

DODGE COUNTY SCHOOLS



Vision
EDUCATING TODAY'S STUDENTS TO SUCCEED IN TOMORROW'S WORLD.



Mission
MAKING A DIFFERENCE: EVERY STUDENT. EVERY DAY.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING MANUAL

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COMPREHENSIVE PLAN FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The Dodge County School System operates the Professional Learning Program as a system and site based program. Professional learning activities are prioritized by the Dodge County Curriculum Department, Federal Programs Director, and Special Education Director. Each school also schedules specific Professional learning depending on specific needs. At the end of the academic year, a survey will be given to all staff to identify areas that Professional Learning would be beneficial. The district will schedule PL opportunities for those identified areas, as well as school-site scheduling.

Each school's School Improvement Plan, as well as the System's Strategic Plan, provides priorities for the school/system program of Professional Learning. The needs of all staff are identified and assessed through the system's needs assessment administered in the spring or through the teacher and leader evaluation systems (TKES/LKES). Data is analyzed to identify the system level and school level strengths and weaknesses.

Training that is common to all schools or centered on a common topic is coordinated at the system level. Training in instructional technology, data analysis, SLDS, CPR, and special education services are examples of some of this type of training. Coordination of training opportunities such as these listed provides a consistent approach as well as meeting the unique needs of individual schools.

Professional learning activities are dependent upon state and federal funding. Additional funds for Professional Learning are requested through the local school system and federal programs. Title II A funds are used for improving teacher quality to provide training to ensure teachers and paraprofessionals are "highly qualified". Local funds, Title I funds, Special Education funds, and Program Improvement funds are also used to fully implement the comprehensive system program for continued Professional Learning.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING PROCEDURES

A needs assessment which focuses on the system/school goals is given to all schools in the spring of the year. Several schools may also administer their own survey with teachers. The results of the assessment are tabulated and presented to the system level leadership team. From these results, system initiatives and school initiatives are planned. The schools submit prioritized yearly professional learning plans to the system-level professional learning coordinator and from these an activity list is developed and maintained.

Professional Learning funds shall be used for activities that enhance the skills and knowledge of all school system personnel, school board members and school council members, which are directly related to improving student achievement. Every decision concerning professional learning will be made with improving student achievement as the goal. When available from the federal government, Title IIa funds are available to classroom teachers and school level administrators. The following items will be funded only if the allocations are given to the school system and budgeted for that fiscal year.

EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

1. If awarded to DCSS, professional learning funds shall only be expended for one or more of the following items.

- (i) Additional compensation for teachers to serve as mentor teachers.
- (ii) Teachers and school level administrators participate in professional learning activities, i.e. substitute teacher salaries and employee benefits.
- (iii) Travel for professional learning purposes. (for teachers and school-level admin)
- (iv) Professional and technical service fees and expenses for instructors and consultants.
- (v) Training materials and supplies.
- (vi) Developing and implementing initiatives to assist in recruiting, hiring, and retaining effective teachers
- (vii) Reimbursement for expenditures of persons who successfully complete approved conferences, workshops/courses, GACE testing,

2. Due to limited funds, stipends may or may not be given.

3. Funds budgeted for professional learning should be used only to compensate personnel for activities that relate to school and school system improvement efforts.

4. Funds budgeted for professional learning should be used primarily for activities that enhance the skills of certified personnel and directly relate to student achievement or school climate.

PROCEDURES FOR EXPENDITURE OF FUNDS

1. Participants complete the professional leave request at least 10 days before the training that is requested with appropriate documentation attached.

2. The form is submitted to the school administrator and district professional learning coordinator on line where final approval is granted.

3. If the request is made by a staff member with no personal or sick days available, the professional learning request will be denied.

4. Requisition forms will be completed if there is a fee to be paid. The Professional learning/Purchasing secretary will begin the registration process with a purchase order.
5. Expenses will be reimbursed according to Statewide Travel Regulations. Please refer to the Dodge County Travel Procedures Manual for further information regarding meals, mileage, and lodging.
6. Dodge County certified staff will be encouraged to serve as instructors and consultants as often as possible. The train the trainer method is utilized whenever possible.
7. All professional learning will require redelivery to department, grade level, and/or school. Documentation must be submitted to the office of curriculum and professional learning.

DODGE COUNTY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

On July 1, 2017, the Georgia education community turned the page on professional learning centered primarily in workshops, measured by seat time, and moved to a professional learning system based on research, best practice, and national standards. Professional learning for the purpose of certificate renewal must now be a continuous job-embedded learning in the context of a professional learning community. Georgia will no longer use PLUs for certificate renewal of active educators. The Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) and the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) have worked together and statewide with Georgia educators to design a professional learning system that is built around educators learning while they are working with other educators to improve teaching and learning. Their focus will be on addressing problems of practice.

The Dodge County School System currently requires that all certified employees participate in job-embedded Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Student achievement will be a main focus of the majority of the PLCs. There will be other PLCs that will be determined by the district's Strategic Plan Goals and School Improvement Plans. We believe that these PLCs will allow teachers to better collaborate and plan across grade levels and academic subjects.

All certified staff will participate in Dodge County's Big 3 model: in a week of school, 1 day will be designated for data review, 1 days will be designated for professional learning, and 1 day will be for collaborative planning. The professional learning day will be organized at the school level and documentation will be kept on file with administrators. At the end of the school year, documentation will be delivered to the professional learning office.

Workshops will play a secondary role to support job-embedded learning. Workshops will be used judiciously so educators can learn new strategies, learn how to implement new curricula, learn how to develop and use better assessments, and so forth. Workshops that don't connect to the educators' work have never been helpful and will no longer be used since collecting PLUs will no longer be necessary.

All certified employees will be required to have professional learning goals or professional learning plans. These goals/plans will be built around student achievement data as well as summative evaluation data. In addition, school and school district goals, as well as state and federal goals/requirements can also contribute in determining professional learning goals and plans.

Terms Used When Thinking about Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) **Glossary of Professional Learning Community Terms**

The terms defined below are commonly used in the context of professional learning community literature. In Georgia, the intent of the Georgia Professional Standards Commission (GaPSC) certificate renewal rule is to move the focus of professional learning from seat time in workshops to job-embedded continuous learning in professional learning communities (PLCs). There may be other definitions of these terms, but for the purpose of improving teaching and learning in Georgia schools, the expectation is that educators will understand these terms as defined in this document.

Agenda – Used as a way of organizing a meeting so the group gets done everything it intends to accomplish in that meeting. No meeting should be held without first establishing the agenda. Team members should have input in developing the agenda. Agendas should be published in advance of meetings so participants can come prepared, thus creating more effective meetings.

Collaborative Team – Any group of people who work together and meet regularly to focus on common work constitute a collaborative team. Various configurations can be used such as grade level or subject area collaborative teams, or collaborative teams that have a schoolwide focus such as the school’s professional learning committee, media committee, strategic planning committee, etc. Team members are responsible to one another. Members carry out assigned roles and bring assigned materials to meetings. High levels of trust are a hallmark of high-functioning collaborative teams.

Collaborative Work - Collaboration means working together to combine knowledge that will be greater than if member worked individually. Collaborative work results in decisions agreed upon by team members and work products that ensure all students have access to the knowledge of the best teachers in the school. Research is clear: student achievement is higher in schools where educators work collaboratively.

Common Assessments – An assessment of student learning that uses the same instrument or common process utilizing the same criteria for determining the value of student work. Often times these assessments are created by the District and are called benchmarks. In a Collaborative Team, common assessments are created by a team of teachers with collective responsibility for the learning of a group of students which are expected to learn the same knowledge and skills. The team developed assessments provide team members with a base line of data which can be used to identify strengths and weaknesses in student learning or identify students who need enrichment opportunities to stretch their learning. This information can then be used to change instructional strategies to meet the needs of all students.

Communication Structures – High-functioning professional learning communities (PLCs) create structures that allow members to know about and participate in the work. Communication structures might include publishing summaries of meetings, calendars, newsletters, routine announcements about learning community work, channels established to recognize accomplishments, regular reporting of data, etc.

Cycle of Work/Learning – Successful collaborative teams use a widely accepted process to guide their work/learning to ensure they are focused on problems of practice and are able to successfully address the particular problem of practice. A typical cycle of work would include

- Examining evidence of student performance – what is the current level of performance?
- Analyzing possible instructional strategies that address student strengths and weaknesses – based in data, what is the most appropriate strategy to use?
- Developing common assessments that will provide data as new strategies are used – what does the data tell us about the effectiveness of the strategies?
- Implementation of the agreed upon instructional strategies and common assessment.
- Analyzing changes in student learning – did the instructional strategy worked?
- Incorporating the new professional learning as the work/learning cycle continues.

Deprivatization of Practice – Teachers make their craft visible to others. Teachers may observe one another, and using a coaching or mentoring process, give and get feedback. Teachers share and collaboratively analyze student work samples. Teachers are not concerned about colleagues knowing about problems of practice and student performance in one another’s classrooms.

Empowerment of Teachers – Teachers are viewed as experts capable of making decisions about instruction. At the same time, teachers give up individual autonomy in favor of group autonomy so that collective decisions about teaching and learning are made by teams of experts. Teachers and leaders know the ground rules surrounding empowerment; all parties trust one another to effectively carry out their roles.

Guiding Questions – Agreed upon questions that guide the work of the PLC and its collaborative teams. Guiding questions help maintain the focus on teaching and learning, and remind everyone about issues of equity. When guiding questions are used effectively, the focus is on every child – no child falls through the cracks.

Job-Embedded Professional Learning – The best way to understand “job-embedded learning” is to think about professional learning as “working on the work.” The old mindset about professional learning was sitting in workshops (divorced from the work of teaching and learning) rather than working on the working (direct engagement with teaching and learning). After all, the purpose of professional learning is to strengthen the craft of teaching to impact student learning and raise student achievement. Job-embedded means working collaboratively with others within

the school as cross-content teams, grade level teams, departmental teams, or some other configuration. In addition, sometimes it is necessary to work with people outside of the school to work on the work. Art and music are fields where teachers may be isolated from others who teach the same content, so working on the work may mean working with similar teachers in other schools and districts.

Professional Learning Community (PLC) – This term describes the culture of a school whereby teachers and leaders seek agreement on shared values, beliefs, and norms and based on these shared values, beliefs, and norms, develop structures, processes, and policies that engage members in common work to resolve problems of practice aimed at improving teaching and learning. The PLC has at its core a focus on student success, use of collaborative processes, a deep sense of trust among members, regular use of data and a common drive to create a school where every child succeeds and achieves at high levels.

Professional Learning Goals – As part of the certificate renewal process, every educator must create professional learning goals. These goals should be balanced between the identified learning needs of the educator and the learning needs of the team, school, and school district. Goals must be based on data, developed by the individual educator with input from colleagues as long as the educator is comfortable in discussing performance with colleagues, and approved by the educator’s supervisor.

Professional Learning Plans – Certain categories of educators (induction level teachers and leaders, for example) are required to formalize their professional learning goals into plans that lay out objectives, resources, timelines, etc.

Protocols – Carefully designed processes aimed at arriving at the best conclusions since the protocol controls for time, who speaks, what is to be accomplished, etc. There are several different types of protocols including 1) decision-making, 2) brainstorming, 3) examining student work, 4) team building, 5) discussions, and others. Some protocols are recognized across the nation (Tuning Protocol, for example), but individual educators can create their own. Many protocols can be used by educators as well as by their students. Protocols can be found in books, articles, and on websites. One good source is the National School Reform Faculty website, www.nsrffharmony.org.

Reflective Dialogue - Public conversations focused on teaching practice and student learning. Reflective dialogue builds self-awareness among teachers and leaders and lessens the likelihood of teacher isolation. Reflective dialogue is dependent upon trusting colleagues enough to share challenges and successes.

Response to Intervention (RTI) – The process of teachers changing their instruction based on how well the students responded to it. “Response” is a key word; this moves the teacher to ask, “how can I change instruction to meet student learning needs?” changing instruction DOES NOT mean lowering standards; instead, it means trying a different approach. “Intervention” is another key word – “what actions can I take to meet the learning needs of this student? RTI focuses on meeting the needs of the individual student when usual teaching strategies do not work.

Results Orientation – The PLC has a collective focus on student learning so that, above all else, student learning comes first. Collaborative teams and the PLC as a whole examine data to determine if the work has moved student success forward. Results matter; student learning as measured by student achievement on multiple measure (not just standardized tests) helps tell the story. Other data is important too. For example, has student attendance improved, is the dropout rate lower, are achievement gaps closing, are student succeeding at the next level, etc? The measure of success in the PLC is results; this is where the focus must be and everyone must understand collaborative work is the vehicle for achieving the desired results.

Shared Mission – Where every member of the school faculty deeply understands and believes in the school’s mission. The mission is about teaching and learning. Other things may be important, but none so much as the shared mission. Detailed discussions help faculties institute their shared mission.

Shared Norms – What is “normal” in our school in terms of how we do the business of teaching and learning? Norms develop in every group. The important thing is to guide the development of norm so that all group members have had input into what the norms should be. Toxic learning environments are generally places where norms are not shared by the group. When norms are shared, everyone looks out for everyone else: students don’t fall through the cracks, nor do first year teachers because the norms are aimed at success for all.

Shared Values – How much time and effort has been devoted to deciding what we value in our school? Valuing something means protecting it. Valuing means creating policies, processes, and structures that assure what is valued is protected. It is easy to say we value protecting instructional time, but are there policies and procedures in place that actually do that? Or we say we value equity, but when we look at the master schedule do we find that all students have access to the best teachers?

Shared Vision – A vision is not a dream. Instead, vision is what we have all agreed (teachers and leaders, not just the principal) is where we want to see our school go. Visions are dynamic meaning actions must support the vision. Creating a shared vision and then making it become a reality requires collaborative work. Visions are more likely to be achieved when people do work collaboratively.

SMART Goals – Collaborative teams should develop SMART (Specific, Measureable, Attainable, Realistic and Timely) goals to set purposeful goals that relate to their teaching practices based on student data. SMART goals should be specific in clarifying what students should learn and the level of learning during a specified time.

Socialization of new staff – When new people join the staff, they don’t know the school’s history. They weren’t here when the current improvement initiative started, so without carefully planned orientation, they will be out of step with the work that engages the remainder of the faculty. Simply assigning a mentor is not sufficient. There needs to be a carefully planned set of opportunities for new staff to learn about vision and mission, norms and protocols, and all of the other moving parts of the school’s culture and learning community.

Systems of Continuous Improvement – Researcher Anthony Bryk and his colleagues created a continuous improvement framework based on years of longitudinal research. The Georgia Department of Education has adopted this framework as the state model for continuous improvement in schools and districts. There are five dimensions that determine improvement; failure in any of the five dimensions diminishes the chances for success in raising student achievement. The five dimensions include: effective leadership, coherent instruction, professional capacity, supportive learning environment, and family and community engagement.

Teacher Leader – Those teachers who, through formal or informal roles, engage in the process of influencing other teachers, leaders, and others in the school community to improve teaching and learning with the intent of improving student achievement (paraphrase of Jennifer York Barr’s definition of teacher leadership). Teacher leaders may engage through formal roles such as coaching, mentoring, leading a grade level team, as a member of a committee, etc., or through informal processes as a member of a collaborative team, through their participation in various types of meetings, and through participation with other teachers in informal leadership activities. Teacher leader effectiveness is enhanced when the teacher leader complete training in a degree or endorsement program based on state teacher leader standards.

Trust – A key ingredient in the success of schools. Do people trust each other by believing in the goodness of their intent, by committing to care out group decisions, by sharing openly about teaching challenges without fear of violations of confidentiality? Trust involves teachers trusting one another, students, leaders, and parents. It also involves each of these groups trusting one another. Trust creates predictability in the learning community so that people can count on one another.

KEY ROLES OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Professional learning communities (PLCs) can be successful only when everyone does their part. Various people have important roles to play. Following is a list that reminds every one of the minimum they must contribute to the success of the learning community.

Director of Professional Learning

- Communicates the vision and expectation for PLCs in all schools at the beginning of each school year.
- Articulates the importance of PLCs to all stakeholders and works to make certain stakeholders understand how and why PLCs operate the way they do
- Holds the district accountable for PLC implementation

District Staff

- Facilitates the district vision for PLCs
- Provides tangible support for schools in PLC implementation and ongoing function
- Actively participates in a district PLC as well as in school PLCs
- Actively analyze data and based on analysis, provide appropriate district support to schools

Principals

- Holds school accountable for PLC implementation expectations
- Leads the school to create a shared mission, vision, and norms that support the development and success of the PLC
- Assures that appropriate organizational structures, including the organization of time, are in place to support the success of the PLC
- Fosters the development of a collaborative school culture aimed at high performance for adults and children
- Collects and process data and report it to support PLC work, and expect all educators to base decisions on school data
- Uses data to monitor progress and make adjustments based on data
- Provides feedback to collaborative teams
- Sets expectations for the role in the PLCs for assistant principals, service field educators such as school counselors, academic coaches and other teacher leaders, etc.
- Engages in the PLC as a learner and as one committed to the work of the PLC

Assistant Principal and/or Teacher Leaders

- Reinforces/advances the shared mission, vision, and norms of the PLC
- In daily work models the vision and expectations of the PLC
- Works with the principal to collect and process data and report it to support PLC work, and expect all educators to base decisions on school data
- Teaches and uses protocols to support the work of the PLC
- Develops and delivers professional learning for the PLC
- Supports the principals work in monitoring progress by collecting evidence of implementation
- Provides coaching/mentoring and other expert help in support of the PLC
- Engages in the PLC as a learner and as one committed to the work of the PLC

Teacher

- Actively participates in the PLC and as a member of a collaborative team
- Consistently participates in agreed upon collaborative work following the established norms and using appropriate structures that support effectiveness in the PLC
- Produces agreed upon data and share data in support of collaborative work
- Works reflectively as an individual and engages in reflective dialogue as a collaborative team member
- Provides professional feedback to collaborative team members
- Advocates for students in support of equitable treatment so that all students have access to the best learning opportunities

Other School Professionals Such as Media Specialists, Counselors and School Social Workers

- Actively participates in the PLC and as a member of a collaborative team
- Consistently participates in agreed upon collaborative work following the established norms and using appropriate structures that support effectiveness in the PLC
- Produces agreed upon data and share data in support of collaborative work

- Works reflectively as an individual and engages in reflective dialogue as a collaborative team member
- Provides professional feedback to collaborative team members
- Advocates for students in support of equitable treatment so that all students have access to the best learning opportunities
- Uses expertise to provide specific support to the PLC and its collaborative teams

Paraprofessional

- Supports the PLC and the work of collaborative teams
- Works with teachers to develop and implement learning materials
- Actively engages as a learner in the PLC

The Professional Learning Community Decision-Making Cycle

