



Background

Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS) created the Professional Learning Communities Institute (PLCI) in 2005 to help school leadership teams increase student achievement and eliminate the achievement gap by developing and strengthening a climate at each school devoted to continuous learning and professional growth. PLCI provides intensive support and training for participating school teams throughout the school year. The PLCI experience helps teams to examine their own belief systems and empowers them to establish and communicate high expectations for all students. PLCI also builds the capacity of school leaders, including teachers and support professionals, to make instructional decisions that lead to increased student achievement.

PLCI began with 11 elementary schools in 2005–2006 and has added 27 more elementary schools and 15 middle schools during subsequent years. The school leadership teams include administrators, classroom teachers, academic support and arts teachers, support professionals, parents, and community members. The schools participate in structured professional development that focuses on case studies, team discussion, self-assessment, and action planning. Each school team also participates in detailed school improvement planning to address its particular needs.

Real Results

Results from the 2006 and 2007 Maryland School Assessment (MSA) indicated that the first group of PLCI schools demonstrated growth in student achievement that was greater than the Maryland state average and the Montgomery County Public Schools' average. Data also indicated that the gap between African American and Hispanic students and their White and Asian counterparts narrowed as well.

Results from the 2009 Maryland School Assessment show PLCI's first cohort of middle schools' year-to-year growth exceeded the county and state averages. When comparing eighth grade students, the increase in growth of PLCI schools is pronounced when compared to state and county test results. For example, on the Grade 8 MSA in Reading, the PLCI schools demonstrated gains over two years from 69.3% to 86.7%, a gain of 17.4%, compared to two-year gains by MCPS (10.3%) and the state of Maryland (11.9%). On the Grade 8 MSA in Math, the PLCI schools demonstrated gains over two years from 53.2% to 70.2%, a gain of 17.1%, compared to two-year gains by MCPS (7%) and the state of Maryland (9.1%).

Conclusion

Four years of score increases that outpace the state and county averages, along with significant individual school gains in various subgroups, demonstrate that the PLCI is helping each of its schools build an organizational culture that is focused on student learning and devoted to helping every student succeed.