



WYOMING
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



PLC
AT WORK®

Success Story

**Wyoming Department of Education's
Statewide System of Support Aligns
with PLC at Work® Process**



Solution Tree

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) at Work[®], developed by Richard DuFour and Robert Eaker, has been recognized as an integral foundation in defining the instructional practices and processes for improving

K–12 schools. For more than 20 years, this work has assisted school communities in focusing on three big ideas that improve student learning: (1) **a focus on learning**, (2) **a collaborative culture and collective**

responsibility, and (3) **a results orientation**.

In addition, schools across the world have found that building a strong foundation by defining their mission, vision, values, and goals focused on ensuring high levels of learning for all students is an important step in the school improvement process. **When implemented well, the PLC at Work process supports school improvement across grade and school levels.**

The Three Big Ideas of the PLC at Work[®] Process

- A focus on learning
- A collaborative culture and collective responsibility
- A results orientation



The PLC at Work® Process in Wyoming

The PLC at Work® process has been implemented in thousands of schools across the United States. Verification that PLCs have a positive impact on student learning and achievement is at the heart of the work.

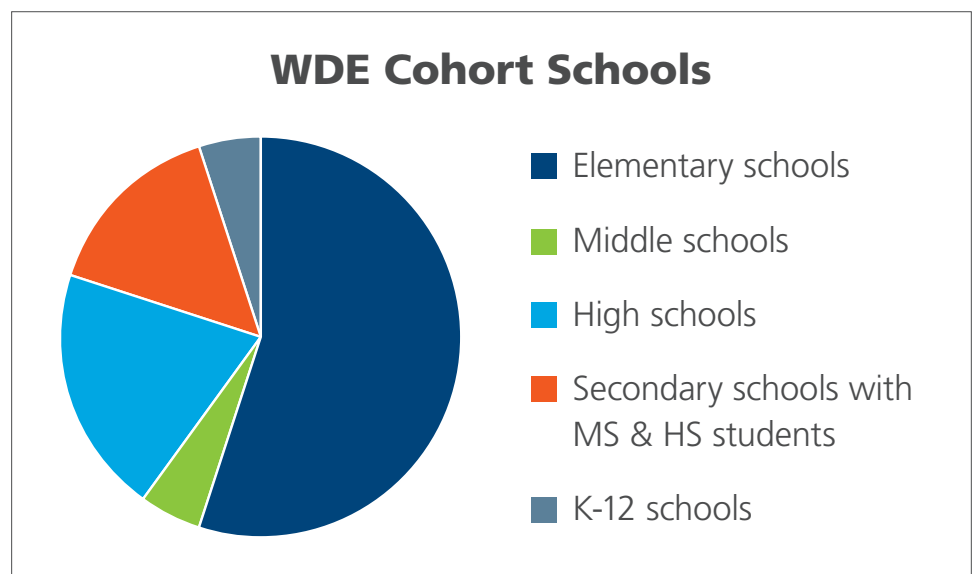
With that impact in mind, the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) partnered with Solution Tree during the 2018–19 school year to provide professional development to K–12 teachers on the PLC at Work process, which is aligned to the WDE’s Statewide System of Support. The overarching goal was to deepen educators’ understanding of the process and implement it within their educational settings.

Following a competitive application process, the WDE selected 15 cohort schools. Varying in size, poverty level, diversity, and teaching experience, these schools spanned 10 districts and included eight elementary schools, one middle school, three high schools, two secondary schools serving middle and high school students, and one K–12 school.

Solution Tree provided workshops at the state and regional level as well as additional support services to the cohort schools.

Cumulatively, the schools served more than 4,000 students, 48% percent of whom were eligible for free or reduced-price lunch. Most schools served students who were white (65%); however, three schools served almost solely Native American students (99%). Schools averaged slightly less than 300 students, and teachers typically had about 12 years of classroom experience.

The majority of schools had prior experience with PLCs in some form through Solution Tree, although implementation varied widely, ranging from schoolwide implementation to attending to one aspect of the PLC at Work process. During the first year of implementation, the focus was on building a strong culture of collaboration within each school. This was accomplished through a variety of activities for educators.



Varying in size, poverty level, diversity, and teaching experience, the 15 selected cohort schools spanned 10 districts across Wyoming.



Cohort schools were able to participate in PLC overview workshops and four targeted statewide workshops that were open to all educators in Wyoming. They also engaged in a needs assessment with a Solution Tree associate and received a descriptive report outlining the school's current reality relative to the PLC at Work® process.

In addition, the 15 Wyoming cohort schools employed a *diffusion of innovation* model in which five members of each school's guiding coalition—or leadership team—came together across the school year to participate in three Coaching Academy sessions focused on leadership and collaborative team development led by a Solution Tree associate.

Following these sessions, each team returned to its school tasked with demonstrating and modeling the PLC at Work process with colleagues in order to implement it across

classrooms. Throughout the year, leadership teams in the cohort schools also participated in two interactive web conferences in which they had the opportunity to ask questions and receive assistance targeted to their specific needs. Additionally, eight schools were selected to receive one on-site PLC coaching day with staff.

Throughout the year, the guiding coalitions and collaborative teams focused on the four critical questions as they began deeply

implementing the PLC at Work process with a focus on student learning across their diverse schools.

The Four Critical Questions Guiding the Work of Collaborative Teams

1. What knowledge, skills, and disposition should every student acquire as a result of this unit, this course, or this grade level?
2. How will we know when each student has acquired the essential knowledge and skills?
3. How will we respond when some students do not learn?
4. How will we extend the learning for students who are already proficient?

Tracking Progress Toward Goals

The WDE and educators across the state invested considerable resources—both human and budgetary—to undertake PLC implementation in their schools. Tracking progress toward goals was important for both Solution Tree and Wyoming educators as they progressed on their PLC at Work® journey. Education Northwest, a regional laboratory funded by the U.S. Department of Education and specializing in researching educational and classroom practices, served as the external evaluator to provide feedback and insights to educators dedicated to implementing best practices.

While the overall long-term outcome was to continuously improve student achievement, researchers focused on four interim outcomes for the PLC at Work cohort schools in Wyoming. In brief, the 15 schools should be able to demonstrate progress in:

- ▶ PLC at Work® process goals
- ▶ Staff members' interest in and capacity for PLC at Work
- ▶ Changes to instruction to support learning for all students
- ▶ Student engagement

To provide progress on these interim outcomes, Education Northwest gathered feedback at the end of the 2018–19 school year using several methods. End-of-year perception surveys were distributed to 250 cohort teachers, administrators, and other personnel involved with the implementation.

In addition, Education Northwest interviewed cohort school administrators, reviewed feedback from Solution Tree activities, and analyzed cohort school applications.

Solution Tree provided on- and off-site supports as an important component of the first year of implementation. Educators surveyed reported appreciation for these supports, specifically the PLC at Work overview and targeted workshops, as well as the Coaching Academy provided to cohort schools. In addition, educators reported that the books and videos in the PLC Toolkit along with on-site coaching were particularly helpful. While these activities provided time for planning and collaboration, the virtual coaching sessions with a PLC at Work associate gave additional support by offering educators the just-in-time feedback they needed.



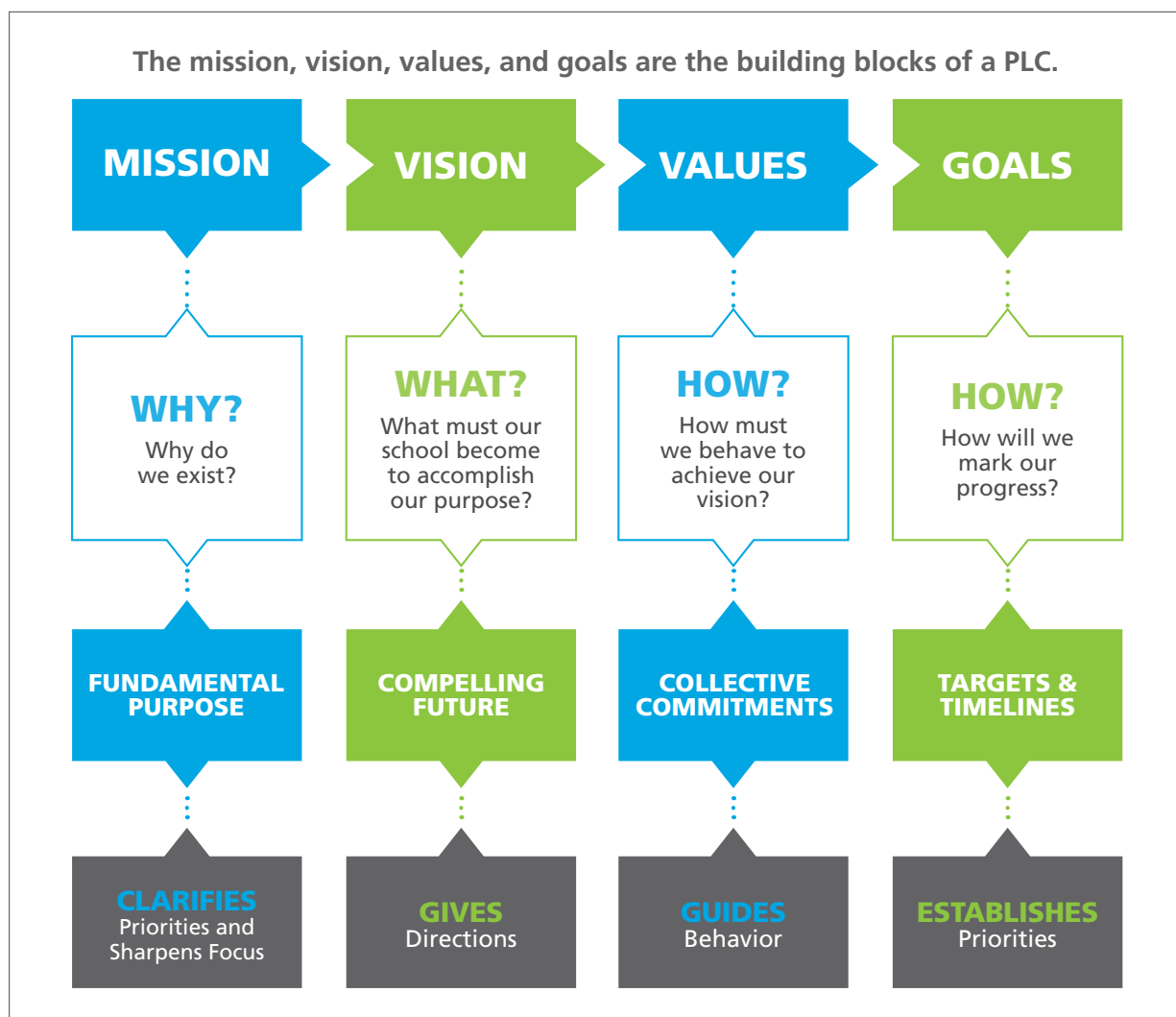
School administrators are always key to successful implementation. They reported that their teaching staff had made progress on foundational activities that included:

- ▶ Establishing schoolwide mission, vision, values, and goals for improving student learning
- ▶ Creating guiding coalitions and collaborative teams
- ▶ Finding time for teams to meet regularly

As educators addressed the four critical questions, they engaged in other key activities

in addition to those reported previously. More than half of the cohort schools reported progress in ongoing activities such as establishing a guaranteed curriculum by identifying essential standards and creating common formative assessments as well as strengthening their systems of interventions and extensions.

Cohort school administrators reported positive changes in teacher leadership, and survey responses included positive change in areas such as understanding school goals, creating a collaborative culture by making time for collaboration, and engaging in cycle of inquiry activities.



Implications for Your School

While there is not one right path to school improvement that meets the needs of your unique setting, lessons learned from the Wyoming PLC at Work® implementation can provide insights for your school, district, or state. As you embark on the PLC at Work journey, implications for you to consider include prior PLC experience and school infrastructure, staff support of schoolwide goals, and organizational structures and activities within that allow for distributed teacher leadership.

In addition to these considerations, it is important that collaborative teams focus on gaining clarity around the four essential questions of a PLC during weekly meetings. Next, a focus on building staff members' understanding of schoolwide improvement goals is key when implementing the PLC at Work process. Providing opportunities for teachers to share leadership also contributes to effective implementation.



In summary, overall research results indicate that when the PLC at Work process is implemented with fidelity, there are positive results. These include:

- Improved interest in and knowledge of PLC at Work
- Increased collaboration and communication among teacher teams
- Increased collective responsibility over time
- Deepened belief that all students can learn with progress specific to schoolwide systems of interventions and extensions for learning

Whether you are beginning or advancing on your PLC at Work journey, the important lessons learned from the Wyoming implementation can help you navigate your journey toward school improvement through the PLC at Work process.

Results of the PLC at Work® Process

- Improved interest in and knowledge of the PLC at Work® process
- Increased collaboration and communication among teacher teams
- Increased collective responsibility
- Deepened belief that all students can learn with specific interventions and extensions