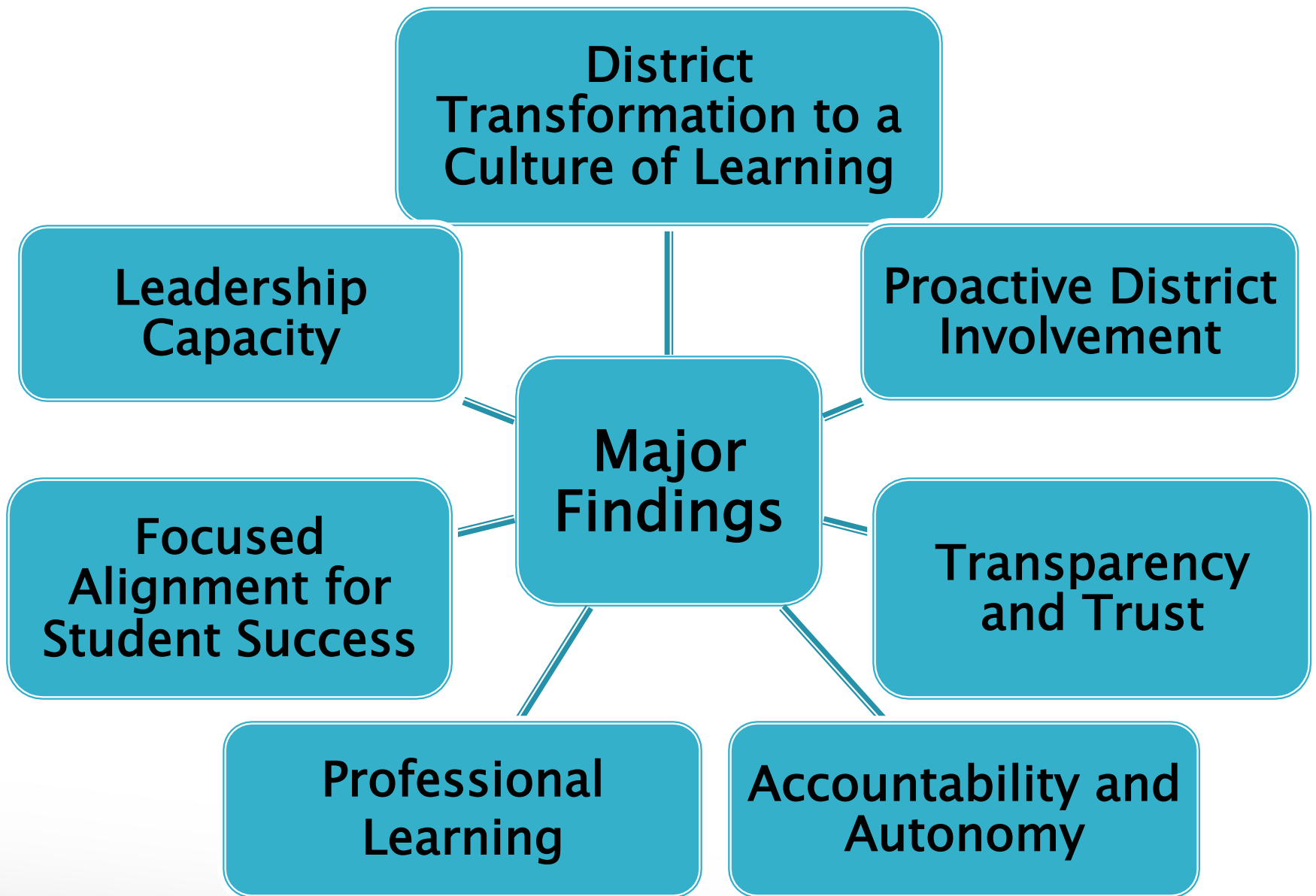
~ Principal

Challenges

- Conceptualizing the PLC process
- Building leadership capacity building and planning for succession
- Focusing on the vision

Challenges

- Providing necessary resources
- Balancing high expectations
- Recognizing success at all levels



Major Findings

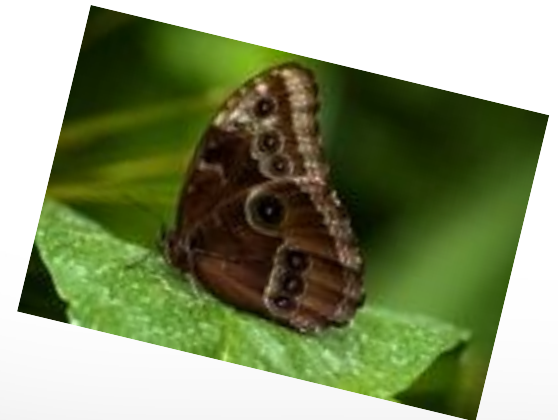
District Transformation to a Culture of Learning

- Reculturing district as a PLC
- Adhering to the PLC framework
- Commitment to student achievement/
learning

District Transformation To a Culture of Learning

“ I think the PLC process has the power to transform the culture...And I think it’s transforming culture around how we work but more importantly what we believe and transforming that we really do start to believe in our collective capacity to move every kid, not just kids who fit in our box.”

~ Superintendent



Major Findings

Proactive District Involvement

- Active participants in the learning process
- District and school partners in the learning process
- Directly involved in school level collaborative groups
- Support and resources to schools based on needs

Proactive District Involvement

"So we tried to model at the district level and how we organize things what our expectation for shared leadership would be on the school level."

~ Superintendent



Major Findings

Transparency and Trust

- District vision clearly articulated, regularly reviewed
- Clear and consistent communication
- Expectations, decision making, use of data
- Common and consistent language to communicate and maintain district priorities

Transparency and Trust

"It's much harder to create a culture in which everyone feels supported and where there's trust. We have obviously tried to model...people won't trust you unless you trust them. And so we're trying to model for principals that we trust to get this work done. We're going to give you all the support. We're going to help you. We'll do whatever you need, but we trust you to get this done."

~ Assistant Superintendent



Major Findings

Accountability and Autonomy

- District establishes non-negotiables and offers autonomy to schools for implementation
- District promotes a sense of shared responsibility for all staff and student learning
- District consistently monitors progress to maintain focus on district vision, goals, and objectives

Accountability and Autonomy

“When we decided we were going to have some nonnegotiables for our PLCs, we modeled what we would look like it terms of collaborative learning... the PLC process – what it looks like and what our expectation is. It really created that guiding coalition of people who were starting to believe this was what needed to happen.”

~ Assistant Superintendent



Major Findings

Leadership Development/Capacity

- District utilizes multiple layers of leadership to accomplish district and school goals
- District offers opportunities and resources for leadership development
- District models effective leadership practices through interactions among all professional staff
- District plans for leadership succession in order to sustain a culture of learning

Leadership Development/ Capacity

“ I have such a profound belief in the collective wisdom and such a profound belief in strategic leadership and such a keen understanding that everyone brings gifts to the table that have to be tapped and have a contribution to make to the whole...(however) the whole idea of a flat organization is foreign to some people... and it’s been a journey.

~ Superintendent ~



Major Findings

Focused Alignment for Student Success

- District ensures alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to standards
- Reciprocal relationships exist between district and school goals
- District expects examination of student work to monitor learning and improve instructional practice
- District allocates resources based on needs of the schools

Focused Alignment for Student Success

“Our visions just align perfectly...their [district] vision is the collaborative effort, the making sure we are examining student work, making sure we are providing interventions for those students who are getting it and are not getting it...and so their vision very much flows with what we’re doing.

~Principal~



Major Findings

Professional Learning

- District uses the PLC as an infrastructure for continuous professional learning
- District models and expects collaboration as an essential component of professional learning
- District supports relevant job-embedded professional learning
- District provides time and other resources to enable collaboration



Professional Learning

"... what we're trying to get principals and teachers to understand about their collective learning is that whatever your data tell you that your kids are not doing well with, that's where your collective learning needs to come from... Go out and find a solution to that. Go out and research, find, develop, and we'll support you in any way you need. Principals will support teachers. We'll support principals. So whatever the data leads you to in terms of what we don't know enough about to help kids, that's what our collective learning needs to be based on."

~ Superintendent



Quantitative Methodology

- ▶ Validation of the survey - PLCA-DS (District Support) designed to assess perceptions about the school district's support for the development and implementation of the PLC framework in schools
- ▶ Survey describes actions district leaders take to support PLC development and implementation in schools

Survey Pilot

- ▶ 73 items
- ▶ 6–point Likert scale
- ▶ Expert opinion questionnaire
- ▶ Online administration – Survey Monkey
- ▶ 6 school districts – 3 Louisiana; 3 Texas
- ▶ Factor analyses
- ▶ **2,027 respondents**

Major Findings

Dimensions Retained Based on Factor Analysis

- Shared and Supportive Leadership
- Shared Values and Vision
- Supportive Conditions – Structures
- Supportive Conditions - Relationships

Dimensions Modified Based on Factor Analysis

- Collective Learning & Application and Shared Personal Practice = Collective Learning and Application of Practice

PLCA-DS Sample Items

Shared and Supportive Leadership

District leaders...

...provide opportunities to engage school staff in district-level decision making.

...encourage shared accountability among district and school staff.

PLCA-DS Sample Items

Shared Values and Vision

District leaders...

...support the PLC process as a coordinated approach to achieve the district vision.

...use data to assist schools in prioritizing actions to achieve the shared vision.

PLCA-DS Sample Items

Collective Learning and Application of Practice

District leaders...

...collaborate with school staff to implement curricula aligned to state standards that guide instruction.

...provide regularly scheduled opportunities to share effective professional learning community practices.

PLCA-DS Sample Items

Supportive Conditions - Relationships

District leaders...

...model respectful interactions between district and school staff.

...facilitate interactive communication with stakeholders.

PLCA-DS Sample Items

Supportive Conditions – Structures

District leaders...

... provide regularly scheduled time for district and school leaders to collaborate.

... provide financial support to schools to implement professional learning community practices.

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