

Office of the Superintendent of Schools
MONTGOMERY COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS
Rockville, Maryland

March 10, 2009

MEMORANDUM

To: Members of the Board of Education

From: Jerry D. Weast, Superintendent of Schools

Subject: Goal 4: Update on Professional Learning Communities Institute

Executive Summary

The Professional Learning Communities Institute (PLCI) is an innovative professional development initiative of Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) that is designed to increase student achievement and eliminate the achievement gap in middle and elementary schools by building the capacity of each school's leadership team. Goal 4 of the MCPS strategic plan, *Our Call to Action: Pursuit of Excellence*, captures the MCPS commitment to create a positive work environment in a self-renewing organization. PLCI supports this critical goal, as well as efforts to ensure success for every student (Goal 1), to provide an effective instructional program (Goal 2), and to strengthen productive partnerships for education (Goal 3). Through participation in the PLCI, leadership team members, including administrators, teachers, support professionals, and parents, develop the skills and knowledge that will enable them to create and sustain a high-performing professional learning community in their schools. The creation of a professional learning community culture in schools has been shown to have a positive effect on student achievement. This is evident in the results attained by students at schools in Cohort II of the PLCI (Attachment A). From 2006–2008, the percentage of students scoring at proficient/advanced on the Grades 3–5 Maryland School Assessments (MSAs) in reading and math increased for the student subgroups shown below:

- Grades 3–5 MSA Reading (Percentage increase of students scoring proficient/advanced)
 - African American students increased from 64 to 79 percent (gain of 15%)
 - Asian American students increased from 87 to 94 percent (gain of 7%)
 - White students increased from 91 to 97 percent (gain of 6%)
 - Hispanic/Latino students increased from 64 to 84 percent (gain of 20%)
- Grades 3–5 MSA Mathematics (Percentage increase of students scoring proficient/advanced)
 - African American students increased from 60 to 71 percent (gain of 11%)
 - Asian American students increased from 90 to 92 percent (gain of 2%)

- White students increased from 91 to 95 percent (gain of 4%)
- Hispanic/Latino students increased from 68 to 82 percent (gain of 14%)

Students receiving special education services and students with limited English proficiency also achieved significant gains, especially when compared to state and county averages.

PLCI participants review case studies, engage in reflective discussions, examine their own practices, and plan for school improvement. Teams are provided with structured professional development, ongoing support from PLCI staff, and enhanced school improvement funding. As a result of these experiences, teams identify needs, plan strategies, and implement action plans to improve student achievement and eliminate the achievement gap. Implementing these action plans often involves modifying belief systems, changing school structures, and working in new ways to meet the needs of students. Examples include the following:

- Staff at an elementary school developed a process for conducting regular data chats so that teachers, support professionals, and administrators would have the opportunity to meet and analyze leading instructional data in order to promote changes in teaching practices.
- A middle school leadership team worked to develop a schoolwide systemic process to provide targeted interventions for students who were not achieving grade-level goals in reading and math.
- Staff at an elementary school has increased the role of parents as partners in the educational decisions that affect their children, e.g., outreach meetings at the nearby community center; MSA awareness activities and recognition ceremonies; open houses; formal parent conferences with kindergarten parents twice a year; data notebooks sent home monthly and reviewed by parents (parents provide feedback); school newsletters to inform parents of key data points and benchmarks; and a Thanksgiving dinner for the entire community.
- Staff members at numerous schools have reorganized master schedules in order to provide time for student interventions and collaborative planning by teaching teams.

Review of PLCI implementation in the participating schools reveals that teams have learned the key concepts that supported the professional learning community and have applied them with quality in their buildings. Analysis of 2006–2008 MSA scores shows that student outcomes at schools in PLCI Cohorts I, II, and III collectively, have demonstrated gains on the MSA when compared to state and county increases. Furthermore, analysis of the data shows that PLCI schools are succeeding in eliminating the achievement gaps between groups of students. Today's discussion focuses on the collaborative development of the PLCI, the continuing implementation of the program during the 2008–2009 school year, and the next steps for expanding the impact of the initiative.

Background

PLCI is a key component of efforts by MCPS to improve the ongoing professional development of staff members. Building the capacity of staff is important for ensuring that teachers, administrators, and support professionals have the skills, strategies, practices, and beliefs to meet the learning needs of all students. Providing professional development and ongoing, job-embedded support for staff members is a fundamental aspect of the school system's strategic plan. The focus on building professional learning communities is evident in key reform initiatives. At the elementary school level, for example, the comprehensive Early Success Performance Plan was designed to improve student-learning results through a strong professional development plan focused on curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Middle school reform efforts involve a coordinated approach guided by the school system's strategic plan, middle school policy, an external program review of middle schools, and ongoing professional development and work done by school leaders. The Professional Growth Systems for teachers, administrators, and supporting services staff provide the processes for the necessary supports. Effective implementation of these reform efforts has produced important student learning results, including greater reading proficiency in kindergarten, improved reading performance across all grade levels, and record-setting performances on the MSA.

The concept for PLCI began with the participation of MCPS executive staff and employee organization presidents in the Public Education Leadership Program (PELP) at Harvard University. The PELP program uses a case study approach to engage participants in meaningful dialogue and planning about their districts. Dr. Jerry D. Weast, superintendent of schools, suggested that MCPS could identify successful schools, create case studies about those schools, and then use the cases as tools to help other schools improve. A cross-functional team was convened in September 2004 to develop the case studies and plan their use as a professional development initiative. The cross-functional team included the deputy superintendent of schools, the deputy superintendent for information and organizational systems, the chief operating officer, the president of the Montgomery County Education Association, the president of the Montgomery County Association of Administrative and Supervisory Personnel, the president of the Service Employees International Union Local 500, the associate superintendent for organizational development, the associate superintendent for special education and student services, the chief school performance officer, and the director of the Office of Shared Accountability. Once the case study schools had been identified, representatives from Broad Acres, Ronald McNair, and Viers Mill elementary schools also were included in the work of the team. From the beginning, the development of the PLCI was a collaborative process that involved many stakeholder groups, especially the employee organizations, in creating a program that would benefit school staff and students.

The PLCI officially launched in July 2005 and was attended by 11 elementary schools (Cohort I) in its first year. Cohort I and II schools have completed their two-year commitment with the PLCI and have exited formal participation. The spaces vacated by these schools have been filled by 11 middle schools (Phase I and Phase II middle schools) and 10 elementary schools. Middle

schools were introduced to the PLCI in 2007 as part of the MCPS middle school reform initiative. To date, staff members from 31 elementary schools and 11 middle schools have participated in the two-year institute (Attachment B).

PLCI is implemented by the Office of Organizational Development (OOD). The PLCI team includes a director, two teacher-level instructional specialists, and one support professional who work together to plan and deliver professional development sessions, visit schools to provide support, and model a high level of collaboration for all schools that participate in PLCI.

The Structure of the Professional Learning Communities Institute

Structured Professional Development

Five times during the school year, the leadership teams from the PLCI schools attend structured professional development sessions. These full-day sessions are designed to increase team understanding of the characteristics of effective professional learning communities, build team capacity to create change in the PLCI schools, and provide teams with the time and guidance to produce specific action steps. The morning portion of each session is a structured professional development experience. Most morning sessions involve the careful review of a business or school case study. The case study review includes small group discussion, a whole-group debrief, and reflection in school action teams. Guest presenters speak at the sessions in which the school case studies are debriefed. They offer their insights and answer participants' questions. In the afternoon, each leadership team establishes its own agenda, engaging in school-specific action planning. Teams use this time to review student data, to monitor progress on school improvement plan goals, and to develop and implement characteristics of effective professional learning communities.

Ongoing School Support

In between structured professional development sessions, PLCI staff provides ongoing support to all schools, tailoring the support to each school's needs. PLCI staff visits the individual schools, meeting with the principal, the staff development teacher, and other staff members. PLCI staff participates in leadership team meetings, school improvement plan sessions, data dialogues, and instructional team meetings. Additionally, PLCI staff conducts presentations for school faculty and parent groups on a variety of topics, including building effective teams, using student data, using content maps to communicate curriculum, increasing parent involvement, pursuing national board certification for teachers, and providing effective intervention for struggling students. Finally, PLCI staff debriefs case studies with school faculties to facilitate reflection, self-assessment, and action planning. PLCI schools also have been connected with the case study schools through visits, observations, and sharing of effective practices. As a result of these efforts, PLCI schools are modifying their practices and processes to focus school efforts on increasing student achievement.

Additional Baldrige-guided School Improvement Plan Funding

Each PLCI school is eligible to apply for up to \$3,500 in additional Baldrige-guided School Improvement Plan funding. Schools must develop budget proposals following the same procedures in place for regular Baldrige-guided School Improvement Plan funds. Plans must be developed collaboratively with the school improvement team and must support school improvement plan goals. Draft plans must be approved by the director of PLCI and the school's community superintendent. Schools are encouraged to use the additional funding to support academic interventions for students, facilitate collaboration among school staff, enhance instructional quality, and expand parent and community outreach. In the past, PLCI schools have used additional Baldrige-guided School Improvement Plan funds to support a variety of strategies, including the implementation of before- and after-school reading and math clubs, expansion of time for instructional team analysis of student work, the purchase of instructional materials that directly impact student learning, and parent curriculum nights.

Budget Implications

The costs involved in implementing the PLCI fall into three separate categories: 1) the cost for staffing the team of individuals who implement the institute, 2) the costs involved in providing professional development to the school teams, and 3) the additional Baldrige-guided School Improvement Plan funding that is available to each participating school.

Measuring Success

It is the goal of the PLCI to increase academic achievement for all students in PLCI schools. Research indicates that schools characterized by highly functioning professional learning communities are able to realize and sustain student achievement gains. Accordingly, the PLCI will measure effectiveness by monitoring student achievement gains and examining evidence of professional learning community characteristics and products.

PLCI schools examine their school culture, belief systems, strategies, and processes. Teams make changes in how they organize instruction, communicate high expectations to students, build equitable learning opportunities, respond when students do not learn, support collaboration among staff members, and reach out to empower parents. These efforts result in the creation and implementation of many effective strategies. PLCI schools design and implement targeted academic intervention for identified students. They also create new structures for collecting, analyzing, and using student data to improve instructional practices, establish clear processes and expectations for collaborative planning, and implement innovative parent outreach efforts.

As PLCI leadership teams have worked to implement new beliefs and processes, we have periodically gathered input from the teams regarding the status of the professional learning community in each school. Survey results indicate that PLCI team members are seeing steady growth in the key characteristics of professional learning communities in their buildings. These

key characteristics include a focus on student learning as the fundamental purpose of the school, high expectations for all students, a school culture that supports collaborative teams, and a schoolwide system for responding when students are having difficulty learning.

Next Steps

Next steps for the PLCI include the following:

- Complete year four of PLCI through facilitating reflection, review, and celebration.
- Continue implementation of PLCI with Cohort IV schools. Gather PLCI participant feedback to plan professional development for year two with Cohort IV.
- Conduct process to select additional schools for participation in Cohort V of PLCI, to begin with the 2009–2010 school year.

Conclusion

The PLCI initiative is a proven approach for providing high-quality ongoing professional development for school leadership teams. We believe that continuing implementation and expansion of PLCI will help build the capacity of our teachers, administrators, support professionals, and parents resulting in increased student achievement.

Present at the Board table today are Mr. Jamie Virga, associate superintendent, OOD; Mr. C. Michael Kline, director, PLCI; Ms. Joan Mory, instructional specialist, PLCI; and Mrs. Aara Davis-Jones, principal, Georgian Forest Elementary School.

Present in the audience are Mr. Paul Salatto, instructional specialist, PLCI; Mrs. Carlene Butt-Pruitt, support professional, PLCI; and Mr. John Bovello, special education paraeducator; Ms. Sharron Huff-Dade, president, Parent Teacher Association; and Ms. Donna Santa Cruz, special education teacher, all of Georgian Forest Elementary School..

JDW:ms

Attachments

Comparison of Composite Data (Grades 3-5 Combined), Maryland School Assessment (MSA) Reading and Mathematics, 2006 through 2008													
		Maryland				MCPS				PLCI Cohort II			
		2006	2007	2008	Change 2006– 2008	2006	2007	2008	Change 2006– 2008	2006	2007	2008	Change 2006– 2008
Reading % of Students Scoring at Proficient or Advanced	African American	67.4	70.5	78.1	10.7	71.1	76.2	82.0	10.9	64.1	72.0	78.5	14.4
	Asian American	89.8	92.2	94.1	4.3	90.6	92.9	95.0	4.4	86.5	89.4	93.8	7.3
	White	88	89.5	92.7	4.7	92.9	94.4	96.3	3.4	91.1	94.4	97.4	6.4
	Hispanic/Latino	70.5	73.1	79.8	9.3	72.1	76.1	82.6	10.5	64.3	74.9	84.0	19.8
	Special Education	54.5	58.7	66.6	12.1	62.5	66.9	73.5	11.0	48.5	59.1	71.5	23.0
	Limited English Proficient	51.2	58.3	69.6	18.4	54.8	63.8	73.2	18.5	48.0	56.6	72.6	24.6
Math % of Students Scoring at Proficient or Advanced	African American	65.0	69.5	74	9.0	68.2	72.3	75.6	7.4	60.1	65.4	71.3	11.2
	Asian American	92.7	94.0	94.8	2.1	93.7	95.1	95.8	2.1	90.1	90.7	92.2	2.1
	White	87.9	89.6	91.6	3.7	93.8	94.1	95.2	1.4	91.0	92.8	94.6	3.6
	Hispanic/Latino	71.7	74.4	78.2	6.5	73.4	76.2	78.9	5.5	67.5	73.9	82.4	15.0
	Special Education	49	53.8	58.2	9.2	56.6	59.1	62.3	5.7	39.4	48.7	50.7	11.3
	Limited English Proficient	56.1	61.9	69	12.9	59.9	64.8	69.9	10.0	53.9	60.4	71.8	17.9

Professional Learning Communities Institute Implementation and Cohort Schools

2005–2006	2006–2007	2007–2008	2008–2009	2009–2010
Cohort I Ashburton Damascus Drew Fox Chapel Gaithersburg Glen Haven Highland McAuliffe Resnik Sally Ride Whetstone	Cohort I Ashburton Damascus Drew Fox Chapel Gaithersburg Glen Haven Highland McAuliffe Resnik Ride Whetstone			
	Cohort II Bel Pre Burning Tree Cashell Clopper Mill Lake Seneca Monocacy Montgomery Knolls Strathmore Summit Hall Woodlin	Cohort II Bel Pre Burning Tree Cashell Clopper Mill Lake Seneca Monocacy Montgomery Knolls Strathmore Summit Hall Woodlin		
		Cohort III <u>Elementary</u> Brookhaven Cannon Road Georgian Forest Rock Creek Forest Waters Landing <u>Middle</u> Banneker Clemente Montgomery Village Sligo Wood	Cohort III <u>Elementary</u> Brookhaven Cannon Road Georgian Forest Rock Creek Forest Waters Landing <u>Middle</u> Banneker Clemente Montgomery Village Sligo Wood	
			Cohort IV <u>Elementary</u> Brown Station Daly Georgian Forest Sligo <u>Middle</u> Eastern Newport Mill Shady Grove Silver Spring International Tilden White Oak	Cohort IV <u>Elementary</u> Brown Station Daly Georgian Forest Sligo <u>Middle</u> Eastern Newport Mill Shady Grove Silver Spring International Tilden White Oak
				Cohort V To be determined Spring 2009