

# Walk the 'Lign: Aligning School Practices With Essential PLC Characteristics

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Never have the demands on our educational system been greater or the consequences of failure as severe. Beyond the high-stakes school accountability requirements mandated by state and federal laws, the difference between success and failure in school is quite literally life and death for our students. Today, a student who graduates from school with a mastery of essential skills and knowledge is prepared to compete in the global marketplace, with numerous paths of opportunity. For a student who fails in our educational system, however, there are virtually no paths of opportunity. Manufacturing and agricultural jobs that require minimal skills yet provide sufficient wages and benefits are either nonexistent or fail to pay above poverty-level compensation. Subsequently, the likely pathway for these students leads to an adult life of hardship, incarceration, or dependence on welfare systems. With such high stakes, school administrators today are like tightrope walkers without a safety net, responsible for meeting the needs of every child with little room for error.

As educational leaders, this stark reality that we are responsible to lead critical, lifesaving work can be both daunting and inspiring. Fortunately, we now possess research-based best practices that are proven to meet this need. Conclusive, compelling research confirms that becoming a professional learning community (PLC) is the most

powerful and effective process to systemically change school culture and ensure high levels of learning for all students. As Mike Schmoker states, “There are simple, proven, affordable structures that exist right now and could have a dramatic, widespread impact on schools and achievement—in virtually any school. An astonishing level of agreement has emerged on this point” (2004, p. 1). Equally important, there is no ambiguity regarding what school leadership must do to achieve these “dramatic, widespread” results. To ensure high levels of learning for all students, we must align our school culture and structures to the essential characteristics of being a PLC. These characteristics are:

- Common mission, vision, values, and goals
- Collaborative culture
- Collective inquiry
- Action orientation
- Continuous improvement
- Focus on results

Considering that all school leaders have access to this research-based, proven “roadmap” to closing the achievement gap, why are so few schools achieving significant, sustained school improvement? We understand why schools and districts that haven’t embraced the PLC movement are not improving. But what about schools that claim to be PLCs? Why are many of those schools still struggling? More often than not, the problem is that their administrators failed to align their schools’ culture and practices with *all* the essential PLC characteristics, for without a deep implementation of all six characteristics, a school will not achieve learning for all. This chapter will explore the common mistakes that leaders make when implementing PLC practices, will suggest key questions for administrators to evaluate the site’s current level of implementation, and will provide practical implementation tools.



## Ineffective PLC Leadership

Without question, the extent to which administrators align site beliefs and programs with all essential PLC characteristics will directly determine a school's ability to improve student achievement. Administrative ineffectiveness in implementing these critical characteristics can be attributed to three ineffective leadership approaches: the Selective Approach, the Managerial Approach, and the "Sacred Cow" Approach.

### *Problem 1: The Selective Approach*

The administrator "picks and chooses" to implement some essential PLC characteristics, while disregarding or avoiding others.

Some administrators begin to learn about PLC concepts and conclude, "We have collaborative teams, [or We use common assessments], so we are a PLC"—as if one or two traits are sufficient to "raise the banner" of being a PLC. This superficial approach to PLCs creates a façade of implementation, but fails to create the deep, systemic change that is necessary to dramatically improve an organization. As Jim Collins says in *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, "In building a great institution, there is no single defining action, no grand program, no one killer innovation, no solitary lucky break, no miracle moment" (2005, p. 23). So, too, becoming a great school does not consist of implementing one essential characteristic.

Another common problem occurs when administrators choose to implement only the characteristics that they favor or find expedient, while choosing to disregard or avoid others that they do not support or find too difficult to address. For example, one superintendent announced that all schools in his district would become PLCs, then started by implementing a districtwide benchmark testing program to ensure a "Focus on Results." Because the superintendent had a strong background in assessment, he viewed PLCs as a perfect vehicle

to promote a stronger district assessment program. Unfortunately, he gave almost no attention to creating a common mission and vision, ensuring site collaborative time, or building shared knowledge regarding essential learning and assessment. In reality, the superintendent's goal was not to become a PLC, but instead to use PLC research to support his assessment goals. While district benchmark tests can be a helpful "means" to achieve an "end" of learning, in this case the benchmarks alone were the superintendent's desired end.

Conversely, another principal delayed implementing common assessments at her school because the staff found student assessment results to be threatening and uncomfortable. Not wanting to upset her staff nor hurt school collegiality and buy-in for PLCs, this principal avoided focusing on results. Unfortunately, this decision also made it near impossible for her site to accurately assess the effectiveness of the school's instructional program, set SMART goals, and create effective site interventions for struggling students.

Whether due to a lack of deep understanding, a desire to focus on favorable characteristics, or a lack of conviction to address the more difficult ones, the results are the same: If at least one essential characteristic is missing, the entire system will collapse. This selective, partial approach to implementation may be the most widespread misapplication of PLC philosophy.

### *Problem 2: The Managerial Approach*

The administrator views the six essential PLC characteristics as an implementation checklist.

Too often, administrators believe that by writing a new school mission statement or renaming department meetings as "PLC time," they have completed an item on the PLC to-do list. As Rick DuFour states, "This checklist approach can sharpen our focus on what must be done. But we also must recognize the inherent dangers in efforts



to simplify complex tasks” (DuFour, 1998, p. 1). Implementing PLCs with a managerial leadership style lacks a deep understanding of the six essential PLC characteristics and how they work interdependently to create an ongoing *process* to improve student learning.

For example, a principal who was just starting to implement PLCs asked a colleague to review his agenda for an upcoming staff development day. The agenda looked like a grocery list:

1. Write a mission and vision statement.
2. Write team value statements.
3. Write team SMART goals.
4. Create action plan to implement goals.
5. Identify common assessments.

When the colleague asked about the ambitious plan for the day, the principal said his goal was to “address all the essential PLC characteristics.” Unfortunately, the principal viewed each characteristic as a distinct act to be accomplished, instead of as *guiding principles to be considered in all acts*. When writing a mission and vision statement, for example, wouldn't the staff want to use collective inquiry to build shared knowledge about the traits of effective schools, or consider their students' needs by focusing on current assessment data? And once the mission is written, would it not make sense to create action steps to begin making the mission statement a reality? Ultimately, an effective administrator cannot view the essential characteristics as singular actions to be accomplished, but as ongoing goals that must continually be reconsidered and embedded within all the school's beliefs and procedures. This is the difference between “doing” PLC practices and “being” a PLC.

### Problem 3: The "Sacred Cow" Approach

The administrator views the six essential PLC characteristics as an implementation checklist.

When a school accepts high levels of learning as their fundamental purpose, the staff must be willing to examine *all* practices in light of their impact on learning, (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). Because the six essential characteristics are necessary to ensure student learning, examining school practices is an ongoing process of aligning all school practices with these characteristics. But just as some administrators implement only *some* of the characteristics, others apply the characteristics only to *some* school practices. Due to a lack of awareness or conflicting priorities, these administrators allow "sacred cow" daily practices that are actually counterproductive to student learning to continue.

In one case, for example, a principal met with a student at risk of failing science. It was the end of the first quarter, and the principal stressed to the child that there were still 9 weeks to improve his grade, so he had to get to work. The boy leaned back in his chair and announced that he was not going to try until February, at the beginning of the new semester. The principal was shocked, so he reminded the child of the importance of passing science. The student responded, "You just don't get it. I *can't* pass this semester. I have a 22% in science right now, and my teacher allows no make-up work, no extra-credit, and no make-up tests. If I earn every point possible for the second quarter, I still can't pass, so why try?"

Unfortunately, the student was right. If the purpose of a professional learning community is to ensure student learning, then why would we implement grading practices that are so counterproductive? Besides grading policies, some of the most prevalent educational sacred cows include teacher evaluation procedures, master schedules, school calendars, and athletics. By failing to align the sacred cows, these



administrations “talk the talk” of being a PLC, but don’t “walk the walk.”

## Powerful PLC Leadership

While these misguided administrative approaches are highly ineffective, there are powerful practices that school leaders can use to successfully implement all six essential characteristics. These include <sup>(1)</sup> developing a deep understanding of all six characteristics, <sup>(2)</sup> assessing a site's current reality in relation to these traits, and <sup>(3)</sup> creating an ongoing process to align school practices with the essential characteristics. How?

### Understand the Essential Characteristics and Assess Current Reality


To avoid the selective, managerial, or sacred cow approach to PLC implementation, it is vital to develop a deep understanding of the essential characteristics and how they work interdependently to create an ongoing process to improve student learning. Only by developing this understanding can an administrator accurately assess his or her site's current level of alignment and effectively take steps towards continuous improvement. To this end, consider the following descriptions and key questions related to each essential characteristic:

#### 1. Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals

All too often, administrators begin PLC implementation by jumping directly into forming collaborative teams, identifying essential standards, and creating common assessments, while failing to first build the vital consensus on a common mission of learning. As *Learning by Doing* states:

The very essence of a learning community is a focus on and a commitment to the learning of each student. When a school or district functions as a PLC, educators with the organization embrace high levels of learning for all students as

both the reason the organization exists and the fundamental responsibility of those who work within it. (DuFour, Eaker, & DuFour, 2006, p. 3)



This seismic shift from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning is far more than a school slogan or catchy “Learning for All” motto on a school’s letterhead. In a PLC school, there are two underlining, fundamental assumptions inherent in the mission of high levels of learning for all students: 1) The educators in the organization believe that all students are capable of high levels of learning, and 2) they assume the responsibility to make this outcome a reality for every child. These fundamental assumptions are the foundation upon which all PLC practices are built and the reason why PLC educators feel compelled to implement the essential characteristics. Administrators who want to build support for a PLC should ask themselves the following key “current reality” questions:

- Has your site collectively determined that high levels of *learning* for *all* students is the fundamental purpose of your school?
- Does your site take responsibility to ensure that all students learn?
- What proof do you have that your mission is being put into action?



## 2 Collaborative Culture

The second essential PLC characteristic is a collaborative culture. Because no single teacher could possibly possess all the knowledge, skills, time, and resources needed to achieve the mission of high levels of learning for all students, educators at a PLC school work in high-performing, collaborative teams. Collaboration does not happen by invitation or chance; instead, frequent collaborative time is embedded into the teacher contract day, allowing disciplinary teams to work interdependently to achieve common goals linked to their collective mission of learning (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). PLC





collaboration goes beyond mere congeniality to dig deeply into learning. It engages in disciplined inquiry and continuous improvement in order to “raise the bar” and “close the gap” of student learning and achievement (Fullan, 2005, p. 209). To this end, team collaborative time almost exclusively focuses on four critical questions:

1. What is it we expect students to learn?
2. How will we know if our students are learning?
3. How will we respond when students don't learn?
4. How will we respond when students have learned? (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006)

Post in Meeting Room

These essential questions help a team focus their collaborative efforts on their fundamental purpose—learning.

Because these elements of a collaborative culture are simple, logical, and universally accepted as best practice, it would seem that this essential characteristic would be an unlikely stumbling block to implementing PLC practices, but surprisingly, this is not the case. Thus, when assessing your site's current reality in creating a collaborative culture, consider the following key questions:

- Does your staff meet frequently during the professional day in collaborative teams?
- Are your teams configured to best address the four critical learning questions?
- Do your teams focus their collaborative efforts on learning?
- What current site practices do or don't promote/support collaboration?

How?

### Collective Inquiry

Roland Barth says, “Ultimately there are two kinds of schools: learning enriched schools and learning impoverished schools. I have

yet to see a school where the learning curves . . . of the adults were steep upward and those of the students were not. Teachers and students go hand and hand as learners . . . or they don't go at all" (2001, p. 23). In a professional learning community, teams engage in collective inquiry to continually learn about best practices in teaching and learning. Teams do not make decisions merely by sharing experiences or averaging opinions, but instead by building shared knowledge through learning together. This collaborative learning enables team members to develop new skills to better meet the learning needs of their students.

The initial process of building collaborative teams creates opportunities for learning, as teachers who traditionally worked in isolation begin to benefit from the collective knowledge of their peers. If a collaborative team does not create a continuous process of learning, however, at some point the team's effectiveness will be restricted to the limits of the team's collective knowledge. To assess your site's current reality in this area, consider the following key questions:

- How are decisions made at your site?
- Are decisions made after building shared knowledge?
- How do you know that you are implementing researched-based best practices?
- What topics and issues are you currently learning about?

### Action Orientation and Continuous Improvement

*Members of a professional learning community are action-oriented: They move quickly to turn aspirations into action and visions into reality.*

—Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour,  
Robert Eaker, & Thomas Many

All collaborative learning, planning, and goal-setting is useless until put into action. Unless staff members are willing to try new



Teams

things, improvement in student learning is impossible. Additionally, this action orientation provides staff learning opportunities, as there is no better way to learn than by doing. PLC educators do not view experimentation as a singular task to be accomplished; rather, they embrace experimentation as "how we do things" every day. Human nature tends to view change as an uncomfortable process, but in a PLC, the team should feel uneasy *without* change, for without change, there is no opportunity for improvement. To assess these characteristics at your site, consider the following key questions:

- Are your site goals and intentions put into action?
- Does your site embrace change or fight it?
- Does your school's culture allow, support, and promote risk-taking and experimentation?
- What new practices are you currently implementing?

### Focus on Results

Members of a PLC school realize that all their efforts to achieve the mission of high levels of learning for all students must be assessed on the basis of results rather than good intentions. A PLC school has a "thirst" for information about their school. This focus on results leads each collaborative team to create a series of common, formative assessments to measure each student's progress towards mastery of essential learning outcomes (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006). This steady flow of student assessment information is the "life blood" of a PLC, as it is used to set goals, identify students in need of additional time and support, and confirm which instructional strategies are most effective in meeting the needs of students. To measure progress towards implementing a culture that has a focus on results, consider the following key questions:

- How does your site know that your students are learning?
- What does your site regularly assess, monitor, and celebrate?
- What does your site do with assessment information?

## Tools for Self-Assessment

Assessing your site's progress toward implementing the essential PLC characteristics should be a collaborative process. Included in this chapter are two resources to assist you:

1. The Essential Characteristics "Current Reality" Staff Survey (page 31)
2. The Current Reality and Steps to Success Planning Chart (page 34)

By having every staff member take the "Current Reality" survey, leaders can secure vital information on the culture and perceptions of the school. Use this information to identify program strengths and weaknesses, as well as to set goals for improvement. Expect differing levels of success in implementing each characteristic, but insist that all six characteristics are addressed. Figure 1-1 shows the results if even one characteristic is skipped.

As Figure 1-1 demonstrates, the ultimate cost of avoiding or disregarding essential characteristics is to lose all the benefits of becoming a professional learning community—hardly a price that an effective administrator should be willing to pay.

## Aligning School Practices With the Essential Characteristics

In addition to assessing current progress towards implementing the essential characteristics, it is equally important to create an ongoing process of aligning individual school practices with the essential characteristics. Because these characteristics serve as defining elements of educational best practice, the more aligned school procedures are to these ideals, the more likely it is that high levels of learning will take place. To this end, there is a simple, yet powerful process that school leaders can utilize to align practices. This process is centered on the graphic organizer in Figure 1-2 (page 26).



	Common Mission, Vision, Values, & Goals	Collaborative Culture	Collective Inquiry	Action Experimentation	Continuous Improvement	Focus on Results
Missing Common Mission, Vision, Values & Goals	Staff efforts do not focus on student learning.	Staff works collaboratively to achieve school mission.	School practices are grounded in research-based best practices.	School puts its mission, vision, values, and goals into practice.	Essential PLC characteristics are continually reviewed and implemented.	Progress towards meeting school mission, vision, and goals is monitored, assessed, and celebrated.
Missing Collaborative Culture	Staff efforts focus on high levels of learning for all students.	Staff works in isolation to achieve school mission.	School practices are grounded in research-based best practices.	School puts its mission, vision, values, and goals into practice.	Essential PLC characteristics are continually reviewed and implemented.	Progress towards meeting school mission, vision, and goals is monitored, assessed, and celebrated.
Missing Collective Inquiry	Staff efforts focus on high levels of learning for all students.	Staff works collaboratively to achieve school mission.	School practices are not based in research-based best practices.	School puts its mission, vision, values, and goals into practice.	Essential PLC characteristics are continually reviewed and implemented.	Progress towards meeting school mission, vision, and goals is monitored, assessed, and celebrated.
Missing Action Orientation	Staff efforts focus on high levels of learning for all students.	Staff works collaboratively to achieve school mission.	School practices are grounded in research-based best practices.	School mission, vision, values, and goals are not implemented.	Essential PLC characteristics are continually reviewed and implemented.	Progress towards meeting school mission, vision, and goals is monitored, assessed, and celebrated.
Missing Continuous Improvement	Staff efforts focus on high levels of learning for all students.	Staff works collaboratively to achieve school mission.	School practices are grounded in research-based best practices.	School puts its mission, vision, values, and goals into practice.	Essential PLC characteristics are viewed as a singular act. Improvement stops.	Progress towards meeting school mission, vision, and goals is monitored, assessed, and celebrated.
Missing Focus on Results	Staff efforts focus on high levels of learning for all students.	Staff works collaboratively to achieve school mission.	School practices are grounded in research-based best practices.	School puts its mission, vision, values, and goals into practice.	Essential PLC characteristics are continually reviewed and implemented.	School has no information to measure student learning or program effectiveness.

Figure 1-1: Effects of Missing a PLC Essential Characteristic

*Any one of these to essentials is missing - will not result in improvement*

Focus Area: _____		
Current Outcomes	Current Practices	Desired PLC Outcomes

Figure 1-2: An Alignment Tool

To align a particular school practice or program, start by selecting a focus area, then list all the existing steps or procedures in the center column titled “Current Practices.” For example, one of the sacred cows mentioned previously was teacher evaluation practice. Often, traditional teacher evaluation procedures are counterproductive to PLC characteristics. School leaders can begin the alignment process by listing their current teacher evaluation procedures (see Figure 1-3).

Focus Area: <u>Teacher Evaluation</u>		
Current Outcomes	Current Practices	Desired PLC Outcomes
	Identify/Review Evaluation Standards and Process	
	Goal-Setting Conference	
	Formal Observation(s)	
	Postobservation Conference	
	Final Evaluation Process	

Figure 1-3: Step One

Next, ask the following guiding questions about each listed procedure:



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1. Does it promote/ensure high levels of learning for all students?
2. Is it in alignment with our site mission, vision, values, and goals?
3. Does it support and promote collaboration?
4. What evidence do we have that it is best practice?
5. How will results be measured and evaluated?

Record answers to these questions in the left-hand column, titled "Current Outcomes."

Focus Area: <u>Teacher Evaluation</u>		
Current Outcomes	Current Practices	Desired PLC Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator reviews evaluation process and teaching standards with teachers.</li> <li>• Process focuses on teacher's instructional practices and meeting individual responsibilities.</li> </ul>	Identify/Review Evaluation Standards and Process	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every teacher writes his or her own goals for the year.</li> <li>• Goals focus on teaching.</li> </ul>	Goal-Setting Conference	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator observes teacher.</li> <li>• Observation(s) focus on teacher's instructional practices.</li> </ul>	Formal Observation(s)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator and teacher meet to review observation.</li> <li>• Focus is on teacher's instructional practices.</li> </ul>	Postobservation Conference	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator and teacher meet to review final evaluation.</li> <li>• Focus is on teacher's instructional practices.</li> <li>• The entire process happens annually or biannually.</li> </ul>	Final Evaluation Process	

Figure 1-4: Step Two

In this case, current teacher evaluation practices can be characterized as an individual process between a teacher and administrator that focuses on teaching practices. Once this step is completed, turn to

the right-hand column, titled “Desired PLC Outcomes.” Reviewing the guiding questions again, identify the desired outcomes you would expect if the focus area was aligned with PLC essential characteristics.

Focus Area: <u>Teacher Evaluation</u>		
Current Outcomes	Current Practices	Desired PLC Outcomes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator reviews evaluation process and teaching standards with teachers.</li> <li>• Process focuses on teacher’s instructional practices and meeting individual responsibilities.</li> </ul>	Identify/Review Evaluation Standards and Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator works with a collaborative team to review the evaluation process and identify teaching standards that are aligned with PLC practices.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Every teacher writes his or her own goals for the year.</li> <li>• Goals focus on teaching.</li> </ul>	Goal-Setting Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Principal works with collaborative team to review previous year’s assessment data and develop team SMART goal(s) for the current year.</li> <li>• Teacher teams use collective inquiry to identify best instructional practices to achieve the team SMART goal(s).</li> <li>• Team SMART goal(s) are selected as the goals for teacher evaluation.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator observes teacher.</li> <li>• Observation(s) focus on teacher’s instructional practices.</li> </ul>	Formal Observation(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator and collaborative team select observation opportunities that directly relate to team SMART goal(s).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator and teacher meet to review observation.</li> <li>• Focus is on teacher’s instructional practices.</li> </ul>	Postobservation Conference	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator and collaborative team meet to discuss instructional practices.</li> <li>• Teams may provide student learning data to demonstrate teaching effectiveness.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Administrator and teacher meet to review final evaluation.</li> <li>• Focus is on teacher’s instructional practices.</li> <li>• The entire process happens annually or biannually.</li> </ul>	Final Evaluation Process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final evaluation focuses on achievement of team SMART goal(s) and student learning.</li> <li>• If a teacher is in need of assistance, fellow team members can be a resource for model lessons, peer tutoring, and mentoring.</li> </ul>

Figure 1-5: Step Three

Once all three columns are complete, the final step is to compare the outer columns. If entries under “Current Outcomes” and “Desired PLC Outcomes” are the same, then the focus area is highly aligned with PLC essential standards. But if the outer columns differ significantly, then current practices should be revised to align with





the essential characteristics—or eliminated—because they are counterproductive to student learning.

In our example, the school's current teacher evaluation practices were obviously significantly misaligned with PLC characteristics. To better align the process, the school leadership made revisions to their teacher evaluation practices, as indicated in Figure 1-6.

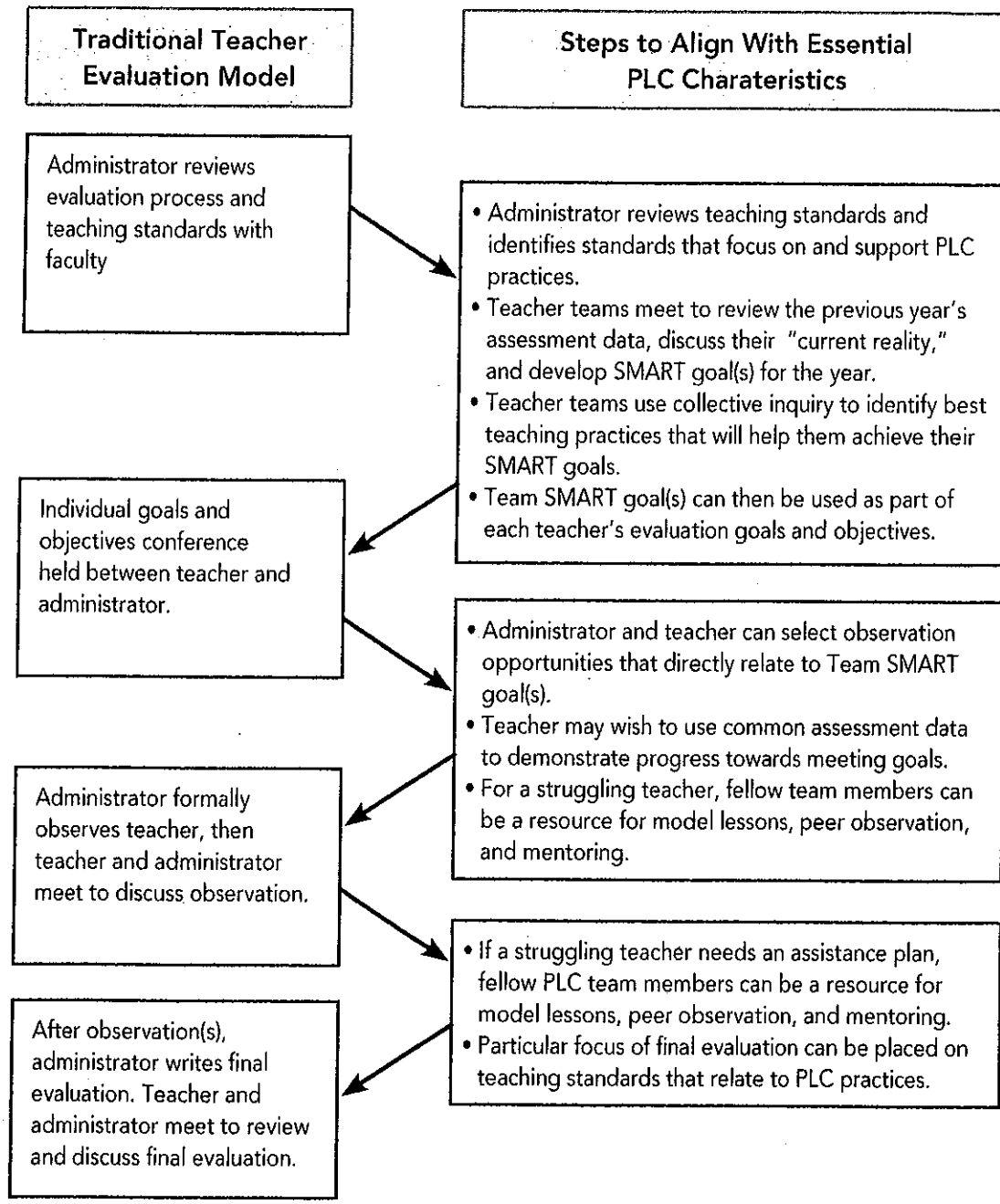


Figure 1-6: Aligning the Traditional Teacher Evaluation Process With Essential PLC Characteristics

By making a few targeted revisions, the teacher evaluation process now supports a focus on learning and collaboration. Considering the amount of time, effort, and emphasis that most schools give teacher evaluation, it only makes sense to have procedures that complement a school's fundamental purpose.

## Final Thoughts

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says, "Greatness is not a function of circumstance. . . . it is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline" (2005, p. 40). As school leaders, we can not leave student learning up to luck, hope, or chance. If we want to be a great school, our primary administrative responsibility is to create the necessary conditions upon which high levels of learning for all students is inevitable. This can be achieved if, and only if, we are willing to align all of our organization's practice, procedure, and disposition to achieve the same outcome . . . learning.

Yet while it is important to learn how to implement PLC practices, we must never lose site of why we are doing this work. If we diligently remember that our fundamental leadership responsibility is to promote, defend, and ensure learning for all students, we will understand that implementing PLC practices is not an end in itself, but instead a means to achieve this mission. The six essential PLC characteristics are not tasks to be accomplished, but a way of thinking, acting, and being that guide our efforts. In the end, our effectiveness in implementing PLC practices will not be measured in standardized test scores or meeting federal mandates, but rather in the life-ending failures or lifelong successes of our students.

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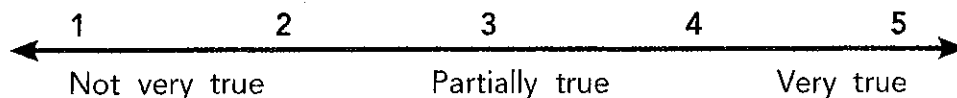


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## Essential Characteristics "Current Reality" Staff Survey

**Survey Directions:** If the question is a statement, please use the following scale to indicate the extent to which each of the following statements is true for you and/or your department team:



- If the question is open-ended, please share your thoughts.
- Honesty is essential!

List your Department/Team(s): \_\_\_\_\_

### Common Mission, Vision, Values, & Goals

- I know our school's mission and vision.
- I believe in our school's mission and vision.
- Our mission and vision were created collectively.
- My efforts are vital and essential to making our mission and vision a reality.
- Our team has identified team norms to guide us in working together.
- Team members consistently adhere to our team norms.

### Collaborative Culture

- Our team meeting time is focused and productive.
- My input is valued and respected by the team.
- Team collaboration has improved student learning in my classes.
- Our team works interdependently to achieve our goals.

### Setting Goals/Collective Inquiry

- Each team member is clear on the essential standards of our course(s).
- We have identified course content and/or topics that can be eliminated so we can devote more time to essential standards.
- We have agreed on how to best sequence/pace the course content.
- We have aligned our essential standards with state/district standards and the assessments required of our students.
- We continually revise and re-evaluate what is essential for students to learn.

*(continued)*



## Aligning School Practices With Essential PLC Characteristics

### Guiding Questions

1. Does it promote/ensure high levels of learning for all students?
2. Is it in alignment with our site mission, vision, values, and goals?
3. Does it support and promote collaboration?
4. What evidence do we have that it is best practice?
5. How will results be measured and evaluated?

Focus Area: _____		
Current Outcomes	Current Practices	Desired PLC Outcomes



*Poster*



## Current Reality and Steps to Success Planning Chart

	Essential Questions	Your Current Reality	Desired Outcome (Long-Term Goal)	First Steps (Short-Term Goal)
<b>Potential Bump</b> <b>Common Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has your site collectively determined that high levels of learning for all students is the fundamental purpose of your school?</li> <li>• Does your site take responsibility to ensure that all students learn?</li> <li>• What proof do you have that your mission is being put into action?</li> </ul>			
<b>Collaborative Culture</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Does your staff meet frequently, during the professional day, in collaborative teams?</li> <li>• Are your teams configured to best address the four critical learning questions?</li> <li>• Do your teams focus their collaborative efforts on learning?</li> <li>• What current site practices do or don't promote and support collaboration?</li> </ul>			
<b>Collective Inquiry</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are decisions made at your site?</li> <li>• Are decisions made after building shared knowledge?</li> <li>• How do you know that you are implementing researched-based, best practices?</li> <li>• What topics/issues are you currently learning about?</li> </ul>			
<b>Action Experimentation and Continuous Improvement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are your site goals and intentions put into action?</li> <li>• Does your site embrace change or fight it?</li> <li>• Does your school's culture allow, support, and promote risk-taking and experimentation?</li> <li>• What new practices have you currently implementing?</li> </ul>			
<b>Focus on Results</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How does your site know that your students are learning?</li> <li>• What does your site regularly assess, monitor, and/or celebrate?</li> <li>• What does your site do with assessment information?</li> </ul>			



## Essential Characteristics "Current Reality" Staff Survey (continued)

### Focus on Results

- Our team has developed common assessments to determine each student's mastery of essential standards and to assess strengths and weaknesses of our program.
- Our team regularly analyzes common assessment data.
- We have established the proficiency standard (rigor level) we want each student to achieve on our essential standards and assessments.
- We have taught our students the criteria we will use to judge their work.
- We have agreed on the criteria we will use in judging the quality of student work related to essential standards, and we practice applying those criteria consistently.
- We use the results of common assessments to assist each other in building on strengths and addressing weaknesses to help students achieve at higher levels.
- We use common assessment data to identify students who need additional time and support to master essential standards.

### Targeted Interventions

- Our team discusses how we can respond when students have not learned essential standards.
- The Pyramid of Interventions effectively helps my students at risk.

### Administrative Support

- Our site administration adheres to our site norms, vision, and mission.
- Our site administration provides me the support I need to do my best.
- Our site administration is approachable and responsive to my concerns.
- Key decisions are made collectively at our school.

### Additional Questions

List the three best things about our school: What's working?

List three suggestions to improve our school.

(Adapted with permission from *Learning by Doing*, DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2006, Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.)

