



CASE STUDY

REVIVE YOUR PLCS

Inside we share how Englewood School District revived PLC efforts to put in place supportive, intelligent professional collaboration across schools. Read on to gather best practices, access sample discussion protocols, and learn how to leverage your assessment data to reinvigorate your data teams.



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Englewood School District No. 1

- 2,440 students
 - ○ Suburban
 - ○ 19.9% of students speak a language other than English at home
-

Background

Englewood, Colorado, is the home of Englewood School District No. 1. Densely suburban, this community hugs the Denver metropolis with tree-lined streets, crowded shopping areas, and numerous parks. The district comprises nine schools, including four elementary schools that have been using Forefront since 2015-16.

In this case study, we focus on the example of Clayton Elementary, a K-6 school in Englewood School District. Although all of Englewood's elementary schools run PLCs embedded with the structure of the Data Driven Instruction (DDI) model (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2019), the meetings' focus and structures vary. For example, other elementary schools run weekly meetings, rotating each week between math and reading.

At Clayton, instructional coaches coordinate and lead weekly reading meetings, and math data discussions take place every 6 weeks. Their intensive math support is unique in the district and their structure allows for deep data dives to provide targeted support. Read on to learn more about Clayton Elementary's PLC model and how school educators use Forefront to leverage their assessment data and fuel data discussions.

Establish Norms

Group norms are important to any group and can promote effective communication and shared responsibility. Foundational group norms are “be present” or “assume positive intent.”

Many of the norms for Clayton Elementary were apparent during a visit in December 2022. Examples of how they put these norms into practice include:

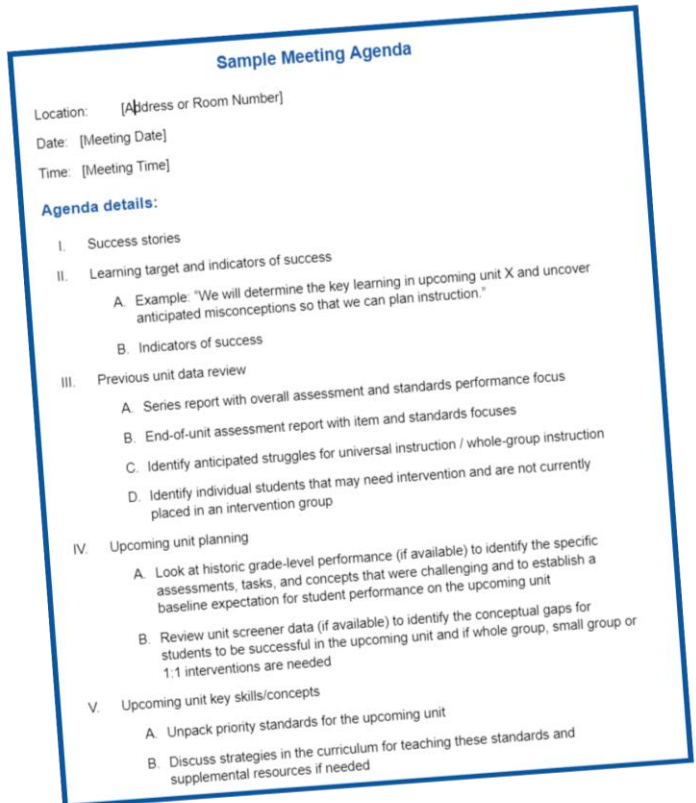
- Stay positive by starting each grade-level meeting with “stories of success,” where teachers shared a success in his/her classroom from the previous unit. (Positive)
- The instructional coach reviews assessment data in advance and shares takeaways with teachers before the meeting. (Analytical, data-driven)
- Teachers have opportunities to discuss challenges, ranging from pandemic learning gaps to missing school supplies and staffing challenges, to get support from coaches and interventionists. (Supportive, helpful, inclusive)
- Interventionists work alongside classroom teachers to align efforts. Specific areas of need for individuals and small groups of students are identified from formative classroom assessment results. Interventionists then pre-teach topics in support of upcoming units and prevent struggle before it happens. (Inclusive, supportive)
- Meetings were centered around priority standards so that teachers could examine historic performance on key concepts/skills and focus on strategies and efforts on high-leverage standards. (Data-driven, forward-looking)
- Conference rooms were stocked with delicious snacks and full of playful banter. (Positive, supportive)

Foster Quality Communication Patterns

If a district has prioritized PLC efforts, teachers should be provided with adequate time to connect with colleagues, discuss evidence of student learning, and plan responses. Englewood has a robust frequency of meetings for math and reading teams. Every 6 weeks Clayton Elementary's instructional coach, with the support of the building's interventionist, coordinate and lead meetings for each of the grade-level teams.

Frequency, duration, and consistency are key to quality communication. In Englewood, leaders use data analysis to plan and share agendas and slide decks for data meetings in advance.

This means these meetings can be devoted to quickly identifying student needs and planning instructional responses. See Appendix 1 for a sample meeting agenda that you can adapt to your needs.



Sample Meeting Agenda

Location: [Address or Room Number]
Date: [Meeting Date]
Time: [Meeting Time]

Agenda details:

- I. Success stories
- II. Learning target and indicators of success
 - A. Example: "We will determine the key learning in upcoming unit X and uncover anticipated misconceptions so that we can plan instruction."
 - B. Indicators of success
- III. Previous unit data review
 - A. Series report with overall assessment and standards performance focus
 - B. End-of-unit assessment report with item and standards focuses
 - C. Identify anticipated struggles for universal instruction / whole-group instruction
 - D. Identify individual students that may need intervention and are not currently placed in an intervention group
- IV. Upcoming unit planning
 - A. Look at historic grade-level performance (if available) to identify the specific assessments, tasks, and concepts that were challenging and to establish a baseline expectation for student performance on the upcoming unit
 - B. Review unit screener data (if available) to identify the conceptual gaps for students to be successful in the upcoming unit and if whole group, small group or 1:1 interventions are needed
- V. Upcoming unit key skills/concepts
 - A. Unpack priority standards for the upcoming unit
 - B. Discuss strategies in the curriculum for teaching these standards and supplemental resources if needed

Provide Focus

“These meetings allow us sacred time to determine the benchmarks, where students are currently performing, and what we need to focus on to support students’ ability to attain proficiency.”

– Alicia Postelli, Instructional Coach, Clayton Elementary

The primary focus of PLC efforts are to understand student learning, identify student needs, and determine next steps. It is important to establish focus on key concepts or skills that students need to master. Called priority or power standards, these help teams prioritize and focus on high-leverage concepts. If your district has not already adopted priority standards, national teacher associations have published recommended key skills and concepts that you can refer to.

Quick tip: Forefront users can create lenses for your district's priority standards. Read about lenses and how to create them [here](#).

During Clayton Elementary’s PLC meetings, staff use the priority standards to focus efforts in advance of an upcoming unit of instruction. Instructional coach Alicia Postelli unpacks standards with teachers, giving new and seasoned teachers the opportunity to deeply understand the key concepts and skills students will be developing in the subsequent weeks.

Share Relevant Information

Valuable information supports intelligent, impactful decision-making. Data is part of this, as is the idea of professional noticing, but information is only valuable if it is accessible, valid, robust, organized and easily understandable.

Forefront supports PLC efforts by providing organized information that is easy-to-access, sharable and directly aligned to instruction and standards. Districts that have used Forefront for multiple years and/or have uploaded historic data are able to do

the multi-year, longitudinal analysis Englewood performs. Learn how to add this historic data to your Forefront reports [here](#).

Set and communicate expectations about which *common assessment* data you will examine as a team.

Regardless of whether you have historic evidence or not, it is important to set and communicate expectations about *common assessments* in advance. For example, set expectations related to the scoring and data collection of end-of-unit or end-of-module assessments. Some districts ask teachers to focus on specific formative assessments. Others might choose to emphasize exit tickets or quizzes for progress monitoring through the progression of the unit.

As important as the data, teachers need to bring actual samples of student work to meetings. Clayton's grade-level teams came equipped with work samples to help decide next steps for certain students. When using Forefront, you may also attach images of student work to student profiles by using the note catcher. Learn more about this feature [here](#).

Special note: If you are new to Forefront, we recommend starting with minimal, but meaningful expectations for data collection. Identify key common assessments you wish to have teachers and leadership look at systematically for PLCs and other purposes. Data collection expectations can become more robust over time.

The Forefront PLC Report Toolbox



- [Single assessment reports](#) Understand results from previous units and/or historic results for an upcoming unit (if available).
- [Series reports](#) Focus on student growth across units, by assessment and standard. Compare results from previous years to put data into context over time and across cohorts of students.
- [Series reports](#) See historic performance for the upcoming unit. Plan for the upcoming unit with an understanding of which assessment tasks and topics have historically been more difficult for students to master.
- [Standards growth](#) Prioritize actions, set, and monitor goals with the standards growth report. See standards performance across assessments and understand where topics appear in your programs.
- [Student pages](#) Individual student profiles can be helpful for sharing examples of student work [via the note catcher tool](#). This allows teachers to share student work samples quickly and efficiently.

Create Intentional Feedback Loops

Intentional feedback is an essential element of efficient learning. Every interaction in a school contains an element of feedback. Feedback is intentional when there is a plan in place to provide feedback that supports improvements.

At Clayton, instructional coach Alicia Postelli coordinates and leads meetings, but spends a lot of her time listening. She creates reflection space at the beginning and conclusion of each meeting with a quick exercise: At the beginning of the meeting, she asks teachers to reflect on what a successful meeting would look like and to write this down on a handout. At the end of the meeting, she asks teachers to revisit their indicators of success to see if their target was met. Teachers may share their suggestions for improving the next meeting.

The best PLCs are iterative. Alicia provides teachers with time to share feedback and areas of need. Meeting processes are dynamic and continuously refined, so that they continue to serve the needs of teachers. If pressing issues such as staffing or missing supplies are shared, the instructional team prioritizes and troubleshoots rather than following a rigid schedule, but quickly pivots back to the agenda to not derail the process.

During PLC meetings at Clayton, teachers identify anticipated misconceptions for the most important skills and concepts that students will learn over the subsequent unit. Following the DDI methodology, Clayton's PLCs also are used to learn and practice teaching strategies. In our observations, teachers ran through sample number talks and reviewed the workplaces and centers to supplement core instruction in the upcoming unit to address the pressing issues evident in their data from Forefront. For students not currently receiving intervention, but who are identified during the meeting as needing additional support, the interventionist for Clayton collects student names and notes specific content areas to focus on with each student or group of students.

Conclusion

Intelligent professional communities can help transform learning outcomes for students and help teachers feel supported during work that the pandemic has made much more challenging.

When you commit to reviving your professional collaborative efforts, you devote time and resources to supporting *all* learners. Just as importantly, you help teachers gain recognition for successes and give an opportunity for them to share and celebrate with colleagues. Your conference rooms can be filled with thoughtful reflection, planning, and laughter, so that teachers re-enter their classrooms energized, inspired, and equipped to improve student learning.

Suggested Reading

Bambrick-Santoyo, Paul. *Driven By Data 2.0: A Practical Guide to Improve Instruction*. San Francisco, CA, Jossey-Bass, 2019.

Appendix I: Sample Meeting Agenda

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Time: [Meeting Time]

Agenda details:

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 - B. Review unit screener data to identify the conceptual gaps for students to be successful in the upcoming unit and if whole group, small group or 1:1 interventions are needed
- V. Upcoming unit key skills/concepts
 - A. Unpack priority standards for the upcoming unit
 - B. Discuss strategies in the curriculum for teaching these standards
- VI. Revisit learning target and indicators of success

Appendix II: Collaboration Protocol

This protocol is designed to support short cycle planning and reflection.

Focus of discussion recent assessment or unit test: _____

1. Assets: What successes have you seen recently? To what do you attribute those successes?
2. Results: Open the [Single Assessment](#) report in Forefront for the assessment being discussed. What do you see? Reflect further on what went well.
3. Reflect: Which questions/topics were most difficult for students? How did students perform on priority topics? What might have been done that could have led to greater success? This is a good time to discuss student work samples and look for patterns.
4. Teach forward: What implications do the results have for upcoming unit(s)? Consider using the [Standards Growth](#) report.
5. Re-Engage: Are there topics that will be retaught to the whole group? Is there a need for small group, targeted instruction?

