



A STUDY ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF A PROFESSIONAL LEARNING  
COMMUNITY FOR A MEDIUM-SIZED HIGH SCHOOL FACULTY

A Dissertation Presented to the  
Faculty of the College of Education  
University of Houston

In Partial Fulfillment  
Of the Requirements for the Degree  
Doctor of Education

by

Glen William Hartsoch

August 2012

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### Abstract

Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) represent a concept that is growing in many parts of the United States. They are an attempt to create an environment in which teachers feel comfortable working together, sharing, and growing as a community of educators. The goal is to improve student performance. This dissertation provides a narrative of a high school currently implementing a PLC on a faculty, which has not had much experience with such a concept. The principal of the school faces challenges as he works in good faith to implement what he believes as proven tactics to improve student performance. At the same time, surveys of the school under study have shown the faculty and other community stakeholders have lost faith in the ability of their school following initial introduction of overlaying PLCs. Teachers find themselves assigned to department and small learning community PLCs. The faculty is focused but unable to articulate their sense of focus in a mission statement and confused on expected expectations. Focus groups that included the entire faculty of the school describe communities of dedicated teachers that desire the conditions a PLC would afford them but remain confused and unsure as they enter into a “flattened” world in which they will need to take more ownership of their own practice at a time in which others are seeking to take control of that ownership as well.

*Keywords:* PLCs, narrative study, high school faculty, focus groups

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

The high school under study opened on May 1, 2010, and currently serves as a second high school in the district. The first principal is in the process of implementing a professional learning community (PLC) within the faculty of the new school. According to the new principal, the school district does not currently utilize the concept of the PLC among its faculty district-wide. Originally, the author of this dissertation sought to address which PLC implementation tactics noticed in other districts in the area would have worked best in this situation. The goal was to determine how ready the faculty and staff of the high school are for such an implementation and what exactly, if anything, needs to be done to prepare them. Upon visits to the district, it has become apparent the high school under study at least purports to operate as a PLC. As will be discussed, the organization of teacher into PLCs will have various names. Originally, the researcher wanted to know which tactic to use; the principal appears to have answered the question. He used the most direct tactic of simply informing the faculty and staff they would be operating as PLCs and he has directly begun to implement the structure. Now the question is: "Is it working?" Does a PLC effectively exist according to the literature and are teachers and community embracing it, or at least embracing its results? The goal of this dissertation is to study the PLC implementation of the school under study and not to criticize faculty or administration. As the literature review will show, the dedicated professionals of this campus are working to implement a nebulous concept in good faith while working under contradictory direction to improve the learning of their students.

## **The Background of PLCs in the Region**

Three approaches are used to introduce PLCs to faculties in the Regional Service Center in which the district is located. The first method begins around 2001 and was used by the large Texas school district as well as some other inner city districts. This method involved simply informing teachers what a PLC is and then providing common planning times and requiring the completion of certain tasks. Survey and interview research the author of this dissertation has done on the introduction of PLCs into the district has shown a fierce initial resistance by teachers followed by some acceptance within a few years after some initial changes. At least one other researcher has also noticed this teacher resistance to PLC implementation in this district (Craig, 2012). A second method was employed by a medium-sized district around 2004 and some other districts geographically located next to the original district involved informing teachers of a PLC implementation, but then leaving all process items to administration to implement. The third method used by a large suburban district near the first two districts mentioned and some other outlying districts around 2007 was not to tell teachers of a PLC implementation and simply have administrators implement PLCs without using PLC terminology until after implementation.

The researcher has noticed that often schools in the area will bring in a PLC consultant, discover issues between the consultant and the faculty and bring in yet another consultant. At least one other researcher in the area has noticed this devoted pattern to the PLC concept in at least one other school (Craig, 2009). The trend the author of this dissertation noticed was the first districts to implement PLCs were more urban districts. The idea appears to have spread from the inner city core to outlying

districts. As it spread, administrators learned not to inform teachers what they were doing to avoid conflict. As has already been mentioned, during the course of this study on the PLC implementation, the principal of the high school under study has chosen the more direct approach. The author of this dissertation was involved at some level with the implementation of PLCs in the districts mentioned.

### **Background of the High School under Study**

The school sits hidden among pine trees off a farm-to-market road in an unincorporated area in southeast Texas. Relevant and censored Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data is available in Appendix C of this dissertation. This data is censored only in the fact that the name of the school has been omitted. A drive through the neighborhood reveals homesteads of between one to five acres for some miles around the high school. Houses range in structure from older ranch-style homes to more modern two-story houses. Some lots have trailer homes in various conditions and there appear to be few enforced building codes as property is used for a variety of purposes. Some lots contain business, houses, light industry, shops or retail outlets of various sorts.

It is in this apparently decentralized community that the high school under study was created as a school with three houses and an independent athletic department using the “small schools model.” The *houses* are named for particular fields: (1) The House of Engineering; (2) The House of Business and Criminal Justice; and (3) The House of the Arts. Each *house* is administered by an assistant principal. The “houses” themselves are decentralized, some more than others. The House of Engineering concentrates on practical fields with specialties such as aerospace engineering. Students are able participate in such hand-on activities as designing and actually building model trains.

Students in this house can specialize in math, science, or several sub-disciplines of engineering. The House of Business and Criminal Justice shares core area teachers among all students but then divides its students and elective faculty into the two areas mentioned in the name of the house. This “house” includes traditional areas of concentration such as English and social studies. The House of the Arts appears to be the largest with areas of concentration ranging from cosmetology and the culinary arts to the fine arts. Students have the opportunity to train with master chefs or train in a modern hair styling salon environment. Its organizational structure has two administrators: an assistant principal and a dean of instruction. Trainers and coaching staff are administered by an athletic director who has sole responsibility for this area of the school.

Administrator turnover has been an issue. During the study, three administrators left employment with the campus for positions elsewhere. All administrators, including the athletic director, serve on what the principal calls his *cabinet*. In discussion with the principal, it became evident students are often placed in classes outside of their “house” as situations warrant. In addition, some of the school leadership, particularly in the House of Arts, is often shared with one or more of the other houses to make the most efficient school-wide use of everyone’s time.

These “houses” form a grid with departments for the purposes of PLC structure. Developing an exact grid is problematic as the relationships between each department and “house” varies. The basic structure is that “houses” focus on student career goals, relationships and interests. Departments focus on academic subject matter and grade-level relationships. Narration is probably the only way to explain how the high School faculty is organized. For example, an English teacher will be a member of the English

PLC and will be assigned to one of the houses. She will have a planning period to meet with her English department team and another period to meet with her “house” faculty. This will give her relevant and timely insight into both her field and the group of students she works with most of the time. The narration might be different for an electives teacher. One teacher the author of this dissertation met was an engineering teacher. Because her field is so specialized, she does not meet with a department PLC but she will spend a lot of time with other teachers in her “house.” This will give her insight into some of the students she shares with these other teachers. Each teacher in this structure has a rich and unique experience in relationships with other teachers and each would need to be explored in detail to determine if the school is actually functioning as a PLC. Every teacher has a different story.

The initial feelings of the author were that this school is very much a PLC on its own terms. Teachers and administration of the high school under study are dedicated professionals who want the best for their students. The community, particularly parents, wants the best educational opportunities for their children as can be witnessed for resources they have been willing to put into this new school and the amount of concern they have given over the selection of its leadership. The unincorporated area around this school, as can be witnessed in the drive through the neighborhood mentioned in the first paragraph of this section, is at the same time loosely organized and independent, yet a community. It almost seems as if a PLC would emerge naturally from such a people.

## **Background of the Educational System of the State**

Ironically, the school under study operates in a state, which maintains tight control over its public school system. The state provides a curriculum, known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), it expects all students to master at a certain levels and requires a standardized test (i.e. TAKS) be taken by all students in the middle of the spring semester as a means to ensure state mandated TEKS have been taught. To monitor teacher lesson plans, the state has begun the process of offering free on-line service known as eSchoolPlus™ and iXplore™ to all state school districts (TEA). These services provide a common grade book for teachers and a means to share lesson plans across the state. They also allow administration at several levels easy access to lesson plans and student grading information.

## **Definitions**

Following is a list of terms used in the literature review and elsewhere in this paper. These terms, or parts of some of these terms, are used as a common vernacular often with slightly different meanings than those of the author.

*Action Orientation:* A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008). Merriam-Webster defines *action* as *an act of will* and *orientation* as *a usually general or lasting direction of thought, inclination or interest*. For the purposes of this dissertation, it refers to the DuFour and Eaker contention that members of a PLC are concentrated on educators getting things done.

*Beliefs:* A principal part of a PLC according to Hord and Sommers(2008).Merriam-Webster defines as *conviction of the truth of some statement or the reality of some being or phenomenon especially when based on examination of evidence*. Used in

this literature review to mean those truths that a staff holds as self-evident or factual.

*Best Practice*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008).

Business dictionary.com Defines as *Methods and techniques that have consistently shown results superior than those achieved with other means, and which are used as benchmarks to strive for*. For the purposes of this study, it refers to those practices that DuFour noticed as most beneficial to a PLC environment.

*Collaborative Culture*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008). Merriam-Webster defines *collaborative* as *to work jointly with others or together especially in an intellectual endeavor* and *culture* as *the act of developing the intellectual and moral faculties especially by education*. Used in this review to mean educators using the same moral faculties working in a spirit of cooperation with other educators on their campus.

*Collective Inquiry*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008). Merriam-Webster define *collective* as *of, relating to, or being a group of individuals* and *Inquiry* as *examination into facts or principles*. For the purposes of this study, *collective inquiry means* a group of professional educators examining facts for themselves. The DuFour definition (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/principle>) differs from collective learning in that no change in behavior is highlighted.



*Collective Learning*: A principal part of a PLC according to Hord and Sommers (2008).

Merriam-Webster define collective as *of, relating to, or being a group of individuals* and learning as *knowledge or skill acquired by instruction or study and/or a modification of a behavioral tendency by experience*. For the purpose of this study, it means a group of professional educators changing their behavior.

*Collective learning* differs from *Collective Inquiry* in that a change in behavior is considered a part of the PLC.

*Communities of Practice* (CPs): In a CP, people, professional and otherwise, comes together for specific reasons to focus on specific issues or problems (Wenger, 1998).

*Community*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) and Hord and Sommers (2008). Merriam-Webster defines as *a unified body of individuals*. Used in this review to refer to the professional educators of a campus.

*Continuous Improvement*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) and of Systems learning (Senge, 1990). Merriam-Webster defines *continuous* as marked by uninterrupted extension in space, time, or sequence and *improve* as *to enhance in value or quality: make better*. For purposes of this study, it refers to the DuFour contention that a PLC is increasing the value of the school without interruption.

*Constructivism:* The epistemological belief we construct what we know from ourselves and not from the actual world, only the world as we see it. Constructivist themes are often quoted in the PLC literature, particularly by Hord *et al* (Hord & Sommers, 2008; Lambert, Walker, Zimmerman, Cooper, Lambert, Gardner & Szabo, 2002).

*Facilitator:* Although this term is not mentioned specifically in the sixth edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, it is often used by organizations using APA format that transcribe focus group transcripts to refer to the researcher doing the focus group (Tigerfish.com). This term is used in this paper for the reason of identifying the researcher in the focus groups.

*Goals:* A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008). Merriam-Webster defines as *the end toward which effort is directed*. Used in this literature review to mean those accomplishments a faculty and staff hope to accomplish for their students and for themselves.

*Knowledge Communities:* A term closely related to PLCs, but more based on communities teachers organically create and live (Craig, 2009).

*Learning:* A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) and Hord and Sommers (2008). Merriam-Webster defines as *knowledge or skill acquired by instruction or study and/or a modification of a behavioral tendency by experience*. Used in this review to refer to a faculty and staff changing their behavior through professional development and other activities.

*Learning Communities (LCs):* An LC is a group of people who are actively engaged in learning from each other (Smith, McGregor, Matthews & Gabelich, 2004).

*Learning Organizations (LOs)*: An organization that uses *systems thinking* as a means essentially to integrate most of the conditions mentioned in a PLC (Senge, 1990).

*Mission*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008).

Merriam-Webster defines as *a specific task with which a person or a group is charged*. Used in this literature review to mean a written statement of mandate agreed to by the faculty and staff of a school.

*Professional*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008)

and Hord and Sommers (2008). Elliot Friedson defines a profession as *an occupation, which has assumed a dominant position in a division of labor, so that it gains control over the determination of the subsistence of its own work. Unlike most occupations it is autonomous and self-directing* (Friedson, 1986). Used in this literature review to refer to teachers and other persons on a campus engaging in a paid activity requiring a certain code of conduct. This code of conduct requires, among other things, that the educator take ownership of their own personal practice and responsibility for that practice.

*Professional Learning Community*: A group of paid educators who reflect upon their practice and democratically make decisions based upon common reflections.

Refer to component definitions for each word.

*Results Orientation*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) Merriam-Webster defines *results* as something that proceeds or *arises as a consequence, effect, or conclusion* and *action* as *an act of will* and *orientation* as a usually general or lasting direction of thought, inclination, or interest. For the purposes of this dissertation, it refers to the DuFour *et al* contention a PLC consists of members who are focused on final product.

*School-Based Learning (SBL)*: A model based on openness, trust and respect, supportive instructional leadership, and certain socialization (Louise & Kruse, 1995).

*Shared leadership*: A principal part of a PLC according to Hord and Sommers (2008). Merriam-Webster defines *sharing* as *to divide and distribute* and *leadership* as *capacity to lead*. For the purposes of this dissertation, it refers to the Hord and Sommers (2008) contention an effective PLC is one that divides the capacity to lead.

*Shared Personal Practice*: A principal part of a PLC according to Hord and Sommers (2008). Merriam-Webster defines *sharing* as *to divide and distribute*. Merriam-Webster also defines *personal* as *carried on between individuals directly* and *practices* as *to be professionally engaged in*. For the purpose of this dissertation, it refers to the Hord and Sommers (2008) belief that a PLC is a place in which the professional business of education is shared between all members of the PLC.

*Small Learning Communities (SLCs)*: In an SLC, a cohort of students is given a rigorous and relevant curriculum by a small group of faculty who advocate for the learner (Oxley, 2001).

*Supportive conditions*: A principal part of a PLC according to Hord and Sommers (2008).

Merriam-Webster defines *support* as *to promote the interests or cause of* and *conditions* as *premise(s) upon which the fulfillment of an agreement depends*. In this dissertation, it refers to the Hord and Somers (2008) contention that administration in a PLC supports the faculty in decision-making and implementation.

*Systems Thinking*: Senge explains roughly as the process of determining how the parts influence the whole intellectually (Senge, 1990).

*Value*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) and Hord and Sommers (2008). Merriam-Webster defines as *relative worth, utility or importance*. Used in this literature review to mean the things and concepts held to have worth by a faculty and staff of a school.

*Vision*: A principal part of a PLC according to DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2008) and Hord and Sommers (2008). Merriam-Webster defines as *a thought, concept or object formed by the imagination*. Used in this literature review to mean a commonly held belief in a common, successful future for the students and other stakeholders held by the faculty and staff of a school.

*Voice*: Although this term is not mentioned specifically in the 6<sup>th</sup> edition of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association*, it is often used by organizations using APA format that transcribe focus group transcripts to refer to the human subject of a focus group (Tigerfish.com). Usually Tigerfish.com differentiates between “male voice,” and “female voice.” This convention is not followed in this paper to protect human subjects. The researcher/facilitator believes gender could be used to identify human subjects. Instead, “voice” is simply used for the reason of identifying a human subject in the focus groups.

### **Research Focus**

The focus of research of this study is a newly created, medium-sized high school, of approximately 1,000 -1,200 students, in a suburban area near a large Texas city. The goal is not to criticize, but to study. This is a school in a district that has not yet utilized the PLC structure district-wide, and the principal currently is pioneering this idea with a faculty mostly recruited from the only other existing high school in the district. Among the questions initially considered were:

1. *Is this school effectively operating as PLCs according to the disparate literature on the subject of PLCs?;*
2. *Does the community, particularly the faculty, embrace it as such?; and*
3. *Did direct implementation work well for this particular community? “Well” is defined as the answers to question number two and is the school generally being effective?*

To answer these questions, surveys, focus groups, and principal interviews were utilized. As with all qualitative research, additional questions of high utility and interest arose and

some flexibility was required to obtain as best a narration of the high school under study as possible. These questions changed slightly as the researcher conducted focus groups and spoke with administration and teacher concerning perceptions of their PLCs and teacher understandings of their PLCs. This paper answers the question of “how do teachers, and to a lesser extent all stakeholders of the school, perceive the effectiveness of their school during PLC implementation?” The researcher is interested in determining how well the concept of the PLC has been embraced.

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of the Literature**

It has become trite to say people are coming together like never before.

Democracy movements across the Middle East give one cause to hope. Earthquakes and Tsunamis strike, upending interconnected international business arrangements that quickly restart as other worldwide supply-chains go into action. Humans, as a species, are able to connect, communicate and take action in ways their ancestors never thought possible. Real democracy is on the rise. People are informed through Twitter™ and Facebook™ and are prepared to make decisions as a whole, destroying dictatorships across the globe and giving industrialized nations cause to rethink their actions as a collective. Across the world, people are becoming more connected than ever before as traditional hierarchies break down and “flatten” out (Friedman, 2007). This phenomenon has officially invaded public education, one of the last bastions of strict-hierarchy, through the form of the professional learning community (PLC). The author of this dissertation personally is experiencing and living through this transition as he writes these words. This literature review will outline a brief sampling of the empirical research on PLCs and then explain, per the literature, what a PLC is and what it is not. Finally, it will end with an explanation of what a researcher would want to look for in simplest terms if he were trying to determine if schools were operating as a PLC per the literature.

#### **The Empirical Research on PLCs**

Most of the research on PLCs has been qualitative but some of this research has been quantitative. This section will outline some of the literature concerning university research on the subject. Most studies have been qualitative given the nature of the field.



For this reason, quantitative research is over represented in this review as the author of this dissertation had less from which to choose. Additionally, most of the researches on PLCs qualifying as empirical were published after 2005. Prior to this time, most of the literature on the subject was marketing in nature. The reason for this was the concept was so novice that universities simply did not have enough time to conduct and publish peer-reviewed studies. As a result, for-profit companies wrote about the PLC concept faster than academia.

### **A Review of the Qualitative and Mixed Literature**

In her primarily qualitative review of the literature, Hord gives several positive results and a few possible negative results arising from PLCs (Hord, 1997). She notes the positives for teachers include reduced isolation, more mission orientation, powerful teacher learning, more satisfied teachers and a host of other similar positives. Students enjoy a decreased dropout rate, lower absenteeism, large academic gains and smaller achievement gaps. Hord mentioned some negatives, such as a then somewhat-held belief that a professional work environment meant a tougher go at it for the students. Keeping in mind this was research done on the parts of PLCs as the term had not yet fully developed and not all of the anecdotal evidence was positive, most of the evidence was positive and there was support for encouraging PLCs as early as 1997. In fact, the need for PLCs was so great that Hord would go on to develop the “School Professional Staff as Learning Community” inventory (Hord, 1999).

Hord was by no means the last writer to use qualitative data spliced with quantitative research to argue for PLC implementation. Another set of researchers went so far as to declare PLCs vital based on recent and historical reform efforts (Hughes

&Kritsonis, 2006). Their argument is that PLCs provide the action orientation and continuous improvement needed to meet such goals as those given in the “No Child Left Behind” legislation. Referring to a host of other writers and researchers, these writers declare that given the times in which we live, concentrating on learning through collaboration is more vital than ever before. According to Hughes and Kritsonis, the time for PLCs has simply come and an organization not embracing them is simply out of the times and in trouble (2006).

Other qualitative research has shown that such structures are effective but leadership needs to tailor programs carefully to individual settings (Phillips, 2003). In this case, a researcher studied an effective learning community located in a middle school. The researcher gave specific reasons for the success of the program. These reasons centered on the characteristics of the teachers. In this case, the teachers were proactive in seeing out research-based practices and tailoring them to their practices. This study showed, among other things, that the effectiveness of such communities comes out of the faculty.

Several qualitative dissertations have been published on the subject in the last year. One study using multiple sources has shown participants perceive a higher sense of efficacy (Herrington, 2011). Another study showed teachers were positive about PLCs but that inconsistent implementation procedures can have a negative impact on PLC effectiveness (Akopoff, 2011). A third qualitative study showed the importance of a principal encouraging such things as teacher input into curriculum, grade level collaboration, and other items inherent in a PLC to the development of a PLC (Reimer, 2011).

## **A Review of the Quantitative Literature**

While the researchers so far have mainly mentioned historical and other qualitative reasons for implementing PLCs, several quantitative studies do exist. Because quantitative studies often take longer than literature reviews, many of these studies are just starting to come out. It was not until 1997 that people really began to think about PLCs as a topic of study and really, it was not until the year 2000 that such study began to become widespread. For this reason, quantitative type work that looked at PLCs as a whole was not widely available until around 2003.

In 2003, a study was released on 83 educators (Huffman & Jacobson, 2003). The results of this study showed that the five core processes identified by Hord(1997) had existed in these educators' schools at least some of the time. The results also showed a perceived value associated with these processes by the educators most of the time. On a four-point scale, researchers rated the values of these processes between 3.28 and 3.7 as far as adding value to the educational experience. The authors state that teachers who have greater perceptions of a PLC have greater opportunities for success.

Some quantitative dissertations have been recently published as well. In one case, it was showed that a positive relationship existed between the perception of a PLC and positive student achievement (Ireland, 2011). Another study used positive correlations between the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) (long form) developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk-Hoy and the School Professional Staff as Learning Community (SPSLCQ) instrument developed by Hord (1999) to show the PLC as a positive school reform model (Romeo, 2011). Another dissertation study has shown

strong positive relationships between the characteristics of a PLC and teacher efficacy (Hardin, 2011).

One group of researchers studied how a PLC grew in a collaborative action research (CAR) group studying a suburban middle school (Balach& Szymanski, 2003). While doing their action research, group members noticed that a PLC had developed in their midst. A version of the “School Professional Staff as Learning Community” instrument developed by Hord(1999) and mentioned earlier was administered to group members along with an instrument developed earlier to measure LC components. The measurements determined that the group was a PLC and an LC. The authors concluded that a CAR group just about had to be a PLC. Collaboration, inquiry, reflective dialogue, and other aspects are vital to the success of both PLCs and CARs. This shows that in some instances, particularly in small groups such as CARs, that such a PLC structure is vital. One question arises here: *Does this principle need to be applied to other small groups of professionals such as teachers in schools of choice?*

### **Conclusion of Empirical Literature Review**

Empirical literature on the subject is growing fast. Most of it is qualitative but researchers are finding creative ways to do some quantitative research. The literature seems to have a theme that PLCs are an effective school-reform model. The difficulty though is that the literature on the subject is often inconsistent as to what it is measuring as a PLC. The next section will attempt to clarify the PLC.

## **A Description of PLCs**

The remainder of this literature review will provide a description of the literature of PLCs and trace the development of the two main PLC models. The phenomenon of the PLC will be differentiated from similar phenomena such as “Learning Organizations” (LOs), “Constructivism,” “Learning Communities” (LCs), “Communities of Practice” (CPs), “Professional Communities” (PCs), “Small Learning Communities” (SLCs), “Knowledge Communities” (KCs), and “School-Based Learning” (SBL). While these concepts pull from ideas going back to the Renaissance, their articulation is a relatively new phenomenon. The earliest mention of any of these concepts located for this literature review was the year the author was born, 1968 (Miller, 1968). The final portion of this literature review will be an overview of research on PLCs. This review represents an effort to determine, as closely as possible, what a PLC is according to the literature, and to organize the various definitions, conditions, concepts and ideas into a more concise picture of a PLC. A theme emerging from this literature review is one of a concept currently disseminating, but not in its original, intended form or forms. The concept of a PLC has spread from academics such as Hord (1997), DuFour and Eaker (1998) studying effective school administration in practitioners. As it has spread, it has come to mean different things to different people. As this review will show, the term has even begun to mean different things to the original authors on the subject. A PLC is a personal vision. Personal visions are often not imposable upon other people. People bring different values and beliefs to other people’s visions and will often interpret those visions differently (Phillips, 2007, p. 5-6).

### **What is a Professional Learning Community?**

There is some disagreement over what exactly constitutes a PLC. There is general agreement about most of the broad characteristics or aspects of a PLC. However, a scrutiny of the literature suggests minor disagreements between researchers. Two schools emerge when one reads the literature on PLCs. The first school centers on Hord (1997) and consists of such persons as Lindsey, Jungwirth, Pahl, Lindsey (2009); Huffman and Jacobson (2003); Hipp (2003) and others. This school concentrates on the *community* part of the PLC. The second school centers on DuFour's (1998) work and consists of such persons as his wife, Rebecca, Eaker and others (2005). This school concentrates on the *learning* aspect of the PLC. Most literature on the subject is written by cohorts from either one of these groups, few literary pieces will mix the two groups. A second them emerging from a review of the literature suggest that as the two cohorts further studied and contemplated the PLC phenomenon, they made small changes to their respective definitions.

While the idea of a PLC may be older than the term "Professional Learning Community," a brief search of available literature shows Hord(1997) as being at least one of the earliest writers describing this concept using the terms "professional learning community."Hord describes PLCs as "communities of continuous inquiry and practice(1997). According to this source, PLCs have the following characteristics:

1. *Leadership that supports a collegial relationship with and among those led.*
2. *A community with shared values and vision.*
3. *Learning that occurs collectively as a community.*
4. *Professional interactions that support the work being done.*
5. *A shared personal practice deliberately created by a formalized structure.*

A PLC is a place where continuous learning occurs according to this source. Hord also makes it clear that a PLC is not a program or a prescription. A PLC is a process.

In a later work, Hord (2004) describes the PLC characteristics used for the Creating Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement (CCCII) project. These are listed by Hord as:

1. *Supportive and shared leadership.*
2. *Shared values and vision.*
3. *Collective learning and application of learning.*
4. *Supportive conditions.*
5. *Shared practice.*

For her CCCII project she has dropped the characteristics of a “collegial relationship, professional interactions,” and a “formalized structure” and added “shared leadership,” and an “application of learning.” In an even later source, she changes “shared values and vision” to “shared beliefs, values, and vision” (Hord & Sommers, 2008). By adding the word *belief*, she has changed her description of PLCs to include the acceptance of the same truths by all or most teachers in a PLC. It is important to note the differences in these characteristics as these characteristics potentially vary and would have to be considered in any study of PLCs.

Another relatively early group of writers describes PLCs existing in educational settings as having three *big ideas* (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005). The first of these ideas is that educators in PLCs work to ensure that students *learn* and are not merely “taught.” In other words, the educator is constantly checking for understanding and adjusting the lesson as required ensuring the student *gets it*. DuFour, Eaker and DuFour (2005) *l* diverge in their writing from the Hord definition in this first “big” idea. Hord does not mention the need for a PLC to ensure students *learn* but it is difficult to believe she would disagree with this. Hord simply concentrates more on teacher-to-teacher interaction than student to teacher interaction does. Secondly, a PLC is a culture of collaboration. Teachers communicate, share ideas, and essentially synergize. The final “big idea” ties in the first, but at more of a macro level. This idea states that PLCs focus on results and relatively less on process. In other words, data drives instruction. DuFour *et al* have also proposed lists similar to those proposed by Hord. Like Hord, the DuFour lists also use differing terms across time. The first list of DuFour of PLC characteristics was published in 1998 as follows:

1. *Shared mission, vision and values.*
2. *Collective Inquiry.*
3. *Collaborative teams.*
4. *Action orientation and experimentation.*
5. *Continuous improvement.*
6. *Results orientation.*



In 2008, the DuFour, DuFour and Eaker list changes as follows:

1. *Shared mission (purpose), vision, (clear direction), values (collective commitments), and goals (indicators, timelines, targets)- all focused on student learning*
2. *A collaborative culture with a focus on learning.*
3. *Collective inquiry into best practice and current reality.*
4. *Action orientation: Learning by doing.*
5. *A Commitment to continuous improvement.*
6. *Results orientation.*

The second list adds more conditions, which would need to be implemented in a school before that school, could be considered a fully functioning PLC. The DuFour and DuFour definition assumes the main role of the principal is to create the conditions that allow a faculty collectively to create a PLC or PLCs with the goal of high levels of learning for the students (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). The principal is not primarily concerned with individual processes; rather the concern is with the results, or student learning.

Other researchers have given other definitions which seem to align with the main two lists and most of the others but differ somewhat. Other definitions include:

- *Astuto's definition of a PLC as "a place in which the teachers and administrators of a school community seek and share learning, and act on that learning" (in Hord, 1997).*
- *MacMullan's definition of a PLC as "the inclusion of the whole faculty" in decision making (in Hord, 1997).*

- *Fuller's definition of a PLC as a place where "individuals provide the most effective route for accomplishing systematic change" (in Hord, 1997).*

Overlaying these multiple definitions is the fact that individual educators can belong to several different PLCs at once (Moore & Shaw, 2000).

Finally, practitioners have given definitions of PLCs. One website poster writes that a PLC's main goal is to answer questions dealing with student expectations and what happens when student's expectations fall short (Hartsoch, personal communication, September 26, 2006). Another poster compares PLCs to a family (Hartsoch, personal communication, September 26, 2006). Still another refers to it as a "support network" (Hartsoch, personal communication, September 26, 2006). These personal communications were posted to an educational leadership course electronic message board taught by Phillips and attended by the author of this study. One researcher when speaking of the efforts of her research team noted, "In a sense we are, ourselves, engaging in creating a new professional learning community (Hipp et al., 2003). She was referring to their specific efforts to complete a research project. All these definitions are probably correct, but as a whole, they give a blurry picture. The picture they give is of a concept that appears to be morphing before the eyes of its creators. With most of these later definitions, a PLC would seem to appear from nowhere and not require the deliberate structure Hord et al describes.

### **What a Professional Learning Community is Not**

Other concepts often become merged into the concept of the PLC. "Learning Organizations"(Senge, 1990), "Constructivism"(Lambert et al, 2002), "Learning Communities"(Smith et al, 2004), "Communities of Practice" (Wenger, 1998),

“Professional Communities” (McLaughlin& Talbert, 2001), “Small Learning Communities” (Oxley, 2001) and “School-Based Learning” (Louise& Kruse, 1995) are some of the concepts which should be covered in a review of the literature of PLCs. These models are slightly different from the PLC model but share many characteristics or conditions and may have either influenced common definitions of PLCs, been influenced by PLCs, or both. In some cases, these similar concepts may be a part of what goes into a PLC, but in no case could it be said that a PLC is part of any other these other concepts. The concept of a PLC is simply too narrow in scope. The concepts often come from different sub specializations and can blur the meaning of a PLC to some degree.

The first of these related concepts, “learning organizations”(Senge, 1990), predates literature on PLCs by about eight years. In this model, a “learning organization” is an organization that uses “systems thinking” as a means essentially to integrate most of the aspects mentioned in a PLC. The aspects or characteristics of learning organizations that Peter Senge (1990) mentions are:

1. *Personal Mastery.*
2. *Shared Vision.*
3. *Mental Models.*
4. *Team Learning.*
5. *Systems Thinking.*

A comparison of these aspects with the ones proposed later by people like Hord et al and DuFour et al clearly shows a relationship. All these models discuss shared visions and beliefs, or mental models, and team learning. In fact, after Hord and DuFour et al published their models, Senge, Cambron-McCabe, Lucas, Smith, Dutton and Kleiner

published an updated version of his model, which could be used in schools (2000). Both Hord and DuFour et al heavily quote Senge, which shows a clear sharing of ideas from the original author of books on “learning organizations” to the authors of early PLC books. A review of the literature of PLCs would be incomplete without mentioning Senge, even though he does not write about PLCs per se.

As mentioned earlier in this review, people have been writing about concepts related to the PLC since at least the Renaissance. A term often used was *Constructivism*. DuFour writes about the need to constantly gather information on learning, test it, try to create better ways to implement it, test those better ways, and then look for better ways to improve upon what is learned (DuFour, 1998). This reflection on action would require the shared personal practice of which Hord writes. These ideas seem to come out of the concept of constructivism and are by no means original to the concept of the PLC. Constructivism is a concept that literally goes back to the Renaissance. Vico noted in 1720 that “verum esse ipsum factum” which translates “as the true itself is made” (Von Glasersfeld, 1981). Vico wrote that early civilization developed out of a common sense. We literally learned to speak from each other and our language grew increasingly more complex as we traded ideas about communication.

Educational researchers have been writing about the concept of the teacher as a life-long learner since at least 1938 (Dewey, 1938). Later, Jean Piaget wrote that we continually learn through a series of phases in life (Piaget, 1968) and Lev Vygotsky is famous for noting that we learn by playing together (Kozulin & Gindis, 2003). In short, the literature is very clear that people learn continually from each other and are constantly reconstructing our knowledge. Strangely, Piaget, Vygotsky and, with one exception the

author of this study could find (DuFour, 2008), Dewey are not referred to in the literature specifically written on PLCs.

Constructivists that are more recent write about the need for the leader to weave whole cloth from the “threads of different colors, textures and lengths” (Lambert et al, 2002, p. 2). This school of thought points out that communities are formed from patterns of learning and relationships, and human growth is based on the principles of interdependence. Clearly, there is a constructivist edge to PLCs, but “constructionism” does not explain the need for professionalism or the need for collective decision making and action as described in the PLC literature. The teacher, as well as the community, is certainly a life-long learner in the PLC, but he is also involved in actual decisions of his organization. “Constructionism” only speaks to the learning piece of the PLC. This is not to say a constructionist would disagree with the need for people to take action on what they learn, it simply means “constructionism” does not address what is done with the learning beyond the fact it used for further learning.

“Learning communities” (LCs) closely relates to PLCs but is not the same thing. An LC is a group of people who are actively engaged in learning from each other. They mostly have gained favor in organizations of higher learning (Smith et al, 2004). Nowhere is it said in the definition of a learning community that decisions are actually made together. It could be said that PLCs are LCs but LCs are not necessarily PLCs. A significant portion of this literature review will differentiate the two later.

“Communities of Practice” (CP) are yet another concept closely related to PLCs, which need to be considered when studying PLCs. In a CP, people, professional and otherwise, come together for specific reasons to focus on specific issues or problems

(Wenger, 1998). Etienne Wenger wrote his seminal work about the time seminal work was being written for PLCs. It is difficult to know how much the two influenced each other. Still, it is even more difficult to imagine there was no back and forth influence or at least influence from a common source given the closeness of the two concepts. Perhaps the common source is Senge. Wenger writes that in a CP, participants share common purpose, leadership is shared and personal meaning is brought from a personal participation. He is writing about more than schools, but the similarities are unavoidable. He does have some differences in that he believes these are more *ad hoc* than organized groups of professionals.

The idea of “Professional Communities” (PCs) does not appear as much in the literature as some of the other models mentioned here but appears to have influenced some of the later work of both Hord and DuFour et al as they quote one of the sources of this concept, McLaughlin and Talbert, in their later works. McLaughlin describes PCs in multiple forms, changing over time, and between cultures (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). McLaughlin and Talbert make the argument that teachers need to be satisfied professionally to be successful. They note the following conditions if present make a successful PC:

1. *Shared norms and beliefs.*
2. *Collegial relations.*
3. *Collaborative cultures.*
4. *Reflective practice.*
5. *Ongoing technical inquiry regarding effective practice.*
6. *Professional growth.*

7. *Mutual support.*

8. *Obligation.*

The above McLaughlin and Talbert list of PC conditions has not been as widely used in the literature and the authors leave off the term *learning* from their title. Still, it does not take a close look to see the similarity between these authors and what is being described in the PLC. Certainly, these authors add more support to the idea of professionalism in PLCs.

“*Small Learning Communities*” (SLCs) is yet another concept closely related to PLCs. These also emerged in the late 1990s. In an SLC, students are given a rigorous and relevant curriculum by a small group of faculty who advocate for the learner (Oxley, 2001). Like a PLC, an SLC has shared values and power structure. In an SLC, a small group of educators are assigned the same small group of students, often between 150 to 250 students, and will remain the teachers and administrators of those students for the duration of the students’ tenure at the facility, be it a high school or middle school. In many ways, the faculty of such a school would be hard-wired to behave as a PLC. They would have the same off/planning times and would meet daily. They would work around a similar school concept such as a business academy or a health/sciences academy. There are some minor differences between a PLC and an SLC. An SLC is more akin to the DuFour et al definition than the Hord definition as a greater emphasis is placed on the relationship between the student and the teacher. Similarly, an SLC places much more emphasis on structure than does the DuFour et al definition. These are minor differences and in each case, there is a strong chance the PLC authors would agree with the

importance of a strong teacher to student relationship or a need for structure. These are just simply not mentioned in their respective literatures.

“School-Based Learning” (SBL) is a concept which came out in the middle 1990s and is quoted in both Hord and the DuFour groups early works. A discussion of the literature concerning PLCs would not be complete without discussing this early effort. SBL is a model in which teachers move from a traditional, isolated practice into a more collaborative situation (Louise & Kruse, 1995). Clearly, SBL is one of the many concepts from which the idea of the PLC would eventually emerge. The aspects of this model as follows:

1. *Openness to improvement within an environment that supports risk taking.*
2. *Trust and respect.*
3. *A cognitive and skill base that reflects effective teaching.*
4. *Supportive instructional leadership.*
5. *A focus on socialization in which the vision of PL is imparted to new teachers.*

SBL shares the conditions of shared sense of responsibility, collaboration, organization support, reflection and others with the PLC model. The words used are slightly different but a clear commonality in the models becomes evident when one looks at both in its parts and especially holistically.

So far, the literature review has shown differing visions of a PLC and some of the writings from cohorts of the creators of the PLC model. It should have become obvious that the concept is not well defined across researchers and is often confused with other, related models. Given this blurry definition of a PLC and its relationship to so many other concepts, a picture arises of a concept that is temporal and site-specific in nature. PLCs



can appear from nowhere (Balach& Szymanski, 2003), disappear as quickly, be there when needed, and unfortunately not be there when needed. A leader can do certain things to encourage their existence, but in the end they are based on the components that make them, individual teachers who can possibly, if left alone, organically create them (Craig, 2012). With all this confusion about an exact definition of what makes a PLC, there is concern that this concept has “reached a critical juncture, one well known to those who have witnessed the fate of other well-intentioned school reform efforts” (DuFour, 2005, p. 31). Despite all this confusion, a picture emerges from the literature of a PLC as being a concept with the goals of cooperation and learning, regardless of how one achieves these goals.

### **Moving Toward a Clearer Definition**

As already mentioned, defining what exactly are the components of a PLC can be problematic. This section will attempt to explore the literature and evolution of PLCs by reconciling the latest sets of characteristics offered by Hord and Sommers(2008) and DuFour, DuFour and Eaker( 2008) as best as possible with as little meaning loss as possible. Only the latest sets of conditions or aspects in both cases are used for two reasons. First, it is felt these are the lists, which have had the most research and contemplation. Second, trying to reconcile every list would be very difficult given the incongruities mentioned earlier between writings of the same author over time.

Obviously, it is impossible to reconcile the belief of Hord that a PLC is a community process with the DuFour et al contention that a PLC has a results orientation based upon learning. However, most of the other more recent proposed aspects are close

enough that reconciliation could be possible. More recently, Hord has proposed yet another list for what constitutes a PLC (Lindsey et al, 2009):

1. *Professional*
2. *Learning*
3. *Community*

This section will attempt to refine the definition of each of these conditions or aspects using only existing literature. It would be impossible to incorporate every idea ever conceived concerning PLCs, communities of continuous inquiry, or related topics into a single, elegant model. The literature is simply too vast. However, by concentrating on the two most common models and adding support from related, equally common models, and incorporating less-known PLC models, a compromised model could be discovered that Hord, DuFour et al and most authors on the subject could mostly agree. Following is a concise definition of each of the new conditions Hord et al proposes with their literary support.

**Professional.** Merriam-Webster On-Line defines “professional” as “of, relating to, or characteristic of a profession.” A Profession according to the same source is a “calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation.” Merriam-Webster notes further in its definition that there is a difference between a professional and an amateur and that difference is that one is a paid vocation while the other is an unpaid avocation. It would follow then that for a PLC to be operating, it would have to consist of individuals working at the activity of education for pay. Using this definition, all schools would meet this qualification of a PLC. The only schools that would be disqualified from being a PLC are perhaps a few parochial,

volunteer schools staffed by retirees or others who donate their time. One would think it is the term "professional" which makes a PLC different from other learning communities, but a review of the literature shows this is not the case. Only one set of authors (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001) concentrate on this concept, but for the most part, it is left to the imagination. It is the next two aspects or terms in the title of a PLC that make it different. The term "professional" was used, either intentionally or unintentionally, to set PLCs apart from other learning communities. Because the other two terms have more meaning, the remainder of this literature review will concentrate on them.

**Learning.** Merriam-Webster On-Line defines "learning" as either "knowledge or skill acquired by instruction or study or as a modification of a behavioral tendency by experience." This is a very simple definition until one begins to look at the literature written concerning a PLC. Learning is central to both of the major definitions of a PLC under consideration. Hord et al mentions it in both her earlier definition (Hord, 1997) and her later definition (Hord & Sommers, 2008) as her third characteristic of a PLC. Her thoughts on learning are that it happens in a PLC collectively and is applied collectively. DuFour, DuFour and Eaker concentrate more on the learning aspect of a PLC (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008). Five of their six conditions concentrate on the learning aspect.

When they use the term "learning" in their title of PLC, the authors mean more than simply something is learned. They mean that learning is applied. In this case, the term "learning" either is a misnomer, is being misused or is being underused. Hord and Sommers do not simply say that collective learning occurs in a PLC, they are very clear in stating that learning is applied (2008). DuFour, DuFour and Eaker *are* even more precise when they say that learning is collective, collaborative, continual, and it is action

and results oriented (DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008). In other words, in both models, learning drives decision-making and the learning occurs throughout the school faculty and administration. It is very democratic.

**Community.** Merriam-Webster On-Line defines “community” as a “unified body of individuals.” Hord concentrate on this aspect of a PLC while DuFour et al mention it in only two of their characteristics. As with the term “learning,” the term *community* does not fully describe what Hord and DuFour *et al* actually put in their literature. In this case, Hord *et al* provide the more in-depth descriptor. Community is a process of back and forth. Educators see themselves as professionals, as professionals they have a practice, and as with other professionals they share that practice. They support each other and share major decisions once discussion has occurred. Both schools of thought say the community has a shared set of visions and values. The “community is not threads of different colors, textures, and lengths” (Lambert et al, 2002) as the constructionist would say, but moving as a group. They think alike because they have developed together. The community may be heterogeneous in biographical and biological background, but they have come to think alike as they have worked together and communicated in depth not just face to face but also on all those tweets and other social networking postings. They want the same things for their students and are exploring ways to meet those ends.

**Learning and Community.** Not considering the aspect of professionalism, it could then be said a PLC is a group of educators who learn together and apply what they learn to decisions they can agree upon, for the most part. It is therefore impossible to separate community from learning. The two become one. The community learns and takes actions on what is learned. The community changes and further learning will be dependent upon those changes. There is simply no word in the English language to describe this phenomenon. The closest word in any language that the author of this literature review can think of is the Japanese word “hourensou,” which simply means to report frequently to one’s supervisors and to be open to feedback from them (Wordpress, 2010). Still, “hourensou” leaves out the term professional and has more to do with hierarchy than with equality. A single word for this concept does not exist and the closest two-word combination, “learning community” is already taken. At the same time, it has already been shown that “constructivism” does not provide us with a single unifying term either.

### **A Clearer Definition**

A clearer definition then would have to include more than the words “professional learning community” did. Included in a meaningful definition would be the need for the three words, especially “learning and community,” to be intertwined. “Professional” remains important as it implies a specific knowledge not available to the average layperson. Finally, the need for real decision-making power of a democratic group through application would need to be included. Based on this review of the literature, a clearer definition would include the following conditions or aspects:

1. *Professional educators collectively responsible for their practice through their decisions.*
2. *Learning as community and having that learning applied.*
3. *Community that has learned common professional commitments and practices.*

Anyone wanting to determine if a faculty is operating as a professional learning community would have to look for these characteristic in a school faculty. Such communities might not have been culturally and technologically possible prior to the “flattening” of the world (Friedman, 2007) but following the information and social networking revolutions mentioned earlier a researcher on the subject might be able to see these PLCs conditions flourishing to some degree in every school campus.

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Methods**

As the literature review has shown, PLCs contain multiple and often differently defined elements. For this reason, no two organizations implement PLCs in exactly the same fashion making quantitative comparisons difficult at best. However, some such comparisons can be made within an organization over time. In this case, an in-depth qualitative narration about the faculty of the high school under study concerning its PLCs will be developed from data obtained from focus groups and closed-ended surveys to determine if the school under study is operating effectively as a PLC, and if the faculty and staff see value to this structure. “Effective” here means there is a perception among faculty and staff that the school is operating as a PLC and that the structure is valued as such. The goal was to provide a rich narrative of the PLCs at the particular school under study and match activities of these PLCs against the literature. A secondary goal will be to determine if there has been a change in perceptions among the faculty, and to lesser extent the community surrounding the high school under study, as they have implemented a PLC. Such a study will require multiple data sources (Fitzpatrick, Sanders & Worthen, 2004). Information has been collected from surveys, focus groups and publicly available information such as AEIS data and news media.

#### **The Researcher**

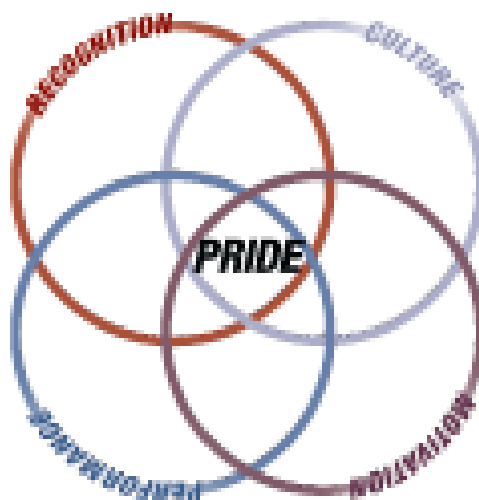
The author of this report is a high school teacher in another Texas district who has only had contact with this district and school under study for the purposes of his research. He has had significant contact with the principal of the school under study as the two were in the same doctoral cohort at university. This contact included approximately 20

doctoral courses and various cohort-building activity sponsored by the university. The researcher was the person responsible for conducting focus groups and otherwise obtaining all data for the final report. He has monitored survey completion as required for the project. It has been the task of the researcher to collect and organize responses and all data with the oversight of his advisor and committee. He has been the one responsible for preparing the final report.

### **The Survey Instrument**

The main instrument used to determine correlation between PLC implementation and changed faculty perceptions is The Pride Factor™ created by Jostens™ Incorporated and administered by Gardener Seaholm and Associates (Jostens™, name repetition intentional). The Pride Factor™ measures four areas that researchers from Jostens© believe to be critical to the performance of a school: (1) recognition; (2) culture; (3) performance and (4) motivation (see Figure 1). On February 15, 2011, faculty, administration, students, parents and other community stakeholders were asked questions dealing with culture, motivation, recognition and performance. This instrument was given again on April 9, 2012. While other factors may have been the cause, at least a correlation can be presented showing either perceived improvement or lack thereof in the school during the first year of full PLC implementation.





*Figure 1. The Pride Factor™ Model*  
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Jostens'© marketing material located on their website([http://www.jostens.com/educators/edu\\_svcs\\_cp\\_pride.html](http://www.jostens.com/educators/edu_svcs_cp_pride.html).) notes that “The Pride Factor” was established by Jostens as a result of research concerning the key issues affecting schools as identified by key professional organizations (Jostens). The organizations cited by Jostens© are:

- *CCSSO - Council of Chief State School Officers*
- *US Department of Education Legislation: NCLB - No Child Left Behind*
- *Breaking Ranks - study by the Commission on the Restructuring of the American High School*
- *NASSP - National Association of Secondary School Principals*
- *NSDC - National Staff Development Council*
- *ASCD - Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development*
- *ISTE (Intl Society for Technology Education's NETS - National Education Technology Standards)*

- *ISTE (Intl Society for Technology Education's TSSA -Technology Standards for School Administrators)*
- *NEA - National Education Association*
- *NSDC - National Staff Development Council's*
- *NBPTS - National Board of Professional Teaching Standards*
- *NCATE - National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education*
- *PTA - Parent Teachers Association*

In addition to the instrument mentioned above, the researcher employed Survey Monkey™ early in his study to inquire as to faculty member perceptions on various components of a PLC (Appendix B). This survey asked many questions which would be used in the focus groups for the purposes triangulation. Some of the questions in the initial survey were abandoned while new ones were added based on the responses of the initial survey.

### **The Focus Groups**

The purpose of the focus groups was to obtain cultural richness the surveys were unable to capture so that questions can be answered as to whether or not the faculty under study sees itself in PLC terms and to determine to what extent the school operates as a PLC. Such focus groups allow the researcher to triangulate different narrations by seeing the reactions of focus group members to the answers given by other focus group members (Fitzpatrick et al, 2004). The transcripts of these focus groups are contained in Appendix A of this proposal. Focus groups took place throughout the day of January 16, 2012. Each group consisted of a house or department, depending on scheduling, and answered questions based on earlier surveys, PLC conditions, and other issues, which arose during

each session. Some focus groups were asked questions that other focus groups were not asked. Initially, the researcher has requested Supervisors and their subordinates not be placed in the same group to avoid bias. School administration required an administrator present for each focus group. Questions were given in order of importance in case time does not permit an answer to all questions in all focus groups; however, the researcher had enough time to ask all questions he had prepared. The proceedings were electronically recorded using an AT&T Smartphone, transcribed and analyzed to attempt answer the above questions.

### **Time-Line**

As far as a time-line, the researcher obtained approval from The University of Houston Human Subjects department before commencement of the focus groups. Initial survey questions were answered in January and February of 2011, using the Internet based survey tool called Survey Monkey™. This survey was conducted for purposes of the candidacy paper created by the researcher and was based on doctoral coursework surveys conducted by the researcher in two other school districts and the literature covering PLC aspects. Further site-specific input was provided for these questions by the principal of the school under study. Archival data obtained from these initial surveys appear where they were found to be germane to the narration. Focus groups building on these original surveys took place on January 16, 2012. A contingency was requested in the Human Subjects application for follow-up focus groups but these did not occur. “The Pride Factor”™ administered February 15 to all stakeholders of the high school under study. It was administered again on April 9, 2012. Analysis of data occurred after all data

had been collected and resulted in the themes of the PLC communities identified in Chapter Four. Transcript of focus groups are found in Appendix A

### **The Universe**

The largest population from which data was gathered is the teachers of the school under study. There is a smaller population of support staff such as librarians and teaching assistants. No group that is involved in the education of students at the high school under study was ignored as any PLC, by definition, includes a community of all educators. However, this study concentrated on exempt employees such as teachers, librarians and counselors as they represent the decision-making aspect of the educational and PLC process. Data needed to be gathered from classroom aids and clerks who interact with students, but not to the level as it does from those in decision making, professional categories. The reason for hourly employee limited input is the fact that they do not tend to make the major decisions influencing students, but they do make minor decisions. In rare cases, hourly employees can have a major impact on some students so they should at least be surveyed. Information gathered from these stakeholders will tell administrative leadership the attitudes and beliefs of teachers and support staff in regards to the PLC envisioned by the leadership of the high school under study. All stakeholders in the community were considered via The Pride Factor™ surveys and media to determine community perceptions of the school. The faculty of the school under study was the main component of the universe and therefore most analysis involved them.

## **Data Analysis**

Data analysis consisted of two parts. The first part sought to determine the correlation between PLC implementation and the categories surveyed in The Pride Factor™. The second part dealt with the focus groups and depended greatly on the situation. These two parts were not performed chronologically as results from the correlation might have led to further interviewing.

Once focus group narrations were gathered and patterns determined, concepts were organized into similar coding structures and compared to the aspects of PLCs as mentioned in the literature review. Such research is a process, which goes from the development of field texts to research texts (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). It was difficult to determine exactly what form these patterns would take until the researcher had a chance to perform the focus groups and analyze the resulting transcripts. Often focus group members failed to answer questions as posed but otherwise provided valuable insight into the development of the PLCs under study. These field texts would begin with the raw focus group discussion transcripts and previous surveys. Narrations were taken from the transcripts and similar topics were compared for patterns. Nine themes were then induced based on these narration patterns. These themes formed the bases of Chapter Five.

The researcher interpreted these bits of information to try to form field texts with the intent of finding patterns in what focus group members said and what the PLC literature says. These were then organized into research texts that were used to form the final narrations, which would describe a campus either working as a PLC or not working as a PLC according to the literature.

As mentioned, the initial part of data analysis will use quantitative data from The Pride Factor™ to determine if there is a positive or negative correlation between PLC implementation in the school under study and the perception of the five groups mentioned earlier, with a concentration on the faculty group. A correlation simply observes two variables, as they exist naturally in the environment (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2004). This data either provides triangulation with what faculty members say in the focus groups or will raise further questions. The results of these correlations then are explained as part of the narrative described in the previous paragraph to provide a rich narrative description of this phenomenon from which may emerge further mysteries.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

The results show a faculty that values many of the aspects of a PLC, does not fully understand what a PLC is about and at the same time is beginning to see their school as less effective. It is not possible at this time to say if the school is actually less effective because no comparable Texas Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) data is available but the AEIS data shown in Appendix C does not appear to show a school performing differently from similar Texas schools. This chapter will detail the relevant parts of the Pride Factor™ surveys and then give a detailed narration in the form of nine themes developed from the focus group transcripts found in Appendix A.

#### **The Pride Factor™ Surveys**

To determine stakeholder perceptions, administration of the school under study had stakeholders complete the on-line Pride Factor™ assessment on February 15, 2011, and again on April 9, 2012. This assessment measures four critical areas that Jostens© researchers believe to be critical to the performance of a school. These areas are recognition; culture, performance and motivation (see Figure 1). Key stakeholders assessed both times were administration, faculty, students and parents. Due to the length of data obtained, the proprietary nature of the data, and the fact this paper primarily concerns the development of PLCs among the faculty of the high school under study, only data obtained for all constituent groups and faculty will be presented here. Data will be in summarized format. Complete data is available at the Jostens© on-line assessment site but can only be accessed by school administration. This information was provided to

the researcher by administration under the agreement that school identifying information not be made public.

In all cases, each constituent group was asked 39 proprietary questions and asked to respond using a 10-point Likert scale. To protect the integrity of the test, most of these questions are not made directly available to the public other than indirectly in analysis sections of reports. In these reports, complete questions lists are not made available and are therefore not available for this report. Generally, these questions ask participants their perceptions of the school and environment. Ten questions are asked for the critical area of culture. Average responses are then added to give a score of between zero percent and 100%. Eleven questions are asked of the critical area of motivation and converted to a 100% scale by dividing the result by eleven and multiplying that result by 10. The critical areas of recognition and performance are similarly converted. In the two later cases, since each area asks nine questions, the results are divided by nine and multiplied by 10. Therefore, the results will always provide a score of between zero percent and 100%, which then can be compared between different administrations of the instrument. A graphic is then provided to the consumer of the study consisting of the four rings shown in Figure 1. The closer the four rings are to the center, or in other words the closer they are to 100%, the better the school is perceived as performing by the stakeholders being assessed.

**Data provided from all constituent groups.** In total, 864 stakeholders were assessed during the February 15, 2011, assessment and 1,138 were assessed during the April 9, 2012, assessment. The increase is because a fourth grade was added to the school during the period increasing student responses from 747 to 1,011. Stakeholders included



administration, faculty, students, parents and other community members. While no comparison is available to say what a “good” score is, the trend is a slight drop in perceived school performance during the first year of the school operating as a PLC (Table 1). The critical area of perceived culture dropped the furthest by four points. Motivation and performance each dropped by one point. Recognition remained constant.

Table 1: *Pride Factor* <sup>TM</sup> Scores for all Constituent Groups

Critical Area	February 15, 2011 Score	April 9, 2012 Score
Culture	65%	61%
Motivation	61%	60%
Recognition	60%	60%
Performance	63%	62%

**Data provided from faculty only.** Sixty members of the faculty took part in the February 15, 2011, assessment while 63 took part in the April 9, 2012, assessment. Results show a drop in faculty perceptions much greater than the overage drop presented in the previous section on total constituents. All critical areas saw well over a double-digit drop in faculty perceptions. It was during this time of drop in faculty perceptions that the focus groups detailed in Appendix A and in the section below occurred.

Table 2: *Pride Factor*™ Scores for Faculty Only

Critical Area	February 15, 2011 Score	April 9, 2012 Score
Culture	80%	66%
Motivation	79%	61%
Recognition	78%	63%
Performance	83%	69%

**The Correlation.** In each case, the February 15, 2011, score serves as a pretest and the April 9, 2012, score serves as a posttest to the initial implementations of the PLCs among the faculty. The February date represents a time before PLCs were implemented in the new campus and therefore serve as a measurement to faculty perceptions of school performance within the four critical areas identified by Jostens© before PLC implementation. The April 9 date reveals faculty perceptions after implementation. The Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient for all constituent groups is  $r = 0.6673$  and for the faculty only, it is  $r = 0.8817$ . The closer to zero, the less correlation exists between such variables (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2004). Having a score of negative one or positive one would indicate a perfect correlation. There appears to be a strong correlation between PLC implementation and a drop in faculty perceptions as to the efficacy of the school. A strong, but relatively less strong, correlation exists between all stakeholders.

### **The Focus Groups**

These Pearson correlations clearly do not provide the complete narration as to faculty and stakeholder perceptions of their school. With just this information, it would be impossible to say if PLC implementation caused a drop in perceptions or if some other

condition such as the newness of the campus or administrative turnover was the cause. To answer this question, much broader qualitative questions are required of the faculty and other stakeholders. As mentioned earlier, this study is primarily limited to PLCs within the faculty. Ultimately, four focus groups were conducted on the faculty of the school under study. Three of the focus groups consisted of an entire small learning community, known as a “house” in the school under study and the fourth group consisted of a single academic department. This section will give a detailed explanation of themes derived from the focus group transcripts in Appendix A and notes taken by the facilitator during the execution of the focus groups. From these transcripts and notes, trends have been identified by the researcher. A modified version of the reference system used by the transcription company employing APA format mentioned in the vocabulary section in Chapter 1 (Tigerfish) will be used in this and the following chapter to reference statements made during the focus groups. This modified format is “0:00:00,” with the first digit representing the focus group, the next set of two digits representing minutes into the focus group and the last two digits representing seconds. For instance, “1:12:24” would be twelve minutes and 24 seconds into the first focus group. To protect human subjects, no labels such as houses (SLCs or PLCs), departments, subject taught or other such identifying information will be given to the voices.

Nine themes were identified at the school under study through these focus groups and are identified in Table 3. Other themes could possibly be identified by researchers with different backgrounds from the facilitator and author of this report. Also given in Table 3 is the number of times the researcher noticed narration either supporting the theme or showing evidence the theme is not completely supported. It needs to be

emphasized the researcher made a qualitative decision as to whether or not a particular narration supported the theme or not. Again, other researchers with different experiences might look at the narration differently. In addition, differing number schemes could have been used but the researcher believes the ratios in each case would be similar. For instance, in Theme Four a separate table is used to describe instances in which focus group members made a statement supporting the theme. Each of these statements could have been counted separately, adding five more to the second column in Table 3. However, one would need to add two to column three because two people in that focus group did mention twice that they supported all the meetings, until they were further asked about it later in the focus group. If the researcher had thought along these lines, Theme Four would have approximately 25 in column two and eight in column three. This would still show a clear preference for the department meetings but not the SLC meeting shown in Theme Four. It is very hard to quantify such data and the numbers given below are just approximates for demonstration. Finally, Theme Two and Theme Three could have been merged into a single theme. The same could be said for themes five through seven. Theme Five could have been that despite a recognized mission statement, the faculty of the school under study saw a need for a common direction and was shown to be able to work together. However, the researcher would not have been able to pull specific instances of this combined theme. Themes were chosen only if specific instances could be identified in the transcripts of the focus groups.

Table 3: *Themes Noted in the Transcript with Number of Clearly Discernible Instances of Occurrence.*

Theme	Number of times and references to support.	Number of times theme not supported.
Educators initially appeared nervous about the subject of PLCs.	5	Not applicable
Educators were not clear as to the definition of a PLC.	8	2
Educators confused PLCs with meetings.	18	2
Focus group members believed meetings were an effective part of a PLC for groups with something in common but not for large groups.	4	0
Focus group members did not know their school's mission statement.	4	0
Educators see the need for the common direction called for in a PLC with caveats.	4	0
Educators knew each other well and appeared to work as a PLC.	Constant	
Members of the Focus Groups prefer a results orientation.	4	0 (Although some members might have had a process orientation, this did not come out)
The faculty values the ability to make decisions but they understand the constraints.	3	0

**Theme One: Educators Initially Appeared Nervous About the Subject of PLCs**

The first theme the researcher noticed was that the topic of PLCs was something educators were nervous to discuss, particularly in the earlier focus groups. This theme is also shown in the low response rate from the surveys in Appendix B. Despite the principal requiring the survey to be answered, the return rate was only 10%. A probable but partial explanation for this return rate is that faculty is uncomfortable with this topic. In the opinion of the facilitator, this fear was unfounded as the school principal has a real interest in knowing what the faculty of this school thinks about PLCs as can be witnessed by the fact the facilitator was allowed to conduct these focus groups. The facilitator saw more evidence of this nervousness in the first two focus groups than in the last two. Focus group members were seen by the facilitator talking to other focus group members in the halls between focus groups but can only surmise what the topic of those conversations might have been. Nervousness did subside, in the opinion of the facilitator, following these hallway conversations. An alternative explanation for the decrease in nervousness might be something the assistant principal had brought up to the facilitator before the focus groups. The third focus group contained more individuals who had worked as professionals outside of education and were more direct in their communications. The fourth focus group actually had two or three members in it from the first three focus groups.

The apprehension about discussing PLCs became apparent to the facilitator upon the beginning of the first focus group. The facilitator took notes indicating that many teachers appeared nervous when they learned the focus groups would be recorded. He noticed things such as grimacing faces, which appeared to show nervousness. Toward the

end of the focus group, a member said to the facilitator “I appreciate you coming in. It’s like being fed to the lions.” In this case, the voice was referring to the idea that this had been a subject much discussed in disfavor with members of this focus group. They had entered into the focus group seeing the facilitator in negative terms to the point he had to say earlier on “I am not here to defend PLCs by the way.” (1:39:13). The second focus group began with a voice saying, “Are we on the record or off the record?” (2:00:54). This statement was followed by what the facilitator recorded as “nervous laughter.” When told by the facilitator that he was just trying to get their true feelings on the topic, one voice is heard answering, “honest?” and another is heard saying “Exactly how we feel about it?” These voices seemed unsure about this and were posing their questions almost as a challenge to the facilitator that this was a topic he probably did not want to get into with this particular faculty group. The facilitator then states, “Here is how it is going to work out. I do have it recording.” (2:01:10). The response to this statement is “uh oh.” In this case, several members of the focus group expressed concern over the fact they were going to be discussing PLCs on the record and they were being recorded. Finally, in order to get honest opinions the facilitator felt he had to make the statement, “No one will hear the recording except for me or possibly the members of my dissertation committee. I am going to prepare a transcript that won’t be available... but I am trying to get honest opinions here. (The building principal name mentioned) won’t attach names to what you are saying.” (2:01:05). The response to this was “Excellent” (2:01:28). This statement appears to have convinced members of the focus group that upper administration would not be able to tell who contributed what. The third group entered a little more relaxed. Perhaps, as already mentioned, because they had a chance to talk with

other faculty members about what was going on. Perhaps it was because they were, as the assistant principal above had mentioned, a group more used to a professional setting and therefore more comfortable with the topic. The only apprehension the facilitator noticed was at the beginning when he said:

...So, just to let you know I am recording. I will transcribe this recording and the only one that will possibly hear the recording besides myself will be my doctoral committee. The analysis of this transcript will be available and you could be quoted in my dissertation – but anonymously. Just wanted to let you know that before we got started. (3:00:27).

In this case, the recording picked up some participant displeasure at being recorded not picked up by the facilitator during the focus group. This displeasure did not appear to be as strong as in the first two groups.

The nervousness of the groups subsided to a degree as each focus group went on and as the day went on. Toward the end, the last focus group members appeared comfortable talking about this subject with the researcher. This theme did not completely subside toward the end as can be witnessed in the fourth group when the facilitator sensed a little uneasiness after someone had said they had been unable to implement some of the ideas brought up in meetings due to time and scheduling constraints (4:05:45). This caused the facilitator to remind the group that he would not be identifying anyone (4:06:37). However, the uneasiness was not as strong and easily sensed as at the beginning of the focus groups. The first theme in the opinion of the researcher is that there was a lot of initial apprehension picked up by the researcher on this topic. This uneasiness subsided but did not go completely away as the day progressed. It is unclear



where this apprehension came from, but it was very evident. Perhaps it was over the confusion this faculty is experiencing as to what a PLC is. This confusion will be discussed as the second and third themes the researcher was able to notice.

### **Theme Two: Educators Were Not Clear as to the Definition of a PLC**

The second theme identified shows confusion as to what a PLC is in the high school understudy. The facilitator had gone into the focus groups with the assumption that all groups knew the definition of a PLC. Asking the faculty of the school under study the definition of a PLC was not considered by the researcher for the survey given in Appendix B as he assumed they knew what one was. It quickly became evident to him that members of the focus groups had very different ideas about what a PLC is. The question “what is a PLC?” was not asked by the researcher until the last focus group. However, if it had been asked, the researcher believes the conclusions arising from this theme would not have been much different. In short, although the researcher had not, for the most part, asked the question, focus group members asked the question enough or appeared to the researcher to have asked the question enough of him as the facilitator that he believes there is much confusion on this topic with the focus groups. All four focus groups said things that led the researcher to believe they did not know what a PLC was. At least eight clear instances and possibly several others are discussed here that support this theme. Finally, some things were said that showed this lack of an understanding of the definition of a PLC was not complete.

The first focus group, a member stated, “I was a teacher at another school and sometimes I do not know what a PLC, what is it about?” (1:03:35). The facilitator believes this particular voice wanted to know what a PLC was and he was about to define

a PLC for the focus group when he noticed the group was slowly coming to its own conclusions. This started when a new voice said, “let me confirm a technicality here.” (1:16:15) to which the facilitator responded “ok” (1:16:19). The facilitator had started to give a definition, but at this point thought it might be better to wait instead seeing what the focus group members said. The previous voice then continued, “A PLC is a professional learning community and that is our local thing like say within our department? SLCs are what these house PLCs are really called?” (1:16:19). At this point, the voice stopped and looked at the facilitator with what appeared to the researcher as a “is that correct?” look on the face. Hoping to see further, what this particular voice might say, the researcher simply said “correct” (1:16:30) and continued to look at the voice as if expecting more. The voice then went on “um small group learning community type thing. Small learning community is basically what our house quote PLC AKA SLC is.” (1:16:31). Again, the pattern repeated with the facilitator simply saying, “yes” (1:16:44) and hoping to get a fuller definition. The voice continued:

“...and that in itself will kind of tell you we are a small learning community but we are a community and like he said we got all this... ya’ll got different stuff all within your little group and then this huge difference of different kinds of things going on between core teachers versus say non-core teachers so that is just an idea to keep in the back of your mind” (1:16:45).

To this, the researcher responded in the affirmative and hoped to repeat the pattern, possibly with another voice. No other information was offered by this or any other members of the focus groups as to the definition of a PLC. It is noteworthy that no key components of a PLC such as common direction and learning were mentioned.

The second group entered into this conversation when one member asked, “Well, what is the point of the PLC? I thought it was for cross-curriculum. I mean me interacting with a math teacher or a science teacher and trying to get lessons together – I thought that is what it was.” To this another voice responded, “That’s one of them – one type.” (2:10:18). This information was volunteered after the facilitator has asked about what kinds of information would be useful in a meeting (2:10:10). At this point, the researcher was curious as to whether or not items other than the narrow ones brought up by this voice were discussed so he asked “Do ya’ll ever discuss the students or is it just content?” Several responses came back in the negative (2:10:37). The subject remained in the back of the mind of the facilitator and attempts were made to bring it up again but not until the end of the focus group was it brought up again when a voice said “I have a hard time answering your question because I really do not know what ‘PLC’ stands for and we have all these acronyms and we are told to come to this meeting and it is called a PLC – I do not even know how you are defining a PLC meeting. What all does that mean?” (2:40:00). There was much laughter at this comment and many in the room appeared to be agreeing with the speaker. To this, the facilitator gave a very brief definition, which involved, among other things, the sharing of information about very specific students. At this point, a new voice said, “I didn’t think we were supposed to talk about students as a group.” (2:41:28). This surprised the facilitator because the purpose of a PLC in a public school is to improve student performance (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005; DuFour, DuFour & Eaker, 2008; Hord, 1997) so he asked “You are not supposed to talk about students as a group?” The voice clarified with “No sir. Not individual students. Students as a group? Yes. But not an individual student.” (2:41:39) The researcher was hoping to

learn the extent to which teachers were communicating about individual students. A few more sentences into the same conversation another voice indicated they did talk about special education students. This second voice may have been referring to “Admission, Review, and Dismissal” (ARD) meeting in which educators will often meet before they meet with parent to discuss a plan for a special needs student. In this case, a specific student would be discussed by teachers and other educators who work with the student directly. In this case, to the researcher, it appears as if the teachers not only lack a definition of a PLC, they also do not understand what it is a PLC does. A PLC is very specific to a community, learning things no other community will need to know. A major component of that is the learner (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005; DuFour, DuFour and Eaker, 2008; Hord, 1997). The conversation ended with this group discussing legalistic reasons for not talking about students. It was felt some parents might sue the district if their students were discussed in an “unprofessional – not in a formal meeting” (2:44:04). Members of this focus group appeared to believe the PLC only occurs in the meeting, which will be discussed in theme three below, and did not understand the community aspect of a PLC. This is a very important part of the definition of a PLC.

The third focus group started this discussion late in the focus group when a member who had been discussing PLC literature they had read in another school that was implementing PLCs that brought the issue up. In this case, the voice indicated that the other faculty at the school was having problems understanding the definition of a PLC even after the book studies. The problem this voice noticed at the other school and the school under study was that different people understood concepts mentioned in the DuFour book differently from each other. The DuFour book was specifically mentioned

here. This voice notes “I have a frustration with the fact that there seems to be an assumed knowledge that I am not part of. You know it’s kind of like everyone knows, ‘yea that’s supposed to be XYZ’ and I am like, ‘well ok is that written somewhere?’” (3:26:03). Other voices are heard laughing at this as if they understood what this voice was saying very well. In this case, it is not that educators are not being exposed to PLC literature to obtain a definition; it is as if they are getting a different definition after having read the same books. This voice notes in the same conversation that the same definition does not “filter through everybody.” This caused the facilitator to ask, “Do ya’ll feel comfortable with the language of the PLCs? Have ya’ll done much with that? Or were ya’ll just told to go do PLCs?” (3:27:56). To this question, many voices in the room are heard answering in the affirmative. No negative responses are given. It was overwhelmingly affirmative. Discussion of this theme in this focus group concludes when the researcher asks the focus group how PLCs could be improved. To this a voice responded, “I think to make the PLC positive and impactful and valuable we first need to be educated on it, then we need to be guided on it and we need to be shown the value of it. And I think those things haven’t been done.” (3:35:57). From conversations the researcher has had with the administration of the school under study and from other conversations with the focus groups, these things may or may not have been done, but the problem appears to be different interpretations as to what a PLC is and what it is supposed to do.

By the time of the fourth focus group, the facilitator had determined it might be necessary to ask the question as to what a PLC is. He found this opportunity when someone asked, “So this is common for most schools to have PLCs all over?” (4:01:04).

After having given a brief explanation of the diffusion of PLCs as witnessed by the researcher since 1998, the question was asked, “Do ya’ll know the definition of a PLC?” Much confusion can be heard in the background on the recording and the only responses was “Professional learning community?” (4:1:35) answered in a quizzical, unsure manner. No further definition was given and the topic was not brought up further in the last focus group. This could be because some members from previous focus groups had already had this conversation or perhaps some of the discussion the researcher mentioned between focus groups had circulated the definition of a PLC or at least a definition of a PLC, or perhaps definitions. Throughout the focus group to the extent, no other discussion was brought up.

As mentioned, not all narration from the focus groups showed a lack of understanding of the definition of a PLC. The faculty had, in the experience and understanding of the researcher, received some training in PLCs. Furthermore, voices are heard twice on the recoding showing an understanding of PLCs. In the first focus group, a voice noted, “Seems like the whole idea behind PLCs is to get people to talk and interact with each other.” (1:30:03). While this is not a complete definition, it does, in the opinion of the researcher, show an understanding of what a PLC is supposed to do in order to improve student performance. The idea very much is to get educators to interact and share ideas. Later another voice says of the PLC meetings “...it wasn’t necessarily a true PLC were you are discussing best practices in the classroom.” (3:17:43). This voice clearly understands a PLC is concerned with spreading best practices and knows that a PLC is more than a meeting. It is possible members of the focus group had a better understanding of the definition of a PLC than was discussed in the focus groups. As

already mentioned, the question was only asked once by the researcher. However, no evidence is found in the actual transcripts other than those mentioned here of this understanding being the case. It is the opinion of the researcher that the faculty under study has little understanding as to what a PLC is. This is further evidenced in theme three.

### **Theme Three: Educators Confused PLCs with Meetings**

Most members of these focus groups did not differentiate between a meeting and a PLC. A third theme that became evident was that many of the educators at the school under study thought a PLC was just a meeting. This is related to the second theme but has been identified as a different concept because of the large number of times that the term “PLC” was used synonymously with “meeting.” From the literature review of this dissertation, it has been determined that a PLC is a group of professional educators, learning as a community with common professional commitments and practices and an application of that learning. If one reads the transcripts of the focus groups, it becomes apparent the teachers are discussing their faculty in PLC terms, even if they do not understand the definition of a PLC. The school under study is working as a PLC and a group of PLCs. However, they often refer to their PLC as a “meeting.” The evidence of this phenomenon is overwhelming as can be seen in Table 3. Ninety percent of the time in which meetings and PLCs have the chance to be used synonymously, they are. Because of the high number of times evidence of this theme occurs and the fact that occurrence is relatively brief, this information will be given in Table 4 as opposed to a narration.

Table 4: *Evidence the Term PLC and Meeting are used Synonymously at the High School Under Study*

Focus Group Reference from Appendix A	Text Evidence from Focus Groups in Appendix A	Researcher's Explanation
1:02:45	Facilitator asks “You do meet every two weeks and you have an agenda. Do you take minutes on those agendas?” Voice answers: “In our department PLCs we do.”	The voice did not say in our PLC meetings we do, they voice said, in our department PLCs, we do.
1:03:35	Voice: “I was a teacher at another school and sometimes I do not know what a PLC, what is it about? So are they effective, well no they are not, sometimes we just walk in, sign in, grab a donut and go. And adios.”	Voice is clearly referring to the meeting as the PLC in this case. This instance was mentioned in theme two.
1:10:57	Voice: “...I don't feel like that information that is given to us in PLCs can be seen as very beneficial. ... Now for teams ... its really good to have that collaborative period that where you can talk to your peers and learn different things.”	In this case “collaborative period” is referring to a meeting.
1:27:31	Voice: “If we were to make PLCs voluntary, in other words ‘come if you can, if you can't (don't come)’ how many people would actually come?” Later in the same conversation another voice says:”... when I go to a PLC...”	PLC is being referred to in this case as a place you come to at a specific time to meet with other people, not a group of professional educators. This voice is saying a PLC is a place you go to.



Focus Group Reference from Appendix A	Text Evidence from Focus Groups in Appendix A	Researcher's Explanation
1:30:50	Voice "...in (The other High School in the district) it was how we structured they told us what we knew we had to teach what they knew talk about what subject in the PLC and it was worse than unstructured."	The voice is saying they were told what to talk about in the PLC, but the voice clearly means they were told what to talk about in the meeting of PLC members.
1:32:27	Voice: "...I worked for a district one time that did PLCs and instead of just saying "ok, ya'll just hurry and do this PLC in the morning or do real quick after school here..."	It appears as if this voice has a belief that the administration of the school under study has the perception that a PLC is just a meeting. From the facilitator's knowledge of the administration of the school, this is not the case.
2:04:57 to 2:07:05	Facilitator: "So what other PLCs or groups of teachers are you active with?" Voice: "Coaches, our practice stuff we get together and we plan for that if that is what you are talking about." Facilitator: "So the coaches do that." Previous Voice: "yes." Facilitator: "Are those actual meetings?" Previous Voice: "yes." Facilitator: "And how do those work?" Previous Voice: "hmmm before and after practice." Facilitator: "Kind of informally?" Previous Voice: "yes" New Voice: "but that is not really considered a PLC."	The last voice implies that a PLC is not an informal group that happens to be meeting but a formal, planned meeting.
2:14:02	Voice: "... before you've had it set up to where we had PLC every Thursday morning. You had a faculty meeting every Thursday morning."	The voice believed the PLC only occurred every Thursday morning and was in fact just a meeting.

Focus Group Reference from Appendix	Text Evidence from Focus Groups in Appendix A	Researcher's Explanation
2:37:26	Voice: "...Like this coming Thursday I have to do the PLC... So there is basically an objective for each PLC."	The voice is referring to a meeting he or she has to set-up. Also, each meeting of the PLC has an objective, not each PLC. A PLC has a "mission."
2:38:11	Voice: "...we were required to be at PLCs a certain percentage of the time and all this and so as a department we did have PLCs every what, week or two."	A person does not cease to be part of a community if they are temporarily removed from the physical presence of other community members so the percentage of time to be "at" a PLC would be 100%.
2:40:00	Voice: "...we have all these acronyms and we are told to come to this meeting and it is called a PLC."	As with the 1:32:27 quote, the facilitator believes this voice was not actually told what they believe they were told. The meeting was meant to be one part of the PLC but the voice had come to believe it was the PLC and attributed this belief to administration.
3:24:50	Voice: "Once a week kids had late arrivals on Thursdays and there was a PLC."	The voice in this case is referring to a PLC in another school. Still, in that other school the PLC was seen as a specific time, place, and group of people. In other words, a meeting.
3:28:10	Voice: "During our department PLCs that we are going to share once the department."	The voice stopped talking at this point, but used the preposition "during" to describe a PLC, implying a PLC has a set time.

Focus Group Reference from Appendix A	Text Evidence from Focus Groups in Appendix A	Researcher's Explanation
3:33:11	Voice: "... we are told we had to have an agenda for our PLCs which I always had but it wasn't that, you know, a formal format. Or an official format that we got recently was suggested to follow but PLCs have always had an agenda and this is what we are going to talk about today. But it's just recently been given an official format that we should. You know, setting time frames and time lines for each category and stuff like that so. Which will help in the organization of the PLCs."	Again, PLCs do not have agenda, they have missions. Meetings have agendas.
3:35:57	Voice: "... There is not a- it does not feel like there has been a plan put into place for useful time for that to happen."	The discussion in this case revolves around the time for the meeting being early in the morning before school starts.
4:02:13	Voice: "So once a week we have a PLC."	PLC is limited to an event occurring once a week, a meeting.
4:02:31	Voice: "Like for example last PLC in (Another teacher's) room last week. ... so I always try to incorporate something like that in every PLC"	Each meeting is clearly seen as a PLC.
4:26:59	Voice: "...everybody had to sign up for -every (subject) teacher had to sign up for- a PLC and you had to host it and you know do a presentation or something. .... And like I did have teachers sign up for PLCs you know to host."	Teachers did not have to sign up to host a "meeting." They signed up to host a PLC, even though all meetings were only for the PLC.

In all the cases mentioned in Table 2, the term “PLC” is used interchangeably for “meeting.” However, this is not always the case. In the first focus group, a focus group member says:

“Seems like the whole idea behind PLCs is to get people to talk and interact with each other. And if you are doing that with each other on a regular basis why do you have to take an hour every other week and stop what you are doing and go do that if you are doing it already. And if you know you need someone in art or someone in engineering, why do you have to have a meeting to decide that. If you are going to take a group of people together out of their routine to meet then something significant ought to be accomplished that cannot be accomplished in any other format” (1:30:03).

This voice clearly understands a key reason behind a PLC is to get people talking, not just to hold meetings. Later in the third focus group, another voice clearly notes the difference between a PLC and a meeting when he or she says “...when we did PLCs, this is basically a department meeting – it wasn’t necessarily a true PLC were you are discussing best practices in the classroom.” (3:14:51). In this case, the voice notes that a PLC is different from a department meeting, even if this has not been what this voice has seen in practice. Despite these two departures from the norm, it is the opinion of the researcher that most members of the PLCs in the school under study see PLCs as a meeting and not as a permanent community of professional learners who learn together and apply that learning to their practice. They might do some of the collective learning described in a PLC during these meetings, but they leave the PLC at the meeting. In addition, they might operate as a PLC outside of the meeting, but they do not describe

themselves as doing so. The PLC is the meeting to many, and probably most, of these members of these focus groups at the time these focus groups were held.

#### **Theme Four: Focus Group Members Believed Meetings were an Effective Part of a PLC for Groups with Something in Common but Not for Large Groups**

Focus group members believed meetings were an effective part of a PLC for small groups with something in common but not for large groups. This theme began to emerge in the survey in Appendix B when one respondent answered survey question 12 concerning the importance of meeting people outside their department with “If we would spend less time meeting, then we could spend more time actually working or planning.” (Question 12, Appendix B). Further responses to this question seemed to be split but a closer analysis revealed a difference in opinion between different types of meetings. The practice for the school under study is for departments to meet once every two weeks before school starts and then to meet on the other week with the house or SLC before school starts. In other words, every teacher has a meeting once a week, either with their department or with their house. Teachers appeared to believe they received value from the smaller department meetings, but not the larger house meetings. This was made clear in each of the four focus groups. Four instances are described here and reported in Table 4, but these instances could have been qualitatively broken down into more instances. In instances in which teachers initially appeared to be in support of meetings, further inquiry determined they were in fact in support of department meetings but not SLC meetings.

In the first focus group, conversation on this theme began when the facilitator asked if the meetings members were having have been effective. Almost at once at least four people answered “no” (1:02:09). The facilitator/researcher then asked if minutes

were taken to which three people replied no and one person said only in the department meetings. He was about to ask a question as to the effectiveness of the agenda when a voice interrupted with additional information as to the effectiveness of the meetings. The voice was using the term “PLC” but was referring to the meeting as was discussed in theme three. In this case, the voice brought up an observation that all that happens in the house meetings is that everyone shows up, “grab(s) a donut and go(es). And Adios” (1:03:35). This particular person was countered with some very detailed information from another voice describing how he or she had received real benefits from the meetings. The new voice believed information received in the meetings was “important” and “relevant” (1:03:35). Collaborative assignments with concrete goals coming from these meetings were mentioned as being very useful to this particular voice. The feeling the facilitator got was that most of the rest of the focus group did not agree with the latter assessment. One person appeared to be trying to say something opposing this last statement to which the voice supporting the meeting said, “shut up boy” (1:05:49). A new voice then entered the conversation at this point in defense of the opinion that meetings were not working so well. This new voice noted:

“I think what (singular pronoun) is trying to convey is that the information we are getting in them and the activities we are doing could be done another way that does not entail taking 20 or 30 people or whatever from their daily activity I mean you can send an e-mail and a PowerPoint show it or whatever. You don’t need to have 30 people in a room just to see a PowerPoint when you have e-mail and technical support”(1:05:49).

Another new voice then entered the conversation saying:

“...not only that I think some of this would be done in a smaller group setting period. You can share ideas better because, I’ll be honest, when you are in a larger group setting I am setting here going like “when is this thing over with.... but when I am in a smaller group I am able to interact more and have more input with what’s going on”(1:05:49).

The last voice was interrupted at least once by someone saying, “that’s right” (1:05:49). It was the voice before the last one mentioned that brought up the idea of this fourth theme to the facilitator when he or she said, “I think some of this would be done in a smaller group setting period.” This caused the facilitator to ask if material coming out of the meeting was good, but the problem was with the structure. Someone answered “yes,” followed by the single voice that had come out in defense of meeting above then countering with:

“The people who have done the presentations have been very good, very thorough and its relevant stuff but I agree it can be done in a different format because usually I am thinking of everything I have to get done for the day and the week and then there are so many new things put on us that a lot of us, well I can speak for myself, it takes every available moment. And so I just don’t care for that kind of stuff” (1:07:03).

Another voice then mentioned the fact that the house they were in had many different subjects, which were unrelated, and information given at these meetings was not pertinent to all members of the house or SLC. Several people agreed with this assessment (1:07:03). It was then made clear by several members of the focus group that meeting were hard to schedule in a very practical sense because different departments were

simply not available at different times, so the meeting had to be held early in the morning before school started. The feeling the facilitator got was that focus group members saw value to the information from the meetings as can be witnessed in statements such as “... its really good to have that collaborative period that where you can talk to your peers and learn different things” (1:10:57) but that the logistics of the meetings voided the practicality of the meetings of large houses or SLCs on a regular basis.

This caused the facilitator to ask the question, “It should be a smaller group is what you are saying?” ( 1:11:31). No clear and positive answer was given to this question. Instead, the answer came with statements such as” If it’s just people who teach the same thing we can feel...” and “ ...fine arts you have speech, you have journalism, you have drama, none of us teach the same thing” (1:11:34). It seemed clear to the facilitator the SLC meetings were too large for any value on a regular basis, but department meetings on a regular basis had much value to the participants of the first focus group.

The idea that the smaller department meetings were considered more efficient than larger department meetings with the faculty of the school under study also became apparent with the second focus group after the question was asked as to the frequency of meetings. Members of the focus group verified they do meet once a week with either the house or the department and that minutes of the meetings are taken (2:03:35). When asked if these meetings were useful to their practices as educators, the answer was “no.” One voice did say the meetings were useful at first when he or she was a new teacher, but now “it’s kind of old hat” (2:04:03).At this point, the facilitator was in the process of trying to determine the perception of the focus group member of meeting when a large



number of additional focus group participants entered the room. After introductions, the question was asked again to the now larger group. A district-wide meeting given at the beginning of each year was discussed with most people agreeing those were of some value. However, when discussion turned back to campus meetings, theme four of this dissertation began to emerge again. Contrary to the theme, this part of the discussion started with a person saying of the school-based meetings, “I would like to have more” (2:09:08). This appears to have surprised some in the audience as well as witnessed by quizzical looks given toward this voice. This caused the voice supporting more meetings to say, “He asked us to be honest, I am being honest” (2:09:30). The group appeared to be confused at her response and this confusion was recorded by the facilitator. A new voice tried to clarify what the previous voice had said by stating, “I would like more meetings if they are going to be useful. I hate to go to the meetings that we have now because you get a couple of pieces of information that you can probably get from an e-mail. Its administrative content” (2:09:55). This caused the facilitator to ask the question, “What kind of information would be shared in a useful meeting?” (2:10:10). The response was more interactions between teachers teaching the same units or similar subject. These would be small meetings, which did not include extraneous individuals not involved in the actual teaching of similar topics. It is the belief of the facilitator the individual who mentioned wanting more meeting above meant the smaller meetings in which relevant and useful information is passed among PLC members, not the large house meetings involving people who very well may like each other, but have little professionally to share.

When the third focus group was asked if meetings were helpful to them, a voice responded, “They can be, I mean I suppose if there is anything we can get from each other at that point in time. I mean if one subject has already taught something you can help the other one – but yea, usually they are pretty helpful.” (3:02:24). A similar response followed from another voice. This surprised the facilitator causing him to ask for verification, “So I am not getting any negative feedback here about the meetings, is that correct?” (3:03:38). The response to this was:

“I wouldn’t say there is anything negative about them – the frequency of them – I would probably get more out of them if they were less frequent. It’s like the talking too often, getting together too often I do not get as much out of it. I don’t know if I said that right, If that came out right. Like talking to my sister every week doesn’t do as much – I don’t get as much out of it as I do the quality of it as I do if I wait a month, once a month.”

This was more in line with what the facilitator had expected. The facilitator noticed most people were not giving input at this point and explained to the group that the topic would turn to meetings again later in the focus group (3:05:46). His thinking was this would give them time to think about it as the group had just started. However, later on in the focus group when the idea of meetings came up, meetings were not as easily embraced as they were by the first two speakers mentioned. Table 5 lists times that the researcher noticed discussion turned to the value of meetings following this initial discussion. In all times that the researcher noticed, meetings, particularly house meetings, were discussed in a negative light.

Table 5: *Evidence the Third Focus Group did not Support Regular SLC Meetings*

<b>Focus Group Reference from Appendix A</b>	<b>Text Evidence from Focus Groups in Appendix A</b>	<b>Researcher's Explanation</b>
3:14:51 to 3:17:43	Voice: "...I guess PLCs are being given to create that communication – that two-way line of communication which... Facilitator: "Is it doing that?" Voice: "Na."	PLCs are being used here to refer to the meetings.
3:17:43	Voice: "I think a lot of times –I know especially a couple of years ago when we did PLCs, this is basically a department meeting – it wasn't necessarily a true PLC were you are discussing best practices in the classroom, it was pretty lame information that was coming from the administration – "here's things you need to know about." You know – that type, a meet to meet. We are going to have a meeting this week whether we have anything to say or not.	This person believes meetings, particularly large SLC meetings, are just for communication from administration.

Focus Group Reference from Appendix A	Text Evidence from Focus Groups in Appendix A	Researcher's Explanation
3:24:19	Voice: "you know coming up with what we want to talk about – you know so it is not chaotic when you come in so we have like a set agenda type of thing. 'Ok, this is what we want to talk about today, let's focus on this kind of curriculum, what lessons can we do over the next two weeks or something' – in charge of so you do not go in blindly and no one knows what is going on in the meeting. So like there is an agenda to the meeting and not just random people."	This voice is referring to the fact that the house SLCs contain teachers who were placed in SLCs who often had unrelated teaching assignments. In this voice's words, "just random people."
3:28:10	Voice: "A PLC meeting is here and you show up." Voice: "There is no instruction and sometimes let's be honest, I am really not on the use as far as in-depth discussion that we have at 6:50 with some of us you know granted you know sometimes having teachers with different subjects is a bit of a bind but sometimes with those time constraints in kind of a get in and get out without time type of thing and it just those are the experiences I have."	The tone at this point was definitely anti-meeting and this part of the transcript could have been further delineated to show more points of disapproval for larger meetings.
3:34:17	Voice: "And that is how it feels so it feels like it is just one more meeting to go to so it doesn't feel like it is something that should...that is personal and productive to me."	Here the voice is talking about the SLC meeting as if it is just paper work.

When asked toward the end of the focus group how PLCs could be improved upon on their campus, one voice responded “The thing is I think it would be interesting to know what other teachers who teach the same grade level, I think it would be interesting to know what they are teaching but when we have those house meetings its so many different grade levels so many different (subjects) ... that its confusing – you know, I do not think it is that helpful.” (4:33:27). Very clearly the third focus group valued meeting but thought the frequency of them and the size of the house meetings was not improving their practice as professionals. The facilitator concluded the third focus group by stating “hopefully by spending the 30 minutes with me here the meetings you have in the future will be more valuable to you” (4:34:09). He felt the need to say this because meetings had been such a major topic not just in this focus group but also in the first three.

The topic of the efficacy of meetings continued to be a major topic for the last focus group. In this case a member of the focus group was very direct in the statement of this theme by saying “I think as (this person’s specific department is mentioned) it works well, as a house it’s ridiculous” (4:04:50) when asked by the facilitator if the meetings were working. Another voice then notes, “I think it gets us caught up on stuff and it helps us know what is going on as a unit. And then if we just have our own department meeting then we could probably actually use it for professional learning versus just catching up on what happened last week that I didn’t read right.” This in turn is followed by a third voice noting the difficulty of SLC members finding common times to meet since their schedules are all very different (4:04:50). When asked again if any other focus group members got anything out of the house meetings, the only thing anyone was able to think of were a few times in which they had met other house members teaching the same grade

level and they were able to do some cross-curricular planning. However, a new voice then interjects with “Do any of us have yet to do it? I haven’t actually done it.” (4:05:45). The voice that brought up the idea that they had actually been able to do some cross-department planning then offers support to this new voice by saying:

“Right. Actually implementing it and not too much and everyone is so busy and we all have so much on our plate. It’s crazy, every single one of us in here has something extra. So to meet like that, to take up that much time is – I know a lot of teachers just want to get out of there because they have a list you know, of so many things they have to get done” (4:05:45).

This was followed by silence and what the facilitator recorded as an “awkward feeling in the room” (4:06:37). The topic then turned away from meetings until toward the end of the focus group when the facilitator asked “What are some things you think they would have to do to add value to (PLC)?” (4:33:13). Several voices indicated they were not getting anything out of the meeting but that, as one voice noted:

“The thing is I think it would be interesting to know what other teachers who teach the same grade level, I think it would be interesting to know what they are teaching but when we have those house meetings its so many different grade levels so many different...” (4:33:27).

Another voice completed this sentence with “subjects.” The teachers of the fourth focus group appeared to have a strong desire to communicate with other teachers of their subject and grade level, but found the house meetings to contain too many people who do not fit in one of those two categories.

## **Theme Five: Focus Group Members Did Not Know Their School's Mission**

### **Statement**

As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the next three themes could be merged into a single concept. That concept is that even though focus group members did not have an understanding of the mission statement of the school, they worked well together as a PLC or as members of several PLCs, and at the same time saw a need to do so. In Question 5 of the survey given to the faculty of the school under study, faculty members were asked the mission statement of the school (Appendix B). Most respondents were able to answer this question. However, it is the belief of the researcher that respondents used the copy and paste feature of Microsoft Word™ to do so. Mistakes are often verbatim in their response (Appendix 5, Question 5). In addition, many responses were verbatim from the website of the school.

When asked to state the mission statement, focus group members were unable to do so. No focus group member of any of the four focus groups was able to state the mission of the school. When the facilitator asked the first group, he was answered initially with “confused looks and laughter” (1:13:28). One member did say they could “pick it out of a list but we haven’t memorized it verbatim.” (1:13:44). When read the mission statement, the group told the facilitator such things as “that sounds like it” while another voice said, “it is real somewhere” (1:14:14), which was followed by a lot of laughter leading the researcher to believe they did not recognize it. The facilitator was met with similar laughter when he asked the other three groups what the mission statement was. The response of the second group was “it’s on the website” followed by several attempts to quote parts of the mission statement. For instance, one voice said, “we

are supposed to be preparing kids for life.” (2:10:50). This voice appeared to understand some of the meaning of the mission statement, but was not verbatim in response.

Following the initial laughter mentioned, similar unsuccessful attempts to quote the mission statement were made by the third group (3:06:05) and the last group (4:09:22).

According to members of the focus groups, the high school under study developed a mission statement before they had moved into their present location. It was written by “a committee of people who came together who was interested in it.” (1:13:05). When asked if students had input into this mission statement, the answer was “Very little, I think the teachers had more input so there was a very small group of teachers who did have some input,” (2:11:26). Some of the teachers appeared very familiar with how the mission statement came about; others were not familiar even though they were members of the faculty when the mission statement was written. When one group was asked if they had any input into the writing of the mission statement of the school, someone answered, “it was just made up” (4:10:17). This was followed by someone saying, “I thought we were asked.” Several others then concurred with the idea they were asked after having thought about it (4:10:24). It appears as if this was something in the memory of the members of the focus group, but not a major memory. To keep the school under study anonymous, the actual mission statement will not be given in this paper and the versions read in the transcript are approximate. Other than identifying the need to pass the TAKS exam (1:21:33), members of the focus groups were unable to state the mission statement of the school even though they had been a major component of its writing.



### **Theme Six: Educators See the Need for the Common Direction Called for in a PLC with Caveats**

Although members of the focus groups could not state their mission statement, even in their own words, they did state a belief in the need for the common direction called for in a PLC. However, there are caveats. The survey presented in Appendix B shows that most of the respondents favored a common direction at the higher levels of the organization. In question eight of the survey, 50% of respondents indicated common direction should reside at the district level while 45% said such direction should come from the school level. Only one person said common direction should reside primarily within each department. No one indicated that each person should have his or her own direction. Reasons given for the need of a common direction varied greatly from “making the school look good” to “it is what is best for the students;” but the conclusion reached by all respondents was there needs to be a common direction. The caveats are that there was no agreement as to where what that direction is or where it should come.

When the first group was asked if there was a need for a common direction, several voices answered positively (1:19:11). One voice that answered this question with “Ideally” brought up the point that he or she was being paid and had an obligation to either accept the goals of the school or “choose” to work somewhere else the following year (1:19:21). After being asked if the faculty “should” have a common direction, another voice brought up the issue that the common direction is to prepare for a test at the end of each year (1:20:41) even though each faculty member chooses to teach their subject and each person on the faculty wants to teach their subject. Another voice then elaborated on the idea that the end of the year, state-mandated exams were the common

direction of the school by noting that the exams were all that mattered and “when that is over they do not want to work.” (1:21:33). The second group indicated they do in fact have a common direction but saw that common direction differently. This view could have been influenced by the fact discussion on the mission statement had just occurred. This mission statement includes a line on preparing students for life. As a group, the voices of the second focus group appeared to come to the conclusion that each level of education is supposed to prepare the student for the next level of education and ultimately life (2:22:07). No mention is given of end of course exams being the common direction. The third group came back to the idea of common testing as being the common direction of the school (3:20:25). As with the first group, common direction appeared to have been necessary, but it appeared to have been forced at the same time. With the inclusion of the mission statement, the same could be said with the second group, but the common direction of preparing for life replaced the common direction of preparing for tests. The final group also saw a need for a common direction and felt they had one but did not answer the question as to what that common direction might be. One voice did mention that he or she would “hope” that the school and the district would have the same direction (4:15:53). The conclusion reached here is that members of the focus groups believed in a common direction, members were willing to accept a common direction, but they had different ideas as to what a “common direction” is and where it should be placed. They also had different ideas as to what their common direction was and from where it was coming.

### **Theme Seven: Educators Knew Each Other Well and Appeared to Work as a PLC**

So far, the transcripts from the focus groups show the lack of a commonly verbalized mission statement and a nebulous common direction, even though a common direction is something valued by members of the focus groups. Despite these findings, the school under study has a faculty that appears to work well together and is successful. As Appendix C shows, 78% of the students at the school passed the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills exam (TAKS) as compared to a state average of 76% in the 2010-2011 school year. The school did come in two percentage points below state average for commended passing rates. Despite having a new campus, the school earned an academically acceptable rating from the TEA. Beyond these quantifiable measurements, the focus groups paint a picture of a faculty that is very comfortable with each other and works well together.

This was perhaps the first theme noticed by the facilitator/researcher as each focus group began. As already discussed, groups appeared more nervous at first, but became more relaxed as they became aware of the situation. Despite this, the researcher was able to pick up a bond among many of the focus group members early in each meeting. Members would often look at each other for answers and comfort (1:02:53). The word “laugh” is mentioned 70 times in the focus group transcripts in Appendix A. Educators felt comfortable laughing and with each other and at their situation once the initial nervousness, or perhaps despite the initial nervousness, mentioned above might suggest. Teachers also sat close to each other and had lively discussions until each focus group began. For instance, the facilitator wrote in his notes that the third group entered in a “playful mood” and were joking playfully about a drink from the Ukraine (3:00:00). To

the researcher, each focus group appeared to be a group of people who knew each other well to the point he, the researcher, often felt on the defensive as he was trying to discuss the topic of PLCs. As already noted, one voice stated about the research, “It’s like being fed to the lions” (1:39:59). He was referring to their cohesiveness against one lone researcher. Beyond the first few minutes of each meeting, the transcripts of the focus groups are rife with examples of the faculty joking comfortably with each other as if they were all good friends. One voice even felt comfortable enough to tell another voice to “shut up boy” (1:05:49) while the voice that was told to “shut up” appeared to take no umbrage. Groups tended to defend the work of each other. For instance, praising the presentations of others and making it clear to the facilitator that “everyone does what they are supposed to” (1:07:03). The facilitator felt as if members were defending their best friends. At other times, unpopular programs were brought up and derided almost to a person (1:18:33, 3:14:51) as if they were thinking about it as one. Often the facilitator got the feeling the group was communicating verbally and nonverbally among themselves in the way close friends often do, to the point he brought it up (2:01:29). Furthermore, as Table 4 shows, different groups noted several times their interactions with other groups. These ranged from countless interactions in the halls between classes to interactions in formal PLC meetings. It should be noted the incidents listed in Table 6 are far from comprehensive and highly subjective. Many of these instances are actually more than one instance.

Table 6: *Incidences of Interactions Mentioned between Focus Group Members*

<b>Focus Group Reference from Appendix A</b>	<b>Text Evidence from Focus Groups in Appendix A</b>
1:05:49	Voice: “when I am in a smaller group I am able to interact more and have more input with what’s going on.
1:23:03 to 1:23:23	Facilitator: What I am really interested in is those interactions that happen between you that don’t show up in the meetings – like you said the helping each other out before class, “try this here” kind of stuff. Voice: (new voice) that goes on all the time. (much agreement)
1:32:30	I know from my standpoint I work with nearly everybody in this room
1:36:06	We are too busy being in the PLC to answer the survey
2:02:08 to 2:02:12	Facilitator: Ya’ll don’t interact with any other departments? Voice: Well now last year we did. But this year so far it has just been us. (new voice) I interact with science. .... yes. Especially the AP teachers. We talk about things they need to have covered before they get to physiology, microbiology so they can be prepared. (new voice) I think it just kind of depends on what you are doing like you’re in science, I do not really meet with anybody. (new voice) I mean I am trying to interact with other teachers on my own – I haven’t really been successful. (But attempt is made)
2:24:34 to 2:24:59.	Facilitator: Do you get more of that from the informal interactions or does any of that happen in the meetings? Voice: Mostly informal because I might have one question every three weeks and just whoever is nearby who knows the answer, I will take it.
2:28:34 to 2:28:41	Facilitator: Did you get any interactions with (The other high school in the district)? Voice: They have a brand new criminal justice - guess that would be me helping them – um, she came an asked for lesson plans from me for her classes.
3:03:14	Voice: But over a period of time now I am understanding now that I am not isolated as a department. There are other departments that are interrelated that make us as a team a system as opposed to being individuals.
3:21:49	Voice: Well, a lot of times you just say, “Hey what are you guys talking about?”
4:06:37-4:07:24	Facilitator: You get a lot of interactions with other teachers. Voice: probably more so outside of class. (new voice) yea, because we all teach you know different levels.

Of course, there were times when each group disagreed but they were very respectful of disagreements and willing to discuss these with each other. For instance, the first focus group had a slight disagreement as to the value of meetings. As mentioned earlier, this group began to speak in negative terms about meetings when a person provided information to the contrary. In this case, the voice provided very specific benefits of these meetings such as the diffusion of a specific program known as “Ruby Payne,” a staff development program on class and cultural awareness, among the faculty (1:03:35). Others members listened to what this voice had to say and may even have changed their thinking about meetings due to this input. In the opinion of the researcher, based on the focus groups transcripts, the faculty, at least within their SLCs and especially within their departments, work well as a group and meet the interaction requirements of a PLC.

#### **Theme Eight: Members of the Focus Groups Prefer a Results Orientation**

As the previous three themes have shown, the faculty of the school under study cannot verbalize a common objective, yet they work as well together as most other faculties of their TEA classification, and their function as a team, or at least a set of teams. This working relationship would make sense on the surface given the final theme the researcher noticed: the faculty of the school under study prefers a strong results orientation. The question as to whether or not a faculty has a strong result orientation or prefers to be evaluated on their process was actually one of the initial research questions of the researcher. As noted in the literature review, the DuFour, Eaker and DuFour group places more emphasizes on results (DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005) while the Hord

group writes more about process (Hord, 1997). An interpretation might be that Hord would evaluate an educator on each action the teacher is expected to take. Currently the Texas Education Code requires such an evaluation (Commissioner's Rules Concerning Educator Appraisal, 1994). Teachers in the state receive an evaluation of exceeds expectations, proficient, below expectations, or unsatisfactory in eight different domains. To evaluate teachers in these domains requires an evaluator to go into classrooms as the teacher is teaching and literally evaluate the process. Everything from a clear daily objective being written on the board to the interactions of the teacher with students is the focus of the evaluation. Teachers are also evaluated on such out of class-time activities as the number of hours of professional development and the number of communications with parents. In the survey given in Appendix B, 81% of respondents indicated a desire for the results orientation described in the literature on PLCs written by the DuFour et al group. This desire is supported even more strongly in the opinion of the researcher in the focus groups even though such an evaluation system may be difficult to implement according to focus group members.

The question was asked of each group as to which focus or orientation they preferred: a results focus or a process focus. In each case, the facilitator attempted to explain the difference between the two. The first group appeared to have very strong feelings about this topic, particularly about the meetings already mentioned. The first voice to respond to this question used it as another opportunity to show distaste for the meeting mentioned previously. This voice responded by stating:

“Seems like the whole idea behind PLCs is to get people to talk and interact with each other. In addition, if you are doing that with each other on a regular basis

why do you have to take an hour every other week and stop what you are doing and go do that if you are doing it already. In addition, if you know you need someone in art or someone in engineering, why do you have to have a meeting to decide that. If you are going to take a group of people together out of their routine to meet then something significant ought to be accomplished that cannot be accomplished in any other format” (1:30:03).

The facilitator recorded “agreement heard in the background.” In this case, the voice is referring to the idea that meetings are only attended because that is the process of the PLC. The PLC is conducted through a meeting and a positive evaluation for the teacher is dependent upon attending the meeting. The voice is expressing frustration that formats that are more informal are not used that makes more sense to this voice. After this statement was made, the facilitator-realized frustration toward one particular part of the process, the meeting, was getting the group off the topic of process versus results and so he asked the question again to verify he understood what was being said. One voice responded, “yea, they will figure it out.” (1:30:41). By this, he meant teachers should be able to determine how to be successful without a prescribed process. At this point, it appears as if the facilitator and some members of the focus group were having a different conversation than some of the other members of the focus group. Very clearly, the facilitator was picking up frustration at the process. One voice pointed out that “to answer your question .... it was how we structured, they told us what we knew we had to teach what they knew talk about what subject in the PLC and it was worse than unstructured.” (1:30:50). This voice is saying that he or she experienced so much structure at another school that it had in fact become “worse than unstructured.” A previous voice then



surprised the facilitator by suggesting he needs to “go talk to (the principal) about it.” (1:32:04). The facilitator and the principal of this school have had conversations about PLCs in several classes they have had together and generally supported them. For this reason, the next statement really surprised the facilitator. The previous voice told the facilitator that “yea, but you need to be stronger in your position.” (1:32:13). The facilitator had not realized he had taken a position, but he appeared to have done so to some members of the group concerning the this particular aspect of the PLC process. It is hard to say why this happened, but apparently something obvious to the group was being discussed and some members were projecting onto the facilitator their frustration toward the process. At this point, the subject turned back to the meetings but it was very clear the first focus group preferred to be evaluated on results and not on particular aspects of the teaching process that may or may not apply to them.

When asked which of the two is more important toward evaluation, the second group initially started with the answer “Well, probably both.” (2:33:33). Many teachers in this group appeared not to have standardized tests, which would give them a good results oriented evaluation (2:34:37) but when further questioned they answered with such statements, as “We are more independent as far as the process is going... I like the freedom.” (2:35:15). An administrator in the group noted at this point that he is unable to evaluate results when he evaluates a teacher because he does not know how to do so. He can only evaluate the process. He noted, “I have had a few classes where I walked in and stood for three or four minutes and the teacher did not know I was there. That is not a good process.” (2:36:00). In this case, students may or may not be learning, but all the administrator knows is the teacher did not appear to notice him. That is all he can use to

evaluate. This group appeared to prefer a results orientation but did not think such an orientation was possible. The third and fourth groups were clearer with such responses to this question as “Having time to do our job,” and “Being left alone to teach.” (3:32:24). When asked if that was what they wanted to be evaluated on, their response was, “we should be evaluated on what our kids learn, not what’s on the board.” (3:32:33). When asked which one was most effective, at least four different voices said almost at the same time “results” (4:26:10). When asked what they were seeing, the answer was “process” from at least two voices (4:26:16). There was a strong preference among focus group members to be evaluated on their results but at the same time, it appears to have been recognized that such evaluation would be impossible, with the exception of standardized test scores. Perhaps the only way accurately to evaluate the results of a teacher would be longitudinal studies, which followed students through college and out into the work force. It is probable such costs would exceed the value of the knowledge gained as far teacher evaluations.

### **Theme Nine: The Faculty Values the Ability to Make Decisions, but They Understand the Constraints**

A final theme evident from the transcripts shows a faculty that values the ability to make decisions in regards to their own practice but they understand the constraints of their organization. In the initial survey, respondents had said they do not get a lot of discretion over their school. The responses to this question are presented in Table 7.

Table 7: *Responses to the Question: Do you get a lot of decision-making discretion at you school?*

Focus Group Reference from Appendix A	Text Evidence from Focus Groups in Appendix A
1:16:07	Voice: It's kind of set up for us.
1:17:11	Voice: To answer your question about whether or not we have input there are times when things come out that we are supposed to like "what are they thinking?" That should tell you we don't have a lot of input.
1:17:27	Voice: we are not asked. (In response to a book study)
1:18:04	Voice: As a campus allowed to vote. (on a program) New Voice: yea, we were allowed to vote as to whether or not we wanted to adopt that. New Voice: right. New Voice: but do you think it's still coming even though we voted "no." New Voice: Not next year. New Voice: They are going to keep shoving it at us.
2:18:25	Voice: No. New Voice: not really.
2:20:07	Voice: I do not know if they really listen. Sometimes I feel like they have already made up their mind but in order to be fair about it or in order to appear to be fair about it they ask us the question. Then we so "no" or they may completely disagree with us – I don't know – I have no idea.
2:20:22	Voice: A prime example would have been that presentation that they had the other day, they had pretty much decided that this is what they wanted us to do is join this particular program. That we were there to say "yes" or "no" but I felt like very strong armed that they wanted us to vote a particular way and then when they ask for our vote and you put your name on it, well I don't care, I will put my name on it and I will say "no" but there were teachers in there that did not want to do that. They felt like they better say "yes" or I am going to get into trouble.
3:14:51	Voice: As far as our classroom discipline with the expectations that are put on us whereas you gotta do this, this, and this.
3:20:48 to 3:20:52	Facilitator: So it's kind of forced on us right? (In response to the previous voice's lengthy statement. Voice: mm Hu. I believe it is. (This is followed by a period of silence)

Just from reading the narrations in Table 7, it would appear as if the administration of the school under study is disconnected from the faculty. However, these statements do not

give the whole story. The third group noted that they did get some input into their meeting schedules but that input was based on the logistics of when they could actually meet given every SLC members different schedule (3:10:49). This group also mentioned several times when they were able to have an impact, especially at the district level. One member of the first group pointedly asked the facilitator:

“Why did you throw in that question, it looks like you left it, why did you ask about how our decision making in the school was structured if we had any input because you hit it, and then not many responses and then you left it? You know I would say that our structure is from the top down but as far as I am concerned I don’t think that anybody has ever been denied an audience to go in and discuss their feelings and their ideas... Man I just wanted to get that out there, I do not think we are shut out...” (1:38:14 to 1:38:20).

The group appeared to agree with this sentiment. This voice then went on to note, “I mean you can say what you want, it is going to be that way anyway.” (1:38:20). In other words, this voice understands that often a decision is made and not everyone will agree with it but an action must be taken. The second group supported this when they noted that everyone has different schedules with the implication that someone has to make at some point a decision (2:18:38). The focus groups appeared to have some frustration over the lack of the ability to make decisions but they understood the various constraints faced by administration and they appeared very comfortable in voicing their concerns to administration.

### **Conclusions from the Focus Groups**

More themes could have been gleaned for the transcripts of the focus groups. For instance, the researcher noticed a large minority of each focus group contributed very little and spent some time texting, grading papers, or otherwise not engaging himself or herself fully in the discussion. It was difficult to make apathy a theme as very little of this was detected in the actual transcripts. At the same time, another researcher might have worded these themes differently or might not have even recognized them as themes. Still, the schema presented here describes to a large degree the inner workings of the faculty that constituted these PLCs at a time when the perceived performance of the faculty of their school was declining. The faculty of the school under study appears to see value in the PLC as described by DuFour et al, especially the need for a common direction and decision-making. The faculty does not value a rigid, process oriented PLC. They did not fully understand what a PLC was supposed to do but they felt comfortable with each other and their administration. The faculty has a strong desire to act as professionals and would like some control over their practice. Analyzing this new information should provide insight into the drop in faculty perceptions of their school noticed in the two administrations of the Pride Factor <sup>TM</sup> Surveys.

## Chapter V

### Discussion

The preparation of this dissertation has taken the author on a voyage that has changed his opinions of PLCs in an unexpected manner. Originally, the author sought to determine how best to implement a PLC. He primarily wanted to know if administration should introduce such a concept to a faculty as a program or if an administration should simply implement the elements of a PLC. The purpose was not to criticize, but to study. In the experience of the author, most administrations, including the one under study, informed the faculty they would be implementing a PLC and then informed the faculty with differing degrees of explanation the components of a PLC as defined in the literature review of this report. Some suburban districts in the Houston, Texas, region, also known as Region IV, simply implemented aspects of a PLC without too much explanation to their faculties. Early in the study, the author determined it would be very difficult to determine which method works best as all faculties have different situations. In focusing in on the school under study, new questions arose. As mentioned in Chapter 1, these questions are:

1. *Is this school effectively operating as a group of PLCs according to the disparate literature on the subject of PLCs?*
  2. *Does the community, particularly the faculty, embrace it as such?*
  3. *Did the direct implementation work well for this particular community?*
- “Well” is defined as the answers to question number two and is the school generally being qualitatively and quantitatively effective?*

As the study progressed, the researcher became increasingly interested in the perceptions of the faculty and other stakeholders about PLCs and in their understanding of what a PLC is. The reason for his increased interest in these areas was he began to notice a lack of understanding of the literature on PLCs as the study progressed as well as the drop in perception of school efficacy noticed in the Pride Factor™ Surveys. Such a widespread misunderstanding of what a PLC is might have negative repercussions on the perceived efficacy of PLCs. At the same time, a faculty does not exist in a vacuum. Administrators, politicians, taxpayers, and others, particularly in Texas, legitimately seek to have input in the classroom. The legitimate, but often competing, agendas of all the stakeholders have created a situation in which teacher professionalism is at odds with an educational hierarchy which involves a state legislature, a state board of education, local boards of education, multiple curriculum departments, teacher organizations, and local civic organizations, among others. Simply put, PLCs ask society to put faith in its teachers' professionalism but society appears either not willing or unable to do so. Teachers are part of that society.

### **Overview of the Findings**

A definite correlation exists between PLC implementation by the faculty and a drop in faculty and to a lesser extent the perception of the other stakeholder to the four critical areas identified by Jostens©. An analysis of Focus groups consisting of the entire faculty discovered at least nine themes within the faculty during the time of PLC implementation in the school under study. There appears to be anxiety and confusion concerning PLCs. Confusion exists over mission statements, the nature of a PLC, and PLC terminology. These confusions have also been noticed by the researcher in other

Houston area schools but further study on these schools would be necessary to determine if these are general themes of PLCs across the area, state or nation. In fact, even the researcher of this study is unable to identify his own school mission statement and has noticed regularly scheduled meetings that on his current and previous campus also are referred to as “PLCs.” The findings also show a perceived value by members of the faculty accorded to many of the conditions created by PLC implementation. Participants of the focus groups and surveys expressed a desire for more control over their own practice and a common direction but were well aware of administrative, cultural, and organizational constraints.

### **The Findings in Light of Existing Research Studies**

As the literature review has shown, there is confusion over what exactly a PLC is. This confusion appears to be mirrored and amplified in practice. Different educators interpret the conditions of PLCs differently. In addition, as the literature review has shown, existing research studies both quantitatively and qualitatively have shown PLCs to be beneficial in numerous ways. Initial studies on the topic have shown several positive results (Hord, 1997), while later studies have shown the action orientation and continuous learning aspects of PLCs have allowed educators to adapt more quickly to the changing world mentioned (Hughes & Kritsonis, 2006) and by Friedman (2007). Several more recent qualitative dissertations have shown positive feelings of PLCs by teachers (Herrington, 2011; Akopoff, 2011). Quantitative dissertations have been able to show positive teacher perceptions of the conditions caused by PLCs using such instruments as the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) and the School Professional Staff as Learning Community (SPSLCQ) instrument developed by Hord (Romeo, 2011). The



“flattened” culture Friedman (2007) writes about is evident in teacher culture as well. The demand for the professional conditions among faculties is high. The research on the topic lacks an understanding of the confusion faced by teachers as they go through the cultural transition to a PLC. Administration also appears to be experiencing this confusion. For instance, in the school under study, teachers of the same PLC are expected to meet every two weeks but no significant time is given for such meetings. Meetings will happen either early in the morning when teachers are thinking about their school day or late in the afternoon when teachers have expended their energies. The literature on the topic clearly points to a need for common planning times (Hord, 1997; DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Books explaining to administration how to create the conditions necessary for a PLC to exist have been published (DuFour & DuFour, 2012), but there remains, at least at the time of the focus groups of this study, a disconnect between theory and practice. Much of this disconnect may be due to organizational and cultural challenges to a PLC implementation already mentioned.

### **Implications of the Study for Current Theory**

To bridge this gap between theory and practice, current theory on PLCs should either be unified or given different identifiers for the consumers benefit. As mentioned in the literature review, one researcher offers five conditions (Hord et al, 2004) while another group of researchers offers six conditions (DuFour, 1998) which they later slightly change (DuFour, 2008). This dissertation has proposed a “clearer definition” in the literature review which focuses around the three words in concept. Simply put, the later would be professional educators, using the Elliot Friedson definition of “professional” given in chapter one, taking responsibility for their practice, and learning

as a community with school leadership working mainly to create the culture which would allow such a community. The main implication of this study for current theory on the topic of PLCs is that the theory is not unified and this lack of an agreed-upon theory might be leading to some confusion among educators. A secondary implication proposed is that theory does not match cultural and political realities, at least in Texas. Current theory would need to be changed in such a way that unification is possible and teachers can use PLC theory in light of other stakeholder input. Realistically, the “community” mentioned in the concept “Professional Learning Community” would need to be defined to the point that it would include anyone who has input into the classroom. In Texas, this would be a very large group of stakeholders. Ideally, “community would be the teachers who work together. However, as mentioned earlier, educators do not work in a vacuum and to create the ideal PLC defined in the disparate literature does not appear to be realistic.

### **Implications for the Practice of Educational Leadership**

In Texas, there are political and cultural challenges to PLC implementation not discussed in the literature. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the state maintains tight control over content and is working to gain additional control over evaluation measures and lesson plans of teachers. PLCs, on the other hand, seek to provide teachers with more control over their practice as educators. Moreover, the State of Texas requires educators taking the TExES 195 certification exam for superintendents to answer questions and have knowledge of PLCs (TExES, 2012). The state is encouraging PLC usage in its top education leadership. These goals appear to be contradictory. The state is encouraging teachers to take control of their practice at the same time it is tightening control of

content and teaching method. The transcripts given in Appendix A reveal the frustration of these double standards. For example, when the first group was asked if they should have a common direction, their response was yes but their effective common direction “has nothing to do with the education of any child it has to do with preparing for one test” (1:20:41). When asked what the test was, many members of the focus group were more than willing to discuss the amount time teachers feel they waste on test practice days and on such mundane items as practicing techniques to get to the test room on test day (1:21:33). As with the literature on the topic, an agreement of state policy needs to occur. The question needs to be answered as to whether teachers need to be seen as professionals taking control of their own practice or should they be seen as state employees imparting the knowledge deemed of value by current political leadership through methods that politicians deem appropriate. The literature is clear on this point. It is vital that teachers be able to choose community versus have it imposed upon them (Craig, 2009). However, the political climate of Texas may not allow that at the time of the writing of this dissertation. One party controls 102 of 150 seats in the state House of representative, 19 of 31 Senate seats, eight of nine State Board of Education seats, and the entire executive branch, including the Lieutenant Governor who serves as the 32<sup>nd</sup> state senator and is the major player in determining budget. It is from this political leadership that eSchoolPlus™ and iXplore™ is being implemented in a time of budget-constraints. As mentioned in Chapter I, these electronic, on-line tools will allow monitoring of lesson plans and student evaluation from Austin. Under such a system, school educational leadership finds itself increasingly subject to a central government and must impose the programs of that central government upon teaching. At several points in

the focus groups in Appendix A, teachers brought this up. For instance, when discussing the unpopular TAP program, a voice in the third focus group noted, “communication from the higher ups gets lost with us so we think that they are just forcing us when really it is coming from the state” (3:14:51). The implication is that teachers know community is being forced upon them from the state. Under current political leadership, teachers have no control over “the determination of the subsistence” of their own work” nor are they “self-directing.” This would violate the definition of Friedson of a *professional* (Friedson, 1986). Teachers are told to be professional but they are not allowed to be professional. Teachers are told to create community but specific community is forced upon them.

### **Study Limitations**

This study concentrated on a single faculty of a mid-sized high school in an area of Texas currently undergoing suburbanization with a new campus. Although the author of this paper has personally seen similar narratives in all campuses he has experienced, existing faculties or faculties of different sized schools or cultures might have different experiences as they develop into PLCs. Faculties in others states may very well have different experiences as well. As mentioned in the first chapter of this dissertation and earlier in this chapter, the state in which this the school under study operates has increasingly stricter controls as to what teachers teach and how they report their lesson plans. The principal of the school under study indicates his school is one which has begun to use eSchoolPlus™ and iXplore™ as means of reporting. These limit the ability of the faculty under study to have control over their own practice to a certain level, as they must report grades in a certain format and write their lesson plans with common conventions.

Teachers of core subjects at this and other Texas schools are also limited in their content. Other PLCs in other schools or states may or may not have such strict limitations placed on the individual practices of their teachers.

### **Recommended Areas of Further Study**

Much evidence exists as to the effectiveness of the individual conditions of the PLC using either the Hord conditions or the DuFour et al conditions. Yet, the school under study has seen a drop in teacher perceptions of the ability of the school to operate effectively. The researcher has noticed a possible trend in the Houston, Texas, area in which there is an initial drop in teacher perception of the efficacy of their school when a PLC is first introduced followed by an increase in efficacy. This study only followed this school through its initial introduction to the concept. Following the school further or perhaps looking at some other schools could either support or fail to support such a possibility of an initial loss of faculty support for the school and possibly other stakeholders, followed by a clear recognition of benefits. A secondary possible area of research would deal with the details of PLCs. For instance:

1. *Does every school need a mission statement to give it focus?*
2. *Should PLCs be placed in vertical departments or horizontal SLCs?*
3. *Should meetings be required?*

Another important area of research this study has uncovered is the practicality of PLCs in Texas given the top-down structure of the educational system of Texas discussed earlier. Can PLCs happen in Texas or will they always just become the meetings and paperwork discussed throughout this paper? Will they just become another bullet item on a job-description or is it possible for teachers to become true members of such

communities of practice? Is it possible for teachers in Texas to work in PLCs or is there just simply too much direction from above? As with all qualitative approaches, this project has created more questions than answers in regards to PLC implementation.

### **Recommendation of This Study for the Practice of School Administration**

Following the assumption that PLCs are possible, the themes of this study have brought up several recommendations for practice. As mentioned by DuFour, the main job of the principal should be to create an environment in which PLCs can occur and then let them grow on their own merit (DuFour & DuFour, 2012). The following recommendations are made based on the description of DuFour:

1. *Each faculty member should belong to only one PLC, either by department or by SLC. Belonging to two or more PLCs means essentially living in two communities which, as the transcripts have shown, lead to scheduling and goal/objective confusions. Such confusions are counter to the common focus of a PLC. Further recommendations along these lines are:*
  - a. *For a small or medium sized school, department PLCs work best.*
  - b. *For large schools, SLC PLCs work best as teams of teachers with the same students can prevent students from “falling through the cracks.”*
2. *The needs of the PLC should lead meeting schedules and not the opposite. In the school under study and other schools the researcher has worked with, the PLC has essentially become the meeting and faculty members find themselves preparing for meetings instead of using meeting to prepare for the students. If a meeting is required, PLC leadership should be able to call a meeting to*

*discuss what is vital and then allow members to do what is essential to prepare for their students.*

3. *PLCs need to be supported by the principal and used as his or her primary means of communicating to the faculty. Support means:*

a. *Each PLC should have a common planning time during the day in which all members have the same period for planning.*

b. *School sponsored contests and team-building activities should be held for the PLCs.*

From a perspective of the principal, the main lesson from this study is that he would best be served by changing how he views his job. The main task of the principal goes from being the chief educator to being the chief encourager of professionalism, community and learning. Because every faculty, political situation, cultural situation and community is different, this is more of an art than a science. In some situations, meetings are a good way to do this. In most cases though, the principal needs to be creative. Many faculties already operate as PLCs. In these cases, the main job of the principal is to make sure they continue to do so. Other times the principal may need to intervene with traditional team-building activities. The author of this dissertation has witnessed principals use chili cook-offs, teacher/senior athletic competitions, and other contests quiet effectively toward these goals. Some ideas will fall flat and others will be successful. The key is for the principal to step aside and let these ideas arise from the faculty. When a member of the faculty comes up with such an idea that many seem to support, the main focus of the principal becomes to provide that member with the resources necessary to make it happen. Ideas come easy but the effort to see them to

fruition does not. Principals need to concentrate on effort. Another tool the principal has today that principals did not have in the past is excellent technology. A member of the first focus group mentioned, “I mean you can send an e-mail and a PowerPoint show it or whatever. You don’t need to have 30 people in a room just to see a PowerPoint when you have e-mail...” (1:05:49). Information can be exchanged now faster than ever before and the trend seems to be toward faster information exchange. Also in regards to technology, the author of this dissertation has seen administration discourage non-work related e-mail communication, but these are the very types of communications that build community. Nothing builds community like a teacher sending pictures of her new grandchild to other teachers. Community is not just communication - it is celebrating the achievements of others and literally going through life together. Anything that causes that is what the principal needs to be encouraging. Once teachers have their community, note the singular use of community, once they have control of their own practice and take responsibility for it, they will learn together and grow together as professionals. In the e-mails and cook-offs, in the occasional meeting either formally at a table or in the halls between classes, they will discuss their activities, their students, their lessons and anything that needs to be discussed. Such activities and roles go against culture and the way things have always happened in Texas. However, if the principal is successful, educators will learn from each other what they need to know to prepare their students for college and life in a flattened world.



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## **Appendix A**

### **Four Focus Groups Transcripts**

*These are the transcripts of four focus groups which were recorded on January 16, 2012 at a two-year old, medium-sized (approximately 1,000 students) Texas high school that was in the process of implementing Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). The facilitator of these focus groups is the author of the paper to which this appendix is attached. Voices are differentiated with either the initials “previous voice” or “new voice,” which stands for previous voice or new voice respectively. The abbreviation “previous voice” means the voice speaking is the same one after an interruption while “new voice” means the speaker has either not yet spoken or was not the last speaker. Other than this differentiation, the group was treated as a single Voice. The recording device was an ATT Smartphone which was placed in the center of the room with the Facilitator/ researcher located as far away from it as anyone else in the room. Information identifying the school under study or any of the focus group members has been censored.*



### **First Focus Group**

*Below is a transcript of a focus group which occurred from 8:57 AM to 9:37 AM on January 16, 2012 at the school under study. Present where 35 members, 16 of which participated in the discussion. Five members entered the focus group after it had commenced. Present where members of the House of the Arts, which is a small learning community consisting of teachers who teach several different subjects such as culinary arts, cosmetology, and certain academic fields such as social studies. The later were placed in this house by administration so that all faculty of the school under study would be a member of a house.*

1:00:00 Facilitator: Thanks all for coming; I will be recording what is being said here. It will be transcribed (many teachers appeared nervous at this comment and made gestures such as grimacing faces) – (The Principal) will not see this transcription – my doctoral committee will be looking at it. Appreciate ya'll coming in; I know this is a day you should be planning. The purpose of this is to build a narrative of what your PLC is actually like. I have seen it on paper and watched ken build it for the last I guess three or four years. (Interruption after someone had pointed to recording device to ensure it was recording.) All I am going to do is ask you question about your house of arts and you will be able to answer the questions as you see fit, I had planned on a smaller group, like around eight.

- 1:01:07 Voice: The next group should be smaller (assistant principal speaking, the facilitator's impression was that the assistant principal was trying to give reassurance that information would be valuable).
- 1:01:11 Facilitator: It's good because we will get more information, hopefully we will take about 30-45 minutes of course it really depends on how much ya'll want to talk. First off I would like to find out how you actually have your PLCs structured. You are the house of arts, are you members of any other PLCs?
- 1:01:37 Voice: We are by departments. (Several similar responses same time)
- 1:01:40 Facilitator: Departments?
- 1:01:41 Voice: Yep, house, house, this is our house. (new voice) We have PLCs and SLCs.
- 1:01:47 Facilitator: This is your house. You have horizontals and verticals?
- 1:01:50 Voice: Yes, we are like that.
- 1:01:54 Facilitator: I have questions here about your house. How often do you meet as a house? Where you actually do have an agenda, where you actually do meet?
- 1:02:03 Voice: Every other week. (Agreement from several others and many people seen shaking head up and down.
- 1:02:09 Facilitator: And are those pretty effective meetings?
- 1:02:11 Voice: Yes (new voice), to be honest na,(laughter) (new voice) no (new voice) no
- 1:02:15 Facilitator: That's what we need here is honesty – I know what is going on out there, we have these problems too. You do meet every two weeks and you have an agenda. Do you take minutes on those agendas?
- 1:02:45 Voice: No, (v) no, (v) no. (v) In our department PLCs we do.
- 1:02:50 Facilitator: In the department but not in the house?
- 1:02:53 Voice: (Voices seem to be looking at each other for answers, some confusion.) In the departments no. (v) House meetings are on rotation so each I think each department has a different house meeting – for instance one of our house meetings we met in the history department social studies (someone corrects) sorries (laughter from several). (v) I hate history (v) geography department (v) Yea Geography there you go. And the next one we may meet with house... visual arts. (v) special ed.
- 1:03:30 Facilitator: Have you gotten any use of... (person raises hand) yes?

1:03:35 Voice: (new voice) I was a teacher at another school and sometimes I do not know what a PLC, what is it about? So are they effective, well no they are not, sometimes we just walk in, sign in, grab a donut and go. And adios. (laughter from several) (new voice) donuts are good though (laughter) (new voice) in our house meetings I beg to differ – we have an agenda every time and there is a department in charge of it and we have something specific, its important, its relevant, and we cover it, it may not be the most brilliant thing in the world but we have an agenda and we take care of it. Every single time and there is not anybody who has let us down.

1:04:18 Facilitator: and that is in the house right?

1:04:20 Voice: (previous voice) yea, we have done Ruby Payne, we have done collaborative assignment, curriculum, we do different things but we don't grab in and grab a donut and walk out. (new voice) but that's what it feels like, its maybe been more than ten minutes and we actually put it out there and actually clarify this is what our task is and then we are going to start at least this is from my view and I am seeing all the teachers nod their heads and say "yea, sometimes I don't know what it is." I am just being honest. (previous voice) Your department chair had a nice PowerPoint he discussed and went over what he was talking about, it was right there for everybody to see. (previous voice) oh no, that one yes, I did but I been to other ones and they just don't (previous voice) (Another teacher's name mentioned), she had a PowerPoint, she went through Ruby Payne (new voice) one for special ed. (previous voice) special ed. We went through their stuff on-line you had an assignment where you got with other teachers and you wrote down what you committed to do and then we met three months latter and you said, did you do it?"

1:05:20 Facilitator: And that is for the department right?

1:05:21 Voice: yes (new voice) no. (previous voice) no that's for the house. Each department is taking a lead in rotating through the house meetings. You know I will be in charge of this one you will be in charge of that one. So I don't know, maybe, I don't know. I don't know what you are seeing that is different than what I am seeing.

1:05:42 Facilitator: What about the rest of ya'll. Have ya'll seen anything?

- 1:05:49 Voice: (someone mumbles something) (previous voice) shut up boy. (new voice)  
 I think what she is trying to convey is that the information we are getting in them and the activities we are doing could be done another way that does not entail taking 20 or 30 people or whatever from their daily activity I mean you can send an e-mail and a PowerPoint show it or whatever. You don't need to have 30 people in a room just to see a PowerPoint when you have e-mail and technical support. (new voice) not only that I think some of this would be done in a smaller group setting period. You can share ideas better because, I'll be honest, when you are in a larger group setting I am setting here going like "when is this thing over with. (new voice) that's right. (previous voice) but when I am in a smaller group I am able to interact more and have more input with what's going on.
- 1:06:36 Facilitator: This is good stuff here. So the information you get from the meetings is useful, it's just the structure? Is that what you are saying, it's the structure? There are a lot of people in here and this is the group that meets.
- 1:07:03 Voice: yes. (new voice) The people who have done the presentations have been very good, very thorough and its relevant stuff but I agree it can be done in a different format because usually I am thinking of everything I have to get done for the day and the week and then there are so many new things put on us that a lot of us, well I can speak for myself, it takes every available moment. And so I just don't care for that kind of stuff. (new voice) if you look at the break down of this house, it does say arts, but we have special ed. department in here, we have foreign language, we have social studies, we have very different specialties and sometimes when you bring all these groups together not everything applies (new voice) right (previous voice) that that specific special ed. and arts I mean they have very specific things that are attached to them and maybe the bigger group is not as effective. I think that's where we are going . (new voice) and like she says, everyone does what they are supposed to and the department heads make sure and all that. Everyone is very conscientious and there is no slide on that it's just there is an awful lot of stuff.
- 1:08:25 Facilitator: Anybody else? That's good thanks.

1:08:28 Voice: (new voice) the meetings just don't feel quite professional developmental I guess because the time it takes to have a meeting and all the information has been good and helpful as far as I am concerned and the guys who present it- you guys do a great job putting that information together on the PowerPoint and you studied and did your homework to be able to do that but I would appreciate being able to have a more planned out drawn out meeting that I could sign in get professional development clock hours for it and then walk out feeling like I had done something useful instead of just hearing listening to something I already hear when I was working on my degree. (new voice) keep in mind this is 20 productive meetings maximum and it goes by quick even though I may have information I want to impart I have to speed it up. I like to get the group involved and from her perspective, she is a brand new teacher so for us that are more experienced so sometimes we can walk in and say sometimes it takes us a while to catch up and catch all that's going on for a new teacher she is behind the power curve already based on a lot of new stuff that she is doing and everything so the biggest thing is there is yea 20 minutes.

1:10:08 Facilitator: and you do it during the day, like you have 3<sup>rd</sup> period, then the meeting, then 5<sup>th</sup>?

1:10:12 Voice: (multiple voices) no, no ,no. (new voice) yea cause there are so many different departments. (new voice) that makes a challenge. (new voice) I will just say like for our department sometimes it's not seen as something that is useful to us because looking at our department we have teachers that teach sometimes five or six different classes and there are teachers that do one special thing I mean we don't I mean we are not all like history teacher or English teachers so when it is information that is really general or broad its useful but when it is things that are broken down to certain things it is not beneficial to us ok. Like I mean take me for example, I teach five different classes. That has nothing to do with anyone else in my department.

1:10:53 Facilitator: So five different preps? Right?

1:10:57 Voice: (previous voice) five different preps right(several other heads nodding) so sometimes I don't feel like that information that is given to us in PLCs can be seen as very beneficial. But that's just from our standpoint because we teach you know there are 12 different teachers that teach you know one different subject you know every period. It's just that's our perspective on PLCs. Now for teams that have you know like math and science and English and history that teach the same things its really good to have that collaborative period that where you can talk to your peers and learn different things.

1:11:31 Facilitator: It should be a smaller group is what you are saying?

1:11:34 Voice: If it's just people who teach the same thing we can feel (multiple voices agreeing) (new voice) fine arts you have speech, you have journalism, you have drama, none of us teach the same thing (teachers agreeing and nodding heads in background). And so it's kind of like (new voice) there is no alignment of curriculum (previous voice) there is no alignment I mean I teach six I have six preps I am like the coach I have six preps and then you have at least what, three four preps? But none of us, I mean we have one drama teacher, one journalism teacher. We have nothing in common.

1:12:04 Facilitator: Those of you who just teach one subject do you get time with the other (district schools) teachers or are you strictly here.

1:12:14 Voice: (new voice) no. (previous voice) like we do cross curriculum themes like with sewing and cooking and things like that we have to use that math and science base too so you know I do a lot of writing and stuff in my class so its not like we don't do things across curriculum but sometimes the topics that they want us to discuss and things like that don't really pertain to what we are doing in class. (new voice) it's about the classes that are going through EOC a lot of the times.

1:12:44 Facilitator: There are things that PLCs do according to the literature. One thing is the mission how much input where ya'll able to put into the mission statement of your school? Did anybody here get to add anything to the mission statement?

1:13:05 Voice: (Multiple positive responses in background) (previous voice) yes we got to add some things when we were at the annex. It was a little blurb of what we thought should be. (new voice) yea, that wasn't done through the PLC it was a committee of people who came together who was interested in it, it wasn't the PLC though.

1:13:23 Facilitator: But it was done as a school. Ok. Do ya'll know what the mission is?

1:13:28 Voice: (confused looks and laughter). Something along those lines. (new voice) have we memorized it or can we pick it out of a list?

1:13:44 Facilitator: Can you pick it out of a list?

1:13:47 Voice: (several people saying yes, heads nodding). (previous voice) We can pick it out of a list but we haven't memorized it verbatim. (new voice) that one about excellence, is that the district one or is that ours? (several people seen in back ground and slightly heard trying to remember the mission statement).

1:13:55 Facilitator: The mission says (The mission statement was read at this point but is deleted to protect the identity of the school under study) Does that sound like it?

- 1:14:14 Voice: (agreement) (new voice) Yeas that sounds like it. (much laughter). (new voice) sounds good. (more laughter). (new voice) its real somewhere.
- 1:14:23 Facilitator: Does it sound positive to ya'll?
- 1:14:28 Voice: (previous voice) sounds very positive. (new voice) it's on the monitor somewhere.
- 1:14:33 Facilitator: From an earlier survey I conducted of your faculty, some of you were able to answer this survey. One finding of the survey was that you get a lot of discretion in your area of responsibility but little discretion school-wide. A large group said they do have some input district-wide. Do ya'll agree with that?
- 1:15:35 Voice: (Confusion among Voices) (new voice) what are we agreeing with? (laughter)
- 1:15:40 Facilitator: ok three things. Do you get a lot of discretion over your area of teaching?
- 1:15:47 Voice: (multiple positive responses at once). Yes
- 1:15:50 Facilitator: You do get that. Ok that's what the survey said. And the second thing was you do not get a lot of discretion over the school.
- 1:15:56 Voice: (new voice) can you give us an example?
- 1:15:59 Facilitator: For instance, did you get to have any input as to when your meetings take place? That's a "for instance."
- 1:16:07 Voice: (new voice) It's kind of set up for us.
- 1:16:09 Facilitator: So its top down?
- 1:16:12 Voice: (previous voice) let's put it this way? (new voice) what meetings?
- 1:16:14 Facilitator: PLCs
- 1:16:15 Voice: (new voice) let me kind of confirm a technicality here.
- 1:16:19 Facilitator: Ok.
- 1:16:19 Voice: (previous voice) A PLC is a professional learning community and that is our local thing like say within our department? SLCs is what these house PLCs are really called?
- 1:16:30 Facilitator: Correct
- 1:16:31 Voice: (previous voice) um small group learning community type thing. Small learning community is basically what our house quote PLC AKA SLC is.
- 1:16:44 Facilitator: Yes
- 1:16:45 Voice: (previous voice) and that in itself will kind of tell you we are a small learning community but we are a community and like he said we got all this... ya'll got different stuff all within your little group and then this huge difference of different kinds of things going on between core teachers versus say non-core teachers so that is just an idea to keep in the back of your mind.
- 1:17:09 Facilitator: Yea, that's the terminology.

- 1:17:11 Voice: (new voice) To answer your question about whether or not we have input there are times when things come out that we are supposed to like “what are they thinking?” That should tell you we don’t have a lot of input.
- 1:17:24 Facilitator: You have no way to communicate that up?
- 1:17:27 Voice: (previous voice) oh we... (new voice) we are not asked. (new voice) actually we do – we were just recently asked to read a book and write a positive comment (previous voice) yea, but that (new voice) we were told to read a book and give our comments (much back ground disagreement). (voice getting louder), we were not asked, we were TOLD to read a book and write a positive comment and do it quickly. (new voice) that came from the district. That was the district. (several people trying to talk at once, issue appears controversial to Facilitator). I don’t think anybody says, I could be wrong
- 1:17:48 Facilitator: That was a third part of my survey...
- 1:17:49 Voice: Recently as a campus we were allowed to vote as to whether or not to take on the TAP Grant. So that was a district thing.
- 1:18:03 Facilitator: TAP Grant?
- 1:18:04 Voice: (previous voice) as a campus allowed to vote. (new voice) yea, we were allowed to vote as to whether or not we wanted to adopt that. (new voice) right. (new voice) but do you think it’s still coming even though we voted “no.” (new voice) not next year. (new voice) They are going to keep shoving it at us.
- 1:18:22 Facilitator: What is that?
- 1:18:23 Voice: (previous voice) I have no doubt that next year they are going to keep getting to the same thing and they are going to ask again but I don’t think they are going to give us the option to opt out. But this year we were allowed to vote and opt out.
- 1:18:32 Facilitator: What was the TAP Grant?
- 1:18:33 Voice: (new voice) um, that’s more paper work. (previous voice), yes more paper work. (new voice) yes, that’s what we need more of. (new voice) working toward student success. (much background discussion, anger apparent among Voices.)
- 1:18:59 Facilitator: I will say this is one of the larger PLCs I have seen. Should ya’ll have a common direction as a group?
- 1:19:11 Voice: (new voice) well sure. (new voice) Yea. (new voice) ideally.
- 1:19:19 Facilitator: For what reasons?



1:19:21 Voice: (previous voice) well yes, we are being paid to do this so certainly money is being passed from hand to hand to show the monetary appreciation for 1000s and 1000s of money we spent on the degree and still owe money for but ultimately it comes down to is there is still a choice, we can still choose next year to continue to do what we are doing and they can choose if they want to extend an opportunity for us to continue doing that so because of the level of choices that I think can be made as to your uh not just your pay check but your career I think that I need to have a bit of say so when it comes to something that affect my certification – I am the one that works to keep that, they don't. I have to do that. We are the ones certified in our professions to speak professionally about what we do. We should be able to speak professionally about that as well.

1:20:24 Facilitator: Question is ya'll do have common direction, should you?

1:20:41 Voice: (new voice) common direction is in the direction of providing for the students what they need – whatever it is and I honestly feel that I have the attitude that sometimes and it is not to be exclusive of anyone but I just want sometimes to be left alone so I can teach and do what I do best. (agreement heard) and I know everybody in here is the same way. You teach what you want to teach and you want to do it (new voice) yea. (new voice) and the common direction is we are all preparing for one test at the end of the year. That is the common direction, that is the focus of everything that we do and has nothing to do with the education of any child it has to do with preparing for one test.

1:21:30 Facilitator: and that test is?

1:21:33 Voice: (previous voice) EOC, TAKS. (several other teachers repeating). (previous voice) that's all we do all year. (new voice) mandated. (previous voice) that is the only direction that we are on. (new voice) but the kids nowadays hear it not just from us (new voice) when that is over they do not want to work. (new voice) we even have practice days, "ok today is the day before the test, we are going to practice getting to the room so you will not be late tomorrow." (laughter) That's not exaggeration, they laugh because they are thinking the same thing I am thinking.

1:22:06 Facilitator: I apologize if I seem to keep coming back to the same questions. What percentage of your time do you think you spend working with your house?

1:22:22 Voice: (new voice) how do you mean working? (new voice) Meetings you mean?

1:22:25 Facilitator: Meeting and everything that is not involving you actually working with a child.

1:22:32 Voice: (new voice) just the meeting.

1:22:37 Facilitator: That's it, just the meeting.

- 1:22:39 Voice: (new voice) as a house, yes, (others “yes” responses heard in background.) (new voice) yea as a house. (new voice) maybe 20 minutes a week. (new voice) but we work with each other all the time. I f I have a science teacher who needs a calculator I am the inclusion teacher I will go in the closet and get them I mean if I have science teachers who have subs I go in there and make sure the subs know what is happening and make sure they are teaching. I mean but to sit in a meeting and talk.
- 1:23:03 Facilitator: What I am really interested in is those interactions that happen between you that don’t show up in the meetings – like you said the helping each other out before class, “try this here” kind of stuff.
- 1:23:19 Voice: (new voice) that goes on all the time. (much agreement)
- 1:23:21 Facilitator: Talk to me about that.
- 1:23:23 Voice: (new voice) that is part of being a professional and we know that if we need help in the social studies department then we know to go to the social studies department and say, “Hey we are talking about art history, when are you teaching this subject, we would like to teach” I don’t think that is because of a meeting of a house – I think that is because we are professionals in our field. (new voice) and I don’t have the cross us out too, you can help engineering (previous voice) right and that does not necessarily exclude us. (previous voice) carry that banner (new voice) we have been cross teaching now for two years and we have never done anything in a meeting. (new voice) except eating donuts. (new voice) no no (laughter) (new voice) don’t be knocking the donuts. (laughter)
- 1:24:08 Facilitator: Things you have gotten from each other and learned from each other. What are some things you have gotten from each other and learned from each other?
- 1:24:25 Voice: (new voice) in the meeting?
- 1:24:27 Facilitator: Well as a group you indicate if it is in a meeting or if it is somewhere else where you are just passing stuff around. At lunch and in between classes, after school. What are some specific things like you mentioned like if you need some help from the history department for a particular unit you will ask them for help.
- 1:24:55 Voice: (new voice) social studies department, we do not have a history department here (laughter)
- 1:24:59 Facilitator: Yes?

1:25:00 Voice: (new voice) I see the benefits of what we are trying to do now through these SLCs – I really do and I guess you never find out if it is going to be something workable until you jump in with both feet and try it. But, I have been working a long time in teaching and I have seen a lot of stuff come and go and for the most part it all boils down to having the time to do what you have to do, using the skills that you’ve got that you have already acquired and you know what you need to do and having to deal with the frustration of having been taken away from that and you know (speaker laughs) I just feel that we honestly we are never, we are not left with the kind of – I won’t say free time because we do not have free time – in this building. But with the kind of time that you need to reflect and do what you need to do because between tutoring two days a minimum a week – most of us do any day when the kid needs it – but you know just honest to goodness two days a week that you are expected to engage in that. Between all that, you know if the SLC – the SLCs are a good idea but I do not know what they are accomplishing really. Again, it is just that attitude without trying to be mutually exclusive of others please leave me alone so I can do what I need to do with my room. So that I can professionally communicate with the people in my department, with people across department like if I am having issues with Johnny and I want to know if someone in another department is having the same kind of thing because that will tell me if the kid has an issue and if you are not maybe it is just me and I need to contact the parent and say “hey you know this is coming down.” You know we do not have that kind of time anymore because we are structured (knocking on table) ABCD ABCDABCD. Its just like boom boomboom. And we are going to do it at this time on certain days. It is extremely frustrating sometimes.

1:27:21 Facilitator: I think I have gotten that from three or four of you. A couple of you are looking like you are agreeing but I am not sure. If I could...

- 1:27:31 Voice: (new voice) I am just curious (new voice) I agree. (previous voice) If we were to make PLCs voluntary, in other words “come if you can, if you can’t..” how many people would actually come? (new voice) nobody. (new voice) nobody (much agreement (previous voice) yes, that’s exactly (new voice) I mean if it would really revolutionize what I did in my classroom but honestly when I go to a PLC and I am the only one who teaches what I do and I am only one of three in the district and there are no subs if I am sick – there are no subs. There are some basic things in a PLC I can certainly agree with – and I am not a closed minded person, I am not stubborn yes, you can ask my wife. (laughter) and I have a thing or two to learn here but I have learned a lot of things here for example my wife is a doctor and she runs her office very very well, very sternly but her people love her to death. One of her favorite sayings is, “ok guys we need to decrappify.” (new voice) right (laughter). (previous voice) just cut the crap is what she tells them and they think its historical and they love her for it but when it comes down to it I am thinking, “wow, that is wisdom, I wish I could say that out loud in one of our meetings here. (new voice) do it right now, let’s decrappify.” (laughter) (new voice) New movement! (new voice) Our mission statement! (much more laughter throughout group).
- 1:29:02 Facilitator: One other line of questioning ya’ll have already gotten to it. The following by the way is not research based. There are at least two schools of thought involving PLCs – one is from Shirley Horde, the other from the DuFours. One is a very results oriented approach while the other is one in which the principal sets a very tight structure (process oriented) for the teachers. Which one do ya’ll think is best?
- 1:30:03 Voice: (new voice) Seems like the whole idea behind PLCs is to get people to talk and interact with each other. And if you are doing that with each other on a regular basis why do you have to take an hour every other week and stop what you are doing and go do that if you are doing it already. And if you know you need someone in art or someone in engineering, why do you have to have a meeting to decide that. If you are going to take a group of people together out of their routine to meet then something significant ought to be accomplished that cannot be accomplished in any other format. (agreement heard in the background).
- 1:30:37 Facilitator: So your saying..
- 1:30:38 Voice: (previous voice) in short it is a waste of time (laughter).
- 1:30:41 Facilitator: So you are saying do not worry so much about the process, just let the teachers get a result - do their thing.

- 1:30:50 Voice: (previous voice) yea, they will figure it out. (new voice) to answer your question in (Another school in the district) it was how we structured they told us what we knew we had to teach what they knew talk about what subject in the PLC and it was worse than unstructured. (new voice) Yea but less worse is not better though. (previous voice) No, it wasn't less, it was worse. (previous voice) no but being less worse is still frustrating. (previous voice) But what you just said doesn't go with what Dr. H. says, Dr. H. says we do PLCs and SLCs because research says that it improves things at your school. I would like to see the research. (new voice) most of it just seems to be a distribution of research which has been e-mailed. (new voice) so you are saying it is not research based.
- 1:31:44 Facilitator: Well it is, but it is not quantitative, the studies really only started coming out about two or three years ago and when I looked at them they were really qualitative. My opinion about it.
- 1:32:01 Voice: (previous voice) so go talk to (The principal). about it.
- 1:32:04 Facilitator: We have talked about it.
- 1:32:05 Voice: (previous voice) well talk about it more, you need to be stronger.
- 1:32:07 Facilitator: This is to give me material.
- 1:32:13 Voice: (previous voice) yea, but you need to be stronger in your position. (new voice) Are you going to tell him what we said.
- 1:32:18 Facilitator: No, I am going to sum up what is said but I will not be saying who said what.
- 1:32:21 Voice: (previous voice) I know that but you are going to let him know how we feel (laughter). I will claim it, he knows how I feel.
- 1:32:30 Facilitator: Yes, he is interested in knowing this stuff. I mean if it is not working you adjust.

1:32:27 Voice: (new voice) well, I know from my standpoint I work with nearly everybody in this room and it would be nice to not have to go to a meeting every single week when I already know what I do like I work with, name somebody I have probably done something with them. For me it would save time in the morning when my kids actually need me to practice to use or take a test or whatever when I already know I am working with cosmo and art you know I have done stuff for everybody. So it would be nice to have more time and not if we could have a way to prove that we are working. (new voice) just a thought. I worked for a district one time that did PLCs and instead of just saying “ok, ya’ll just hurry and do this PLC in the morning or do real quick after school here” they actually planned in the day and we had a split block on Wednesday or Thursday on even numbered days we would meet for a couple hours and students would come in at about 9 or so (later than usual) and there was this segment of time. They didn’t put us in this big community like this, it was just languages and we got together and we talked about the things that were going on in our group and we would help each other out with issues that were coming up, what we do with helping each other out with students or just whatever we talked about what was relevant to our department or our profession and our contribution to whatever was TAKS related. Ultimately when the talk was over we left, we went to our rooms. And we did what we needed to do and prepared for students to arrive to school that day. They set that time aside during the day and they gave us professional development hours. Two hours every week that we could put on our transcripts and turn in for our certification which was useful.

1:34:36 Facilitator: Ya’ll don’t get the hours for these?

1:34:43 Voice: (previous voice) oh no. (new voice) (Another District) does it that way. (new voice) yea. (new voice) yes, my son’s high school does it that way. (new voice) (something about buses and schedules to get to school) (new voice) just remember whatever we do the other has to do because we have to be carbon copies of each other. (much discussion between several groups about how these things won’t work for this district because both high schools have to be doing the same thing as far as scheduling – not really talking to the Facilitator but to each other in small group). (new voice) last school I was at we didn’t do any of this and the kids were better prepared and the scores were higher so.

1:35:15 Facilitator: What do you mean by better prepared?

1:35:16 Voice: (previous voice) they got better scores. Demographics were the same.

1:35:20 Facilitator: Demographics were the same. So it was a community similar to (The school under study)?

- 1:35:23 Voice: (previous voice) yea. (new voice) SLCs were a good idea, it would be interesting to know who came up with it and all that
- 1:35:35 Facilitator: Shirley Hord was...
- 1:35:36 Voice: (previous voice) but I am saying what is it from where they are coming from
- 1:35:39 Facilitator: She is curriculum...
- 1:35:41 Voice: (previous voice) in theory good idea. In practical application it falls short.
- 1:35:50 Facilitator: So the survey ya'll answered said you were more results oriented than concerned about getting involved in the process. I think that is what I am picking up here.
- 1:36:06 Voice: (new voice) we are too busy being in the PLC to answer the survey (laughter) (new voice) 20% of the people are doing 80% of the work. (new voice) I will be honest when I saw the survey come around I said I didn't have time to do this I have other things I have to do so I didn't answer them. (new voice) it was like last spring when the survey came out? (new voice) last fall. (new voice) It should have been worded that you have to do this. (much laughter)
- 1:37:15 Facilitator: Trying to get honest responses here.
- 1:37:35 Voice: (new voice) let me ask you a question (to Facilitator). Why did you throw in that question, it looks like you left it, why did you ask about how our decision making in the school was structured if we had any input because you hit it, and then not many responses and then you left it? You know I would say that our structure is from the top down but as far as I am concerned I don't think that anybody has ever been denied an audience to go in and discuss their feelings and their ideas and...
- 1:38:14 Facilitator: in the meeting
- 1:38:15 Voice: (previous voice) well in the meeting or one on one or whatever.
- 1:38:18 Facilitator: So his door is open
- 1:38:20 Voice: (previous voice) yea, oh yea (much agreement with the group). Man I just wanted to get that out there, I do not think we are shut out (new voice) it might be that way at central office but not here. (previous voice) I mean you can say what you want, it is going to be that way anyway. But I don't think anyone has ever been shut out to have an audience with powers that be.
- 1:38:39 Facilitator: Yes, these questions are actually based on what PLCs are according to the literature. They never really seem to match.
- 1:38:51 Voice: (new voice) well maybe the person who is writing the literature doesn't know what they are talking about. And they just came up with an idea, you know like publish or perish type idea – they just threw something out there to say, “hey look what I thought of.”

- 1:39:13 Facilitator: I am not here to defend PLCs by the way.
- 1:39:17 Voice: (previous voice) well, we are just being honest.
- 1:39:20 Facilitator: That's what we want.
- 1:39:21 Voice: (new voice) plus they have a history of just doing something for a couple of years and then they just throw it off to the side. (assistant principal) hey we are kind of bumping up on forty minutes if you can wrap it up.
- 1:39:32 Facilitator: We are good, I appreciate your honest input – I will be here if you have any questions later on.
- 1:39:38 Voice: (assistant principal) you have three different houses coming in so you may have ...(noise drowns him out)
- 1:39:45 Facilitator: I appreciate your honesty and your time/
- 1:39:58 Voice: (new voice) I appreciate you coming in. It's like being fed to the lions (laughter). Good luck on your Ph.D. (it's an Ed.D.)
- 1:39:59 Facilitator: Thank you.



## Second Focus Group

*Below is a transcript of a focus group which occurred from 10:00 AM to 10:46 AM on January 16, 2012 at the school under study. Present were 16 members of an SLC which consisted of business and criminal justice teachers.*

- 2:00:00 Voice: (Assistant Principal) Hi Glen, he is going to be talking about PLCs and SLCs. He just had the House of arts which is about 36 people. This one might be a little bit smaller. (new voice) This is all of us? (new voice) now I know there is more people than this. (Assistant Principal) well, if they show they show. I think it is best that you go ahead and get started.
- 2:00:20 Facilitator: I am Glen Hartsoch, I am working on my doctorate at UH, hopefully finish in May. I am a government teacher in Cy-Fair ISD. What I am trying to do here is find out how the PLCS here, the teachers here, actually work together. I would like to get the truth from the teachers. I am to build a narrative about that.
- 2:00:54 Voice: (new voice) Are we on the record or off the record? (nervous laughter) (new voice) honest? (new voice) Exactly how we feel about it?
- 2:01:01 Facilitator: Here is how it is going to work out. I do have it recording.
- 2:01:05 Voice: (previous voice) uh oh.
- 2:01:05 Facilitator: No one will hear the recording except for me or possibly the members of my dissertation committee. I am going to prepare a transcript that won't be available... but I am trying to get honest opinions here. (The building principal name mentioned) won't attach names to what you are saying.
- 2:01:28 Voice: (new voice) Excellent.
- 2:01:29 Facilitator: Because I know you are saying things among yourselves, let's find out what your PLC actually looks like. And ya'll know what I mean by PLC right?
- 2:01:40 Voice: (new voice) Nope.
- 2:01:41 Facilitator: First off, you are in the business house which is a PLC and also an SLC. I am sure you have other terms for it. That didn't sound right (not what I meant for it to sound like). What other PLCs, groups of teachers to you interact with in meetings and stuff?
- 2:02:03 Voice: (new voice) I guess as far as like English teachers, history teachers.
- 2:02:05 Facilitator: Yes
- 2:02:06 Voice: (previous voice) None of them.
- 2:02:08 Facilitator: Ya'll don't interact with any other departments?
- 2:02:12 Voice: (new voice) Well now last year we did. But this year so far it has just been us. (new voice) I interact with science.

2:02:19 Facilitator: With science?

2:02:20 Voice: (previous voice) yes. Especially the AP teachers. We talk about things they need to have covered before they get to physiology, microbiology so they can be prepared. (new voice) I think it just kind of depends on what you are doing like you're in science, I do not really meet with anybody. (new voice) I mean I am trying to interact with other teachers on my own – I haven't really been successful.

2:02:47 Facilitator: What have you been trying to do?

2:02:49 Voice: (previous voice) Like generate some kind of lesson, I forget what it was earlier this year. But I thought it would be great to have the kids create their own towns and create an entire government type - set up their own government like the laws and all that stuff. I didn't really work out. We ended up doing it by ourselves.

2:03:14 Facilitator: Do you teach government?

2:03:15 Voice: (previous voice) I teach criminal justice.

2:03:19 Facilitator: How often do you meet as a PLC?

2:03:24 Voice: (previous voice) every other week.

2:03:25 Facilitator: Every other week? In the morning I take it?

2:03:26 Voice: (previous voice) Morning.

2:03:28 Facilitator: Twenty minutes? Thirty minutes?

2:03:29 Voice: (previous voice) Thirty minutes. (new voice) thirty. (previous voice) Yea

2:03:32 Facilitator: Do ya'll take minutes on those meetings?

2:03:35 Voice: (previous voice) we do.

2:03:36 Facilitator: And do you get those back? Are they useful to you?

2:03:38 Voice: (new voice) No we don't get minutes back. (previous voice) Well, I have never seen them. (new voice) yea we do. (new voice) (A teacher's name mentioned) has them. (laughter) (new voice) well he has them, I just... (previous voice) I never seen them. (laughter) I think I am not on the e-mail list. (new voice) I think that is something we are going to start doing and let ya'll know. (new voice) We are, Ok.

2:03:56 Facilitator: Have these meetings been useful to your practice as an educator?

2:04:1:03 Voice: (new voice) no. (new voice) To be real honest it did when I was brand new to the profession. Um, you know my former school I was at when I was new to the profession I learned a lot of stuff at the Tuesday morning meetings we had but you know after my first year a lot of it gets repetitive. So its like I already heard it. So that's just me personally when I was brand new it really made a difference now it's kind of old hat.

2:04:37 Facilitator: What about the rest of ya'll? Is it similar story or has it ever helped you?

- 2:04:45 Voice: (new voice) No, sometimes you will get something good out of it.  
(Several people coming in at this point).
- 2:04:57 Facilitator: And again, those of you coming in, I appreciate you coming in.  
(moving the recording device to a more central location since the center of the room had changed with the focus group about doubling in size at this point.) I am moving this because I am trying to get the best voice coverage that I can. Those of you that just came in, let me explain what I am doing here. My name is Glen Hartsoch and I am working on my doctorate at UH. I am going to build up a narrative of what PLCs look like in the area. I teach government in Cypress-Fairbanks. And I am basically trying to get honest input from you about your PLC and if it is not working, what needs to happen, those kind of things. So this is on the record and my doctoral committee will see it. It's being recorded but I am not tying any voice into anything. The question I just asked is what PLCs are ya'll a member of and what other interactions you are having with other teachers like before school, after school, those are the kinds of things I am trying to get. So what other PLCs or groups of teachers are you active with?
- 2:06:41 Voice: (new voice) Coaches, our practice stuff we get together and we plan for that if that is what you are talking about.
- 2:06:49 Facilitator: So the coaches do that.
- 2:06:50 Voice: (previous voice) yes
- 2:06:53 Facilitator: Are those actual meetings?
- 2:06:56 Voice: (previous voice) yes
- 2:06:56 Facilitator: And how do those work?
- 2:07:00 Voice: (previous voice) hmmm before and after practice.
- 2:07:03 Facilitator: Kind of informally?
- 2:07:05 Voice: (previous voice) yes (new voice) but that is not really considered a PLC.  
(previous voice) if that is what he is talking about. Any type of planning.  
(previous voice) we are the PE health department. (she was referring to the group that came in after the focus group started. Note: They were not late the group started early at the assistant principal's request).
- 2:07:20 Facilitator: Yea, I am using a broad term of a PLC. The basic concept of the PLC is that you are trying to get teachers to work together and the meeting is one way administrators use to do that but there is... I am trying to find those instances where PLCs naturally exist.
- 2:07:40 Voice: (previous voice) So at the beginning of the year we have our district-wide meetings where we all get together with the superintendent and all that stuff where it all starts off.
- 2:07:49 Facilitator: All the teachers?

- 2:07:50 Voice: (previous voice) everybody. We have a district-wide coaches meeting where we all get together. We have by the week there are department chairs that get together. And then the departments meet and discuss what is going on with the departments head with their department.
- 2:08:14 Facilitator: That is the beginning of each year?
- 2:08:17 Voice: (previous voice) That's every week. But at the beginning of each year the whole district-wide meets.
- 2:08:35 Facilitator: What kinds of useful information do you get from the district-wide meetings?
- 2:08:31 Voice: (previous voice) Pretty much it tells you a theme or whatever to start off with and motivational type stuff. (new voice) but then we did have meetings where we went over and met the same department like the PE department at (Another school in the district) (previous voice) district-wide. (new voice) yea we met together then to try to get the PE classes on the same page (previous voice) and I think the core subjects have alignment meetings where the alignments go with your elementary, middle school, and high schools all align everything up.
- 2:09:02 Facilitator: Useful meetings?
- 2:09:04 Voice: (previous voice) I am not involved in those.
- 2:09:06 Facilitator: I mean the ones you attend.
- 2:09:08 Voice: (previous voice) Are they useful? Yea. I would like to have more.
- 2:09:15 Facilitator: You would like to have more?
- 2:09:16 Voice: (new voice) yes, I would like to have more, more planning. (previous voice) yes. More staff meetings.
- 2:09:25 Facilitator: And in these meetings that you do have...
- 2:09:30 Voice: (previous voice) He asked us to be honest, I am being honest. (A person sitting next to this person gave this Voice a quizzical look after he or she indicated a preference for more meetings).
- 2:09:38 Facilitator: (Group looking at Facilitator as if they are confused) That's what I am trying to do, this is qualitative its open ended, just trying to get input from ya'll – I try to find trends
- 2:09:55 Voice: (new voice) I would like more meetings if they are going to be useful. I hate to go to the meetings that we have now because you get a couple of pieces of information that you can probably get from an e-mail. Its administrative content.
- 2:10:10 Facilitator: So Content? What kind of information would be shared in a useful meeting?

2:10:18 Voice: (previous voice) Well, what is the point of the PLC? I thought it was for cross-curriculum. I mean me interacting with a math teacher or a science teacher and trying to get lessons together – I thought that is what it was.

(new voice) That's one of them – one type.

2:10:30 Facilitator: Do ya'll ever discuss the students or is it just content?

2:10:37 Voice: (new voice) No. (new voice) no. (Several people shaking their heads "no.")

2:10:40 Facilitator: Ok, let me ask you about the school's mission.

2:10:50 Voice: (new voice) It's on the (laughter) (new voice) it's on the website.

(laughter). (new voice) We are supposed to be preparing kids for life. (new voice) Something about community. (previous voice) basically.

2:11:01 Facilitator: Did you get to have input into the writing of it?

2:11:08 Voice: (new voice) It was established right before we opened. (new voice) oh well, so "no." If you were not hired in (Another high school in the district), so no.

2:11:16 Facilitator: So the one's that came in from (Another high school in the district) where...

2:11:17 Voice: (new voice) I was not included. (new voice) Yes, if you attended those meetings you had input into it.

2:11:21 Facilitator: Did a lot of people attend those meetings?

2:11:22 Voice: (new voice) More students attended those meetings than teachers did.

2:11:24 Facilitator: More students, oh really? And the students had input into the mission too?

2:11:26 Voice: (previous voice) Very little, I think the teachers had more input so there was a very small group of teachers who did have some input. I attended a couple of those meetings.

2:11:37 Facilitator: What kind of input?

2:11:41 Voice: (previous voice) Just kind of where... what we wanted the school to be like – where we wanted... what we wanted the school to accomplish for the kids.

2:11:47 Facilitator: Did you get to write down little ideas and give it to them and they

2:11:51 Voice: Actually it was more of a discussion type

2:11:52 Facilitator: More of a discussion? It says (a portion of the mission statement is read at this point) Does that sound familiar?

2:12:07 Voice: (previous voice) yes.

2:12:08 Facilitator: (Another portion of the mission statement is read at this point)

2:12:12 Voice: (previous voice) that's nice.

2:12:14 Facilitator: That's your mission that ya'll agreed with?

2:12:15 Voice: (new voice) Yes

- 2:12:16 Facilitator: And is there anything in particular that ya'll want to say about that?  
 (silence for a few seconds). Any words that you feel strongly about?  
 (silence) Do you know anyone who input any of those words? I know it was a long time ago. (no answer after some time). Ok, the survey ya'll realize it but earlier this semester (note, I meant earlier this school year) I conducted a survey which I got a small response to but given that teachers are busy... Anyway, I am asking some questions based on this survey. Ok, one thing ya'll said, at least those who responded which probably does not typify the entire faculty...anyway, one thing it said was that ya'll had a lot of discretion in your area of teaching where its...
- 2:13:26 Voice: (new voice) you get to do what you want to do.
- 2:13:28 Facilitator: Do ya'll agree with that?
- 2:13:30 Voice: (previous voice) yes. (Heads shaking yes). (new voice) absolutely.
- 2:13:32 Facilitator: Any examples anyone can think of that I can...
- 2:13:35 Voice: (previous voice) well, for instance when I make my lesson nobody comes back to me and goes, "hey you need to do it this way." I mean there is a lot of discretion in that aspect whereas there has not been much said – you know I mean that may be a good thing or a bad thing – I don't know but...  
 (silence)
- 2:14:00 Facilitator: So that's your experience?
- 2:14:02 Voice: (new voice) I think it's a bad thing as far as guidance you know where you want to go with your subject or whatever and procedures and that type of thing. But it's a good thing like as far as who you are and you know you can kind of do your own thing based on your personality and it all depends on how you... (new voice) I think for experienced teachers it's a good thing; I think for new teachers it's not. Because they need a lot more guidance in comparison to where I have been before you've had it set up to where we had PLC every Thursday morning. You had a faculty meeting every Thursday morning. All the administrators, every single person in the entire school that was in instruction was in that meeting and that your head principal and your associate principal and all your principal, counselors, everybody like that had any contact with the kids where in that meeting and pertinent information that had to be said was said there and it was mandatory but you had to be there and then from there you went to your department meeting and in your department meetings that's where you planned and it was given to you and the district had curriculum and it was exactly what you needed to do and basically your lesson plans were done and then they were put at you a you were told this is what you have to do, you have to do it, what you will do, these are the stories you will do and in English this is what you will do, your warm-ups will be this.

2:15:25 Facilitator: That wasn't here, that was...

2:15:26 Voice: (previous voice) No. That's what I am saying, in comparison you know it was kind of a dictatorship. (questions as to where). I was in a large school district. (new voice) it's kind of like, mine was I followed the TEKS – I don't think it's always right to have a dictated guideline on how to do it because I think there are new teachers that come in with maybe new ideas but I do think they need the more experienced teachers to work with. Maybe you can come up with new ideas of how to do something differently and improve upon it but you... but it would be helpful like when I can talk to somebody about how maybe different idea or bounce ideas off different people to see what they think about it or is there a way I can do it differently.

2:16:20 Facilitator: Are you the only one who teaches your subject?

2:16:22 Voice: (new voice) Going on what she said, there are you know a couple of us where we are the only ones that teach what we teach. And like she had a career before she started teaching, I am a doctor – I had a career before I started teaching. Now I don't know about her but when I look at the TEKS –the TEKS were designed by, and don't take this as an insult – educators. Ok, Educators that have no earthly idea what's involved in the real world as far as these courses relating to careers. Ok, Whereas those of us who have been in those careers for ten plus years – you know, we know what's necessary, we know what the students are going to be subjected to in undergraduate, medical school, nursing school, all these types of things – we know what they need to know. Much better than what those TEKS tell us that they need to know. (new voice) I look at that as a general guideline and I do not want cause I know.

2:17:22 Facilitator: The TEKS come from the state, what do you get from the district?

2:17:27 Voice: (previous voice) what? (new voice) the district? Nothing. Which is fine.

2:17:33 Facilitator: One other thing you said in your survey was that you get a lot of discretion with your practice but at the building level not so much. For instance, being able to decide when your teams meet, things like that. Do ya'll find that to be true? (no response for a few seconds). Ok, you have a lot of discretion with your practice – with your teaching but at the building level, what input do the teachers have with that?

2:18:10 Voice: (new voice) Give an example of what you are talking about. (new voice) What type... (new voice) what decisions?

2:18:15 Facilitator: For instance, you have a meeting at 6:50 in the morning – ya'll have a meeting at 6:50 right – to what, 7:20?

2:18:21 Voice: (confusion) (previous voice) you mean the department?

2:18:22 Facilitator: right. Did ya'll get a choice between that and after school?

- 2:18:25 Voice: (new voice) No. (new voice) not really.
- 2:18:27 Facilitator: Any kind of decision like that?
- 2:18:29 Voice: (new voice) Well you run into stuff here where you have so many coaches as far as as this one goes... (new voice) practices. (previous voice) you can't really meet after school because you are responsible for the kids.
- 2:18:38 Facilitator: So you are being told what your schedule is by the district. The other part of that was according to your survey you get a lot of input into the district. (difficulty wording question to the focus group). Do you find you get a lot of input into the district?
- 2:19:15 Voice: (new voice) on what... (new voice) anything?
- 2:19:17 Facilitator: Yea. Even though here at the school you don't get a lot of...
- 2:19:26 Voice: (new voice) The district votes on the schedule. (new voice) yea, there are several schedules that go out that you can pick. (new voice) That's what I said. (new voice) as far as work days, holidays? (new voice) you are kind of using a broad term with "input." Can you be specific.
- 2:19:44 Facilitator: Yes, anything, I am giving the example of scheduling. Part of a PLC is about teachers taking responsibility for the practice of education.
- 2:20:01 Voice: (new voice) I think they ask us, they do not necessarily..
- 2:20:1:03 Facilitator: They do ask?
- 2:20:05 Voice: (previous voice) they do ask.
- 2:20:06 Facilitator: They listen?
- 2:20:07 Voice: (previous voice) I do not know if they really listen. Sometimes I feel like they have already made up their mind but in order to be fair about it or in order to appear to be fair about it they ask us the question. Then we so "no" or they may completely disagree with us – I don't know – I have no idea.
- 2:20:20 Facilitator: No idea what's going on up there?
- 2:20:22 Voice: (previous voice) A prime example would have been that presentation that they had the other day, they had pretty much decided that this is what they wanted us to do is join this particular program. That we were there to say "yes" or "no" but I felt like very strong armed that they wanted us to vote a particular way and then when they ask for our vote and you put your name on it, well I don't care, I will put my name on it and I will say "no" but there were teachers in there that did not want to do that. They felt like they better say "yes" or I am going to get into trouble. (new voice) You are going to get punished for (previous voice) I think that is wrong.
- 2:20:51 Facilitator: That was the TAP program right?
- 2:20:54 Voice: (new voice) yea (new voice) The way it was presented that thing was wrong.
- 2:20:55 Facilitator: And they required you to put your name on it.



2:20:58 Voice: (previous voice) yea, I think that some put their name on it and some did not.

2:21:1:03 Facilitator: Ok, let's see, what about ok some of these questions are going to seem kind of out there – the aspects of a PLC, sometimes they get thought a lot about – every school is different. But one very aspect of a PLC is a common direction. (talking in the background that the Facilitator did not hear during focus group). And I would like to know how you feel about your school's common direction, is that happening? Do you have a common direction?

2:20:42 Voice: (new voice) I think that mission statement, telling – saying that this is what we all want to do is prepare kids for basically - for like - and their future and being a productive individual in society, I think that they expect us to do that within our subject area –within our – and to do our plans.

2:22:01 Facilitator: Ya'll see that happening?

2:22:07 Voice: (new voice) I can – I can't agree with you on that. (laughter) I, thinking about it, you know be honest I haven't thought about it. (new voice) leaving much even if it wasn't the mission statement – I think most of us would do that anyway. Even if that wasn't the mission statement, I mean that's the reason that we do what we do. (new voice) You are supposed to get the kids ready for the next level. (previous voice) exactly (previous voice) that's your job. (previous voice) that's what we want to do.

2:22:25 Facilitator: So ya'll see that common direction?

2:22:28 Voice: (new voice) primary school gets ready for secondary, secondary gets ready for – or middle school. (new voice) I think that's we get such lead way with what we are trying to do like in our departments is because they do know – I mean I think that Dr. H. understand that we do have skills that aren't necessarily just you know- narrow minded and we have a lot of ideas like we get a lot of lead way in that aspect. That's just my opinion on it.

2:22:58 Facilitator: That's what I am looking for (opinion). Ok one thing I am trying to find out about is all those littler interactions that occur that are not really official. Kind of informal interactions that you have with other teachers. Trying to explore that. What percentage of your time do you think you are actually working with other teachers – sharing ideas – talking about students – whatever?

2:23:30 Voice: (new voice) We don't talk about students. (new voice) I would say about 2% of the time. I mean very little. (new voice) Because your interactions is with the students.

2:23:40 Facilitator: So you are mostly with the students?

2:23:41 Voice: (previous voice) we are here from six..before 6:50 to shoot, sometimes 11 o'clock at night.

2:23:59 Facilitator: Wow

2:23:50 Voice: (previous voice) Coaching staff is. (new voice) yea, it depends on what you do. (previous voice) That's right, the coaching staff is. (new voice) and we make so much money (laugher). (previous voice) yes, tons of money.

2:24:01 Facilitator: It's that \$2,000 a year stipend.

2:24:02 Voice: (previous voice) yes, exactly. (new voice) yes, but I do, if I have a question I will direct it to you know somebody that is nearby that might have a good answer. You know between classes if I have a question I will just run over and ask somebody that I think can help me.

2:24:19 Facilitator: And is that happening a lot for you?

2:24:20 Voice: (previous voice) yes, it does.

2:24:21 Facilitator: and it works out?

2:24:22 Voice: (previous voice) it's not necessarily a formal/site-down meeting but I am not going to go all day with a question unanswered. I will just...as best I can.

2:24:31 Facilitator: Can you readily think of an example?

2:24:34 Voice: (previous voice) it can be all sorts of things, this is my first year teaching – you know grade book issues. Its' just everything that's administrative based, I am comfortable with my subject but basically the behind the scenes stuff that's a little bit. (new voice) housekeeping. (previous voice) housekeeping. Yea

2:24:54 Facilitator: Do you get more of that from the informal interactions or does any of that happen in the meetings?

2:24:59 Voice: (previous voice) Mostly informal because I might have one question every three weeks and just whoever is nearby who knows the answer, I will take it.

2:25:11 Facilitator: What about the rest of ya'll, do you see that too? Do you see something different? Do you interact a lot with other teachers?

2:25:21 Voice: (new voice) There is not really much time to do that in between classes I will go ask some of the experienced teachers next to me, it's mostly administrative stuff – it's nothing to do with teaching.

2:25:32 Facilitator: Do you have interactions at lunch, or do you eat in your rooms?

- 2:25:36: Voice (new voice). Yea. (new voice) we do (new voice) we get like 20-30 minutes for lunch (new voice) like for 10 minutes. (new voice) but lunch is so short, yea by the time you sit down to eat you have like 10 minutes. (previous voice) yea, you got about 10 minutes. (previous voice) Yea. (previous voice) change eating. (laughter) (new voice) I find myself walking down to the cafeteria just to get out of that hoe for a while. (laughter) I am not kidding you. (several agreeing).
- 2:26:1:03 Facilitator: Apologies if I keep asking you questions it seems like you already answered. I am really trying to get this information out of you. Things that you learned from each other. Anything you learned from each other. What are some things you learned from each other?
- 2:26:24 Voice: (new voice) I have learned about the background of this area, about the kids whose were born and raised here, whose parents were born and raised here. And their outlook is helping me as far as being able to communicate.
- 2:26:39 Facilitator: So you are learning cultural...
- 2:26:44 Voice: (previous voice) it's different than I ever experienced before. (new voice) what kind of outlook do you think they have? (previous voice) I would rather not comment on that right now.
- 2:26:50 Facilitator: But you are getting that from other teachers?
- 2:26:52 Voice: (previous voice) yes, people who have been here – been at (another school in the district) – that were here at (the district) for a while and have experience dealing with the people in this area. (new voice) And this is the only place that I have been to teach so I am learning from here that there is life outside of (the community under study). (laughter) Different things happen all the time. (new voice) Like the families that grew up here (laughter) (new voice) and all those rednecks that grew up around here (laughter) they never get out.
- 2:27:19 Facilitator: Sounds like my kind of town actually.
- 2:27:22 Voice: (new voice) Yea, me too. (laughter). (new voice) Well this small town is a little bit different than other small towns. (new voice) This small town is not very small anymore. (previous voice) No, but it has that mentality.
- 2:27:34 Facilitator: And that information was useful? (Heads nodding). Anything else you have earned from other teachers? Anything you have taught other teachers?
- 2:27:52 Voice: (new voice) I am sorry, what was that question?
- 2:27:54 Facilitator: Yea, anything you have learned or taught other teachers? Trying to get a rich narrative here as to what is actually moving between the teachers.

- 2:28:05 Voice: (new voice) My discussions with other teachers lately have just been about competitions coming up and I am not really familiar with all the rules and guidelines and things that go into that.
- 2:28:15 Facilitator: So UIL stuff? Right?
- 2:28:18 Voice: (previous voice) Ours is skills USA but – mock trial competitions. Right now I am talking to another teacher in another district to try to find out a time we can practice so that we can help each other out, that's in a different district.
- 2:28:34 Facilitator: Oh, she is in another district? (note, how did I know it was a she?) Did you get any interactions with (Another high school in the district)?
- 2:28:41 Voice: (new voice) They have a brand new criminal justice - guess that would be me helping them – um, she came and asked for lesson plans from me for her classes.
- 2:28:54 Facilitator: So that's happening. Anybody else have interactions maybe with (The district)?
- 2:29:00 Voice: (new voice) I do, I mean I talk to the ..... sponsor over there all the time as far as getting things ready for competition. Him and I work pretty closely if he has a question about it I answer it. I if I have a question he answers me usually. So there is a little bit of cross between there. I don't necessarily hate him (laughter)
- 2:29:20 Facilitator: That's good.
- 2:29:21 Voice: (laughter) (previous voice) That's a joke, I like coach ..., he is a good guy. (laughter) (new voice) coach who?
- 2:29:34 Facilitator: Ok, see ya'll answered that (they answered a question I was going to ask before I asked it)...Ok, the next line of thought – there are two schools in the PLC literature. One is very strong process oriented and the other is a very strong results orientation. What do ya'll think ya'll see here, do you get a lot of administrative involvement with the process of your PLCs?
- 2:30:25 Voice: (new voice) As like them coming in a running the PLC?
- 2:30:27 Facilitator: Yes
- 2:30:29 Voice: (previous voice) No. (new voice) in the department chair one. (silent thinking).
- 2:30:42 Facilitator: What about the results. Do they look real closely at your results?
- 2:30:50 Voice: (new voice) Results of what?
- 2:30:52 Facilitator: Your students. May seem like a silly question, I know the answer is probably going to be "yes," (changed thought) but what kind of results do they look at for your students?
- 2:31:08 Voice: (previous voice) TAKS. (new voice) TAKS. (new voice) Passing standardized testing. (new voice) Mmm huh.

2:31:14 Facilitator: So that's the big thing? What about the coaches in here, what about victories?

2:31:21 Voice: (new voice) To a certain extent. (new voice) well we are building a new school. (new voice) Yea, but I guess on that question if you look at C.T.E. there is not a whole lot of standardized tests that are being done, maybe I am wrong on that but I know I haven't just sat down and given my kids a marketing test and said, ok here, this is for the state but the way they kind of look at what I do is through the DECA stuff and how successful we are through that. I mean that's (new voice) They don't ever say that but I feel like we better do really well at the competition (previous voice) yea, like through our extracurricular activities like I do ....and I am not sure what everybody else does but you know I get comments on you know, "yea ya'll did a great job" or "yea, that looks good your numbers are up which lets me know they definitely take a look at that. And the fact that if you grow your program a little bit they notice that. I have seen that personally just through my conversations. Even at (Another high school in the district) with Mr.... and through (the principal).

2:32:36 Facilitator: Do you prefer that to getting all into the process? By the way, what I mean by getting into the process is they are evaluating not necessarily by your outcome, but do you have your objectives written on the wall every day, that kind of stuff.

2:32:48 Voice: (previous voice) absolutely. (new voice) That is something he stresses.

2:32:53 Facilitator: He stresses the objective. What else does he look for as far as your teaching process? Where he doesn't look so much at the results, but at your process.

2:33:06 Voice: (new voice) You mean for evaluations?

2:33:08 Facilitator: Yea, for evaluations.

2:33:10 Voice: (previous voice) Technology us. (new voice) He walks in your classroom he expects to see people on task and engaged in what they are supposed to be learning and the objective at hand.

2:33:17 Facilitator: And is that important to you?

2:33:20 Voice: (previous voice) absolutely.

2:33:22 Facilitator: What do you think is more important, that involvement in that process or "did they close the deal?"

2:33:33 Voice: (new voice) Well probably both. I mean... (new voice) well if you are doing the process then the results would be... (new voice) yea. (new voice) kind of, for instance... (new voice) You were talking about scores a while ago and we take tests throughout the year. That is one of the things they look at individual teacher see. Well for instance there is a class that didn't have but 10% or 15% of their class pass and everybody else has 70 or 80%, you have a concern with that class.

2:34:02 Facilitator: And that would cause you to look more at the process right? Would that be true.

2:34:09 Voice: (previous voice) yea

2:34:10 Facilitator: (teachers looking confused) I know some of this you are going, "What is he trying to get." Basically what I have done is gone through what a PLC is supposed to have and I have adjusted my questions based on your answers. The school here said ya'll have a strong results orientation. (quizzical looks) The survey that I gave you. Versus getting involved in the process.

2:34:37 Voice: (new voice) Well, I think that is a little different from our department because ours is a lot of process oriented stuff. I mean we do not have a standardized test to take. But history does. (new voice) The English, History, Science, and Math you are getting that from. (new voice) Who are you talking about getting involved in the process.

2:34:55 Facilitator: Um, Leadership/Administration.

2:34:57 Voice: (new voice) Well then that would go back to the previous discussion about the what are the expectations as far as "here is your mission statement," –get busy with it.

2:35:11 Facilitator: If you say, "here is your mission statement, get busy with it" and that is I think that is results. If you say "here is how you get busy with it."

2:35:15 Voice: (new voice) We are more independent as far as the process is going which I am not opposed to – I like that freedom. (new voice) me too. (previous voice) Um, and so I put the pressure on myself to get those results. I don't really care who is looking, I mean I want my kids to do well. I don't think anyone doesn't want their kids to do well so they are going to work hard to do that so I like that freedom.

2:35:44 Facilitator: Yes, I think I was picking that up in the survey. And again, I am just trying to make sure my survey is saying what ya'll are saying and even here I am getting not 100% participation but I am getting...

2:35:57 Voice: (previous voice) results

2:35:58 Facilitator: Yea, more input.

2:36:00 Voice: (new voice) what do you guys have- do you have benchmarks like the, the... (assistant principal) well as far as us like us core area through ....'s room. I can observe whether he is up teaching and doing stuff but I can't observe what he is teaching. I will be honest, I can't go in there and evaluate him and say you weren't teaching that right, I do not have a clue what he is talking about. (laughter). And the same she worked (in another field) she knows how that goes. We walk in there we see there is objectives, there is going to be objectives on the board. But if she is teaching, she knows that stuff better than I know it, better than any of us gonna know it. We just there to see that. (new voice) You are evaluating the process (previous voice-ap) yea the process. I can't evaluate – all of us have certain subjects. You are evaluating the process more than what they are teaching. Any of us I would think. (new voice) And if there are kids sitting there and they got their head on their desk and you don't address that as a teacher then that is evaluated. (assistant principal) And like you said if you walk in and the teacher is sitting at the computer. I have had a few classes where I walked in and stood for three or four minutes and the teacher did not know I was there. That is not a good process (laughter) – none of them here. (laughter)

2:37:06 Facilitator: Um, Getting back to that – Those who argue for the strict process they have the meetings and the agendas – Your meetings when you have your PLCs, Do you have agendas when you meet as a group every two weeks in the morning?

2:37:26 Voice: (new voice) yea. (new voice) mmm Hu. (heads nodding. (new voice) Like this coming Thursday I have to do the PLC and we are going to be talking about technology. So there is basically an objective for each PLC. Usually.

2:37:41 Facilitator: And ya'll do that. This is my last question. I really want to know from you if you think PLCs, this concept of PLC or SLC which is PLC, do you think that is working and I would like to know why. Would like to get some input on that.

2:38:08 Voice: (new voice) If the PLCs we are doing here are working?

2:38:10 Facilitator: Yea, do you think they are working?

2:38:11 Voice: (previous voice) for us, I mean, this is just me - I feel like I have kind of been lost since I have been here. Like I haven't known what is going on a lot of times and I think a lot of it has to do with we do not have PLC meetings. Um, I came from (another high school in the district) and over there we were also involved in the Bate grant so we were required to be at PLCs a certain percentage of the time and all this and so as a department we did have PLCs every what, week or two (new voice) every week (previous voice) something – and there wasn't an agenda we went over. The meeting lasted you know 20-30 minutes and we met in the morning at 6:50, 6:45 and we had to sign that we were there and all that and I actually I did like that because I felt like I was more aware of what was going on with the campus and and you know.. (new voice) because we were so far out. (new voice) Did you read that meeting thing that goes out from....? (Confusion as several try to answer affirmative) That's the information (new voice) I do not know what you are talking about, I am not on that e-mail list – I just said I didn't get ....'s.... I mean I am just saying the meeting like we did at (another high school in the district) for me was beneficial. (new voice) It was for me but also health and sports medicine are kind of out there like marketing and that sort of thing where we have no guidelines as to what we are supposed to be doing. And so we work together because it was still like health related and so we can say, "hey this is how we can kind of plan" and we planned health and we planned sports medicine kind of that way.

2:38:58 Facilitator: And it worked?



2:40:00 Voice: (previous voice) Sort of..well most of the time... we still had our individual stuff that we had to do (new voice) right. (previous voice) but we can kind of be similar because... (new voice) and like the last in-service we had I just called and I told her and I asked Mr. .... If I could go over and meet with the (teacher who teaches what she does) from (another high school in the district). To get these lesson plans done and turned in because the girl over there I have known her for a while, she is a little more up on technology than I am and so I needed some help and stuff and plus we had kind of meet before and kind of planned everything out and... (new voice) But you are the only (teacher who teaches what she does). (previous voice) right (previous voice) (she is the only teacher who teaches what she does). So there you go, she just did what she needed to do to get her plans done and your given that, and she asked to go over there and she did – That’s it. (new voice) I have a hard time answering your question because I really do not know what “PLC” stands for (laugher) and we have all these acronyms and we are told to come to this meeting and it is called a PLC – I do not even know how you are defining a PLC meeting. What all does that mean?

2:41:06 Facilitator: That’s a confusing term. It stand for “Professional Learning Community.” The idea is that teachers are professionals and they learn as a group –you learn about your curriculum but also your students as group. And I think you said some of that.

2:41:28 Voice: (new voice) I didn’t think we were supposed to talk about students as a group.

2:41:30 Facilitator: You are not supposed to talk about students as a group?

- 2:41:39 Voice: (previous voice) No sir. Not individual students. Students as a group?  
 Yes. But not an individual student. (new voice) When I was at.. I have been in the district for ..years and at three different campuses but when I was at .... – I don't know how to really explain this but like if a kid had my class on his schedule like said he had seven classes over there...um... if he was having problems in English whether it was you know um academic problems or if it was behavioral problems – if he was having a problem in English and he ..and um it was to the point the teacher was having a concern, she would e-mail those other six teachers and say, “are you having a problem with him? We need to meet on this kid.” And so we had a period of time where we could meet as a committee (new voice) formal committees) (previous voice) that were within that group and we would say, “ok, what is he doing in your class and what is he doing in your class and what is he doing in your class” and we would try to get that student, get that kid, and bring him in and try to meet with him and try to say, “ok this seems like an on-going pattern, what is the problem and try to fix it from there, but he... (new voice –voice that said this is not allowed) and where I have been teachers do not do that. It is done from the administrative level or counselor level where they get together to see what is going on in all these different classes. And then you have a formal meeting and then you gather information and then you call the parent in and then you have another meeting with a plan to help that kid. But other than that, sitting around talking about kids.
- 2:43:04 Facilitator: That doesn't happen here? You don't get together with the same teachers who have the same students.
- 2:43:13 Voice: (new voice) I have received e-mails asking about a specific issue.. (previous voice) other than ARD... (previous voice) with a specific student and then e-mail a plan. (new voice) really? k(previous voice) other than an ARD or something like that? (previous voice) just an e-mail (previous voice) special kids (new voice) like the kid who consistently sleeps in class or (previous voice) see I never got an e-mail. (new voice) See that would be an issue like at ... where we would call them in and talk to them (multiple background questions as to whether or not this was happening at the school under study). (new voice) yea, we probably get left out of a lot of (new voice) Like a regular student? (previous voice) Just a regular student. (previous voice) See most of mine like that have been with special ed. students (previous voice) yea I have only had special ed. Students. (new voice) yea. (previous voice) I have never had like a regular student like teachers get together and discuss something like that. (previous voice) yea. (previous voice) mostly just special ed.

2:44:00 Facilitator: Have you been told that that is a “no no?”

2:44:04 Voice: (previous voice) I have where I have come from but it is very legalistic where I was. Lawsuit city (new voice) Here it is not going to be an issue (laughter) (new voice) You sure you weren't in ... (another district named) (laughter). (previous voice) there they would sue the district in a heartbeat if you were talking about their child in an unprofessional – not in a formal meeting. So that everything you did was documented and done by the book (slamming pen down on table). (new voice) well, I felt like when I was at.... (another school) we had less problems with students in class – when we had those types of meetings to see how students were doing in your class or other classes. (new voice) I can see how that be a good thing – I like that. (previous voice) I like that (agreement in background.)

2:44:50 Facilitator: But that is not happening in your PLCs?

2:44:53 Voice: (new voice) as long as it is not gossips.

2:44:55 Facilitator: But the curriculum stuff is happening?

2:44:57 Voice: (new voice) We were allowed to discuss what the issue were that were going on with that student it's like you said, if there was someone who was constantly sleeping in your class or if a distraction or if you know just not doing work or whatever we would meet as a group, we would meet with the student, and then a parent and they would kind of be put on a I don't really know (new voice) a plan (previous voice) a plan with what they would need to do and if it didn't happen then these would be the consequences to it.

2:45:26 Facilitator: As a house do ya'll have the same students?

2:45:32 Voice: (new voice) No. (new voice) No. (Several negative responses.) (new voice) nowhere close. (new voice) because a lot of the students in my classes they won't be in his class, but they will be in (another class) because we share some similar classes you know as far as (classes in their subject).

2:45:50 Facilitator: Well, I know you time is valuable and I will use this information for good – So I really appreciate your time on this. I am a teacher like I said and I know that planning time is very valuable so thank you very much for your time, I will be here if you have any questions.

2:46:13 Voice: (as walking out) (new voice) Well, as long as you use it for good and not evil. (new voice) Yea, no evil.

Voices are heard asking about the doctoral program at UH and other students in the program as they exit, but no further discussion on the PLCs in the school under study.

### Third Focus Group

*Below is a transcript of a focus group which occurred from 10:54 AM to 11:36 AM on January 16, 2012 at the school under study. Present were 25 members of an SLC consisting mainly of engineering, math, and science teachers. Members of the focus group came in much larger than expected and can be heard at the beginning of the recording talking about issues unrelated to PLCs. Crowd was in a playful mood. One teacher had brought in a health drink from Ukraine and other teachers were referring to it using such language as a “urine sample.” The group was told they were being recorded and there was some time before they could be settled for discussion. Transcript begins at the point actual focus group discussion begins.*

- 3:00:27 Facilitator: My name is Glen Hartsoch and I am a government teacher at Cypress-Fairbanks ISD. I am also working on my doctorate, which is why I am here. I have been talking to faculties learning PLCs, building a narrative as to how they actually work, not how they are supposed to work – but what is actually going on between teachers. So that’s what I am trying to do here is build a narrative. So, just to let you know I am recording. I will transcribe this recording and the only one that will possibly hear the recording besides myself will be my doctoral committee. The analysis of this transcript will be available and you could be quoted in my dissertation – but anonymously. Just wanted to let you know that before we got started. (Displeasure heard on recording and seen on faces) Going to ask some questions and hopefully we will get some honest responses. First off, you know what a PLC is right? You are in a couple of them. What PLCs are you members of? (People still talking in background)
- 3:00:47 Voice: (new voice) Science. (new voice) Math
- 3:00:49 Facilitator: Math as a PLC?
- 3:00:51 Voice: (new voice) Engineering
- 3:01:52 Facilitator: Engineering House? So ya’ll are all in the Engineering House and your subject PLC, so you are all in at least two right?
- 3:01:58 Voice: (previous voice) MM hu
- 3:01:9 Facilitator: Is anyone here just in one? More than two? When I say PLC, you know what I am talking about right? A Professional learning community. How often does your PLC meet?
- 3:02:17 Voice: (new voice) PLCs meet every other week the house one week and the department one the next week.
- 3:02:24 Facilitator: Has that been your experience? (heads nodding yes) Do you take minutes in those meetings? (Crowd indicating yes with nods). And you get those back? (Nodding yes) Are those meetings useful to you? (silence, some back ground noise). First off, house meetings, are those helpful to you?
- 3:02:52 Voice: (new voice) They can be, I mean I suppose if there is anything we can get from each other at that point in time. I mean if one subject has already taught something you can help the other one – but yea, usually they are pretty helpful.
- 3:03:10 Facilitator: Is that everyone’s experience here? You can be honest.

- 3:03:14 Voice: (new voice) When I first was attending the house ones, I didn't see much use in it. But over a period of time now I am understanding now that I am not isolated as a department. There are other departments that are interrelated that make us as a team a system as opposed to being individuals.
- 3:03:38 Facilitator: Any other thoughts to that? So I am not getting any negative feedback here about the meetings, is that correct? I mean other than there is a possibility you thought they might not have been good.
- 3:03:55 Voice: (new voice) I wouldn't say there is anything negative about them – the frequency of them – I would probably get more out of them if they were less frequent. It's like the talking too often, getting together too often I do not get as much out of it. I don't know if I said that right, If that came out right. Like talking to my sister every week doesn't do as much – I don't get as much out of it as I do the quality of it as I do if I wait a month, once a month. (new voice) I don't know (laughter) (new voice) I don't like talking to your sister at all to be honest. (laughter)
- 3:04:40 Facilitator: In these meetings what ideas get shared?
- 3:04:46 Voice: (new voice) Which meetings, the department or house meetings?
- 3:04:48 Facilitator: House meetings first. What ideas do you actually share, what do you talk about?
- 3:04:56 Voice: (new voice) Our department so we can help the other departments with what they are doing so we like physics was teaching trig so but we haven't covered it yet so the kids can actually solve it once physics gets done. Yea, but it would have helped if we had calendar-wise subjects that like when science touches on what math covers or when engineering can do little like problems or projects... (new voice) co-curricular activity (previous voice) yea, that's the word (laugh)
- 3:05:25 Facilitator: So a lot of curriculum stuff? Do you ever talk about students or anything else?
- 3:05:33 Voice: (new voice) Sometimes we discuss best practices and stuff. As far as meetings and at the door and how we greet the kids
- 3:05:46 Facilitator: I want to come back and talk about meetings in a bit. I am kind of going through the aspects of a PLC, just kind of seeing what you are actually doing with that. Do ya'll know what your school's mission is? Approximately in your own words.
- 3:06:05 Voice: (previous voice) provide rigor, relevance (low mumbling - laughter) (new voice) I don't have it memorized. (previous voice) I don't have it memorized
- 3:06:20 Facilitator: Very important part of a PLC is the school's mission. Every PLC should have one too. Um, (The mission statement is reads at this point but deleted from this transcript to protect the identity of the school under study). Did ya'll get to have any input in that?
- 3:06:43 Voice: (new voice) Yes. (new voice) I think we got to write stuff in an e-mail and... (new voice) and we would work from that and the school when it would get a little bit bigger. We wrote different things. Yea, that was a couple years ago so it's hard to remember. (new voice) It was a group of teachers and students
- 3:07:02 Facilitator: That's where it came from? How do ya'll feel about the mission? Does it help the school having a mission?

3:07:16 Voice: (new voice) We are working towards it.

3:07:20 Facilitator: Earlier this year I conducted a survey of the faculty here. I did get some results from that and I am going to ask some questions based on the results of that. One thing ya'll said as a faculty as far as responsibility and as far as discretion in your own practice – you said, at least those who answered that you do get a lot of discretion as far as how you teach your subject. Do you agree that you get a lot of discretion as far as how you teach your subject?

3:08:24 Voice: (new voice) yea (new voice) Yes (multiple people nodding “yes”).

3:08:30 Facilitator: Can ya'll think of some examples of that?

3:08:33 Voice: (new voice) I know like for my class trying different ways of hands on and labs – I'll ask all types of people like what I can do to better get kids involved and I can try those and I don't have anybody breathing down my neck and saying, “no” this aspect doesn't really work so well and um I just get the ability to try new things and if it doesn't work, it doesn't work and try something else but at least I learn from it.

3:09:05 Facilitator: So it's at your discretion

3:09:07 Voice: (previous voice) mmm Hu, and then I mean I got plenty of people to ask their opinion of and pull from and plenty of knowledgeable people to get a more informed opinion before I just try

3:09:17 Facilitator: Who do you pull from?

3:09:19 Voice: (previous voice) Umm I got a teacher (in another district) that teaches what I teach and I also have, I actually use a chemistry and physics teacher and she has a lot of years in teach science in general and she is actually involved in Houston Collaborative and she'll come back and give me other information that she has collected even giving me advice.

3:09:45 Facilitator: That's kind of outside your PLC

3:09:47 Voice: (previous voice) Yes, that is outside.

3:09:49 Facilitator: Anybody else? Question was, control over your own practice as an educator. Things that you can do on your own where no one has say. And then the other thing that they said was that there are three layers to that. One was that you have a lot of discretion in your practice but I found out from the survey there was not a lot of discretion within the school. So you do not have a lot of input into what is actually happening in the school. Talk about that. Do you find that to be true?

3:10:29 Voice: (new voice) Yes.

3:10:32 Facilitator: Can you think of some input you have had at the school level? Anybody in here?

3:10:39 Voice: (new voice) Like what input are you talking about?

3:10:42 Facilitator: For instance, deciding when the houses have their meetings. I think the decision was made at 6:50 in the morning. How was that decision made?

3:10:49 Voice: (new voice) Well its either at 6:50 or during your common conference time. So it depends on when people can meet. Like in the math department we have a coach and he can't meet in the afternoons so we can do some in the mornings and some in the afternoons during your common conference period so that he can be involved also because he has athletics in the afternoon so he can't come to them.

3:11:12 Facilitator: Ya'll decide that amongst yourself?

3:11:14 Voice: (previous voice) Yes. Yea, within the department we do that and within the houses we meet, you know we found out what – you know within the house it is a little more difficult for the house to meet except at 6:50 on Monday mornings because that is the only morning that the three departments, you know math, science and engineering have available without duty and other stuff so our house has to meet on Monday mornings. It's not necessarily a fun thing to do but that's the only time we have available so... certain other obligations kind of dictate some of when we can meet.

3:11:58 Facilitator: And the other one was that you believed you had a lot of input at the district level. I wanted to hear from you of some stories of some time when you had input into the district as a whole. (Silence) Did that happen to anybody here?

3:12:30 Voice: (new voice) Well I had an experience with getting approval for curriculum to come back that they had decided to go away – IPC coming back – specifically for our special ed. students and it's taken me a year and a half (laughter) – there is a lot of pestering to get that done and to finally reach the right ears – to reach the right decision makers. So it was... and it wasn't an opinion thing it was based on state mandates on special ed. curriculum versus regular ed. curriculum. And what those options are and the decisions that the district made to eliminate that particular course created additional hardships on special ed. students. But I think that was a unique situation – I don't think was typical at all. (new voice) Our career and technology—which the house of engineering is under - has pathways and our teachers helped develop those pathways and once we developed them we put them we put them into the school and the school forwards them into the district. So we do have a say in what we are offering as a CATE department.

3:14:10 Facilitator: So you had input into two high schools. Do you think it is important that you have input outside of your department or should you just basically worry more about what you are teaching?

3:14:29 Voice: (new voice) Say that again? (new voice) What do you mean by outside of our department?

3:14:32 Facilitator: Outside of what you teach. Is that your only area of responsibility?

3:14:40 Voice: (new voice) you mean like school as opposed to my classroom?

3:14:39 Facilitator: Correct

3:14:51 Voice: (new voice) As far as our classroom discipline with the expectations that are put on us whereas you gotta do this, this, and this. To have way to give some of that input would be beneficial. There may be times things are handed down come from kind of rolls down hill and is handed to us here you do this, maybe not quite as much buy in if there is not a whole lot of input from the classroom teacher. (new voice) Well, in just like if you try something in your classroom and it works or it doesn't work they have to try that stuff to see if it works or if it doesn't work but yea, I don't feel like we ever get to express our opinion later and say "this is working for us, let's keep doing this. This isn't working for us or can we teach this?" (new voice) What about that one thing we all voted on? (new voice) But then we were just all told the other day that we are getting it anyway. Yea, you have no choice the vote was just sort of a formality. (new voice) That's what I heard. (Agreement) Your vote doesn't matter, we are doing it again. (new voice) yea, that's what we are talking about we feel like sometimes it does, sometimes it doesn't. Yes, like overwhelmingly. I will admit I was one of the teachers that stayed counting it because we had heard some bad stuff that had happened you know previously by different areas so people wanted to be there when they counted it and it was very obviously a "no" against this program and then we hear that all of a sudden we said "no" against this program. So why would you have us vote and feel like we have an input if you are going to us anyways? (new voice) the change is coming from the state. (new voice) Yea, it's coming from the state more so (previous voice) so were are going to be strapped when we go to a TAP type model. (new voice) But it's really the TAP model is – not every school district in Texas has to do it it's a.. (previous voice) Its coming though ... what I am saying is it's coming down the road. It's what our state is moving toward. (new voice) But I think that the problem with all this lies with communication. Communication from the higher ups get's lost with us so we think that they are just forcing us when really it is coming from the state and if they would tell us, "oh you know it's coming from state level, it's not just you know, your management doing this to you then... (new voice) Whatever is going to happen is going to happen (previous voice) yea. (Agreement head in the background). (new voice) you hit on an important part, the communication is really important, there is a gap in communication that's where all kinds of wires get crossed and you get lots of issues which I guess PLCs are being given to create that communication – that two-way line of communication which...

3:17:42 Facilitator: is it doing that?

3:17:43 Voice: (previous voice) na (new voice) so that's... (previous voice) I think a lot of times –I know especially a couple of years ago when we did PLCs, this is basically a department meeting – it wasn't necessarily a true PLC were you are discussing best practices in the classroom, it was pretty lame information that was coming from the administration – "here's things you need to know about." You know – that type, a meet to meet. We are going to have a meeting this week whether we have anything to say or not.

3:18:18 Facilitator: So ya'll believe it is important to have school-wide decisions made



- 3:18:25 Voice: (Confusion heard in background)
- 3:18:33 Facilitator: Yes or no?
- 3:18:37 Voice: (new voice) yea (new voice) yes (new voice) Yea
- 3:18:39 Facilitator: Just wanted to make sure.
- 3:18:42 Voice: (new voice) yes
- 3:18:44 Facilitator: And district-wide?
- 3:18:46 Voice: (new voice) If we knew it counted and mattered, yes. (new voice) and there has to be somebody at the top who makes the ultimate executive decision. But we deserve to be heard at least before that final decision is made. (new voice) ...The guy that is in charge of the science curriculum, I think he does a pretty good job communicating with us, talking about what works, what doesn't, um our districts developed a curriculum cadre that they are building our CBAs, used to be our benchmarks but are soon to become our checkpoints. And we have our biology one, we had one that was interesting (laughing) You know we went back to the teachers and kind of like, "hey, here is what we got" and try to get input from the biology teachers regarding some of that may not necessarily have cleared it up but there is some effort I think being made. (new voice) Well, it did clear it up because the next bench mark was much more on track (new voice) yea.(new voice) The first one, half the information was stuff we had to cover and wouldn't cover for months. And the second one we had pretty much covered everything. So, were we had covered everything (laughter) (previous voice) I will get you another one too, you are going to love it. (previous voice) Oh boy. (laughter)
- 3:20:08 Facilitator: Your survey indicated a strong common direction. Should educators have a strong common direction in your opinion? Or should you just concentrate on being the best English teacher, the best...
- 3:20:25 Voice: (new voice) Well, because of the testing that is going on now we are all being aligned in a common direction. It's not as if we have a choice, teachers don't get to teach what they want to teach anymore and they have to teach to what is being tested.
- 3:20:48 Facilitator: So it's kind of forced on us right?
- 3:20:52 Voice: (previous voice) mm Hu. I believe it is. (silence)
- 3:21:05 Facilitator: How much of your time do you spend working with your house and the other? Well, let's start with your house. How much of your time do you spend working with your house versus actual teaching?
- 3:21:22 Voice: (discussion) (new voice) Every other week 20 minutes – 30 minutes. (new voice) Just whenever we have our house meeting.
- 3:21:30 Facilitator: That's it for you? What about those interactions that happen during lunch and in between classes where you are helping each other out. Talk to me about that. What percentage of time do you spend doing that? (silence) What interactions do you have with other teachers? That's what I am really trying to get here.

3:21:49 Voice: (new voice) Well, a lot of times you just say, “Hey what are you guys talking about?” I know I talked about this before but like they did trig and physics You know and we are going to talk about the calendar to try to align them a little bit better to where geometry might cover trig before physics gets it if we can so they will have at least seen it before they get it to use in physics because the kids were clueless on it in physics because they hadn’t seen it yes in geometry so they didn’t know the basis and the foundation of it, where it came from and stuff so we are going to try to work more closely with the calendar to see if we can hopefully align them a little bit differently when it comes to next year’s... (new voice) Actually I know for pre-cal and for physics when we had that conversation, it was in the hall passing each other. It wasn’t in a meeting. (agreement) (new voice) It almost seems like communications like that happened there isn’t an organized methodology to it. It’s an on your own time you happen to be next to a...it’s a “hey, I have this and I thought...” there isn’t a system in place for that sharing of information. (new voice) Well, I was listening to my kids and I hears what my kids were saying, “hey I just did that in physics or we did that differently in physics or we used that a different way. So when you pass a physics teacher, you have a conversation, yea it’s not fun. (new voice) I think out house, our SLCs, that’s what we are gearing them towards. We have at the beginning of this year told don’t worry so much about focusing on getting the department running smoothly before you really do the house and combine everybody and so we hadn’t done house as SLCS (banging) you know other than conversations at lunch and talking and stuff like that. But I understand this month we are going to focus every other month is going to be a house SLC. First one math department is in charge of, the next one science department and the next one engineering. So that’s when we are really going to start you know focusing on getting that cross curriculum stuff – where you guys focus on “what do we need from you, what do you need from us kind of thing.

3:24:16 Facilitator: You said um, “in charge,” What do you mean by that?

3:24:19 Voice: (previous voice) um – you know coming up with what we want to talk about – you know so it is not chaotic when you come in so we have like a set agenda type of thing. “Ok, this is what we want to talk about today, let’s focus on this kind of curriculum, what lessons can we do over the next two weeks or something” – in charge of so you do not go in blindly and no one knows what is going on in the meeting. So like there is an agenda to the meeting and not just random people.

3:24:46 Facilitator: But it is just your house that is meeting right, it’s not all four meeting at the same time?

3:24:50 Voice: (previous voice) Well the house is the Health Science and Engineering. And then the next week you do the department meetings (new voice) Whenever I was a the last district I was at in .....ISD. Once a week kids had late arrivals on Thursdays and there was a PLC. It might have started out with a group meeting of all teachers for just an update then we would all meet with our departments and then it also gave us time that if we needed to do things like a type of technology training or something like that we had two hours on Thursday morning with no kids where there and we got to do those things. And I feel like I got the most out of those times and we got the most done in a department because we knew at least they would give us that common time where we could see where we are going within our department but also if we needed to go talk to other departments we could also do that. I just wanted to throw that out there.

3:25:46 Facilitator: What are some other things ya'll do in these meetings? (Silence) What are some other experiences you have had?

3:26:1:03 Voice: (new voice) I mean I have been in several other districts that – I was also in ....(another district) for many years and I remember when they brought PLCs in and I was actually in on the group that did the DuFour book on what is one and so you had a common language, you had a common understanding throughout the school as to what PLCs stand for, what it should look like – and what are the different options – it wasn't a "here is your template, here is what you are going to follow" kind of thing. It was an actual discussion about what is it and it was kind of an educational discussion between people who had done some in-depth study on it and people who were going "I don't even know what PLC stands for." And I have found this is my second year in this district and I have a frustration with the fact that there seems to be an assumed knowledge that I am not part of. You know (laughter) it's kind of like everyone knows, "yea that's supposed to be XYZ and I am like, "well ok is that written somewhere?" You know it seems to be that gap in communication that I think because it is a small district and because that communication is almost- that same kind of conversation that we were talking about between teachers – "oh well these people have had that conversation" that doesn't necessarily go across board. It doesn't filter through everybody.

3:27:38 Facilitator: Did you start after the PLC was created or were you with the original group here that came over from (another high school in the district)

3:27:49 Voice: (new voice) I was after. This is my first year here at (the school under study).

3:27:56 Facilitator: Do ya'll feel comfortable with the language of the PLCs? Have ya'll done much with that? Or were ya'll just told to go do PLCs?

- 3:28:10 Voice: (new voice) Correct. (new voice) right. (new voice) what you just said. (laughter)  
 (new voice) A PLC meeting is here and you show up. (new voice) There is no instruction and sometimes let's be honest, I am really not on the use as far as in-depth discussion that we have at 6:50 with some of us you know granted you know sometimes having teachers with different subjects is a bit of a bind but sometimes with those time constraints in kind of a get in and get out without time type of thing and it just those are the experiences I have (new voice) Well, our goal though to bring interviewers to take turns presenting something...how would you say it.. a professional development concept we are supposed to you know take turns presenting – something we learned (mumbling in background) yea, department-wide. Like that is what we did a couple of years ago too. We presented something like we brought back from a workshop or something like that. (new voice) or something you feel you excel at that you feel, hey maybe you guys can benefit from what I do for this, or I think it really works well. You know something like that kind of thing; you know one of the topics that they had written down as parent communication you know, some people excel at some people don't. And you know so maybe some helpful hints and so that's what we are trying, what we are getting set up for. During our department PLCs that we are going to share once the department. (stops mid sentence)
- 3:29:38 Facilitator: Has that been happening in the meeting much where you get to talk about curriculum issues?
- 3:29:45 Voice: (new voice) Not yet, it is in the plan. In the past it has been a big part of PLC meetings. In my brain, that is the purpose of them is to share across the department and then up and down vertically.
- 3:30:02 Facilitator: Are you able to experiment? Um, you already said you were. What are some ways you think you have improved because of these PLCs? (Silence) Let you think about it for a second. (Mumbling, confusion) Has it improved your practice?
- 3:30:38 Voice: (new voice) They help you make sure you are on the same page as other teachers in your department. You know, if you're like in geometry we have two geometry teachers – you know we might not always have time to talk to each other during the day. You know, but "hey," How's it going. You know, set up times for review and stuff like that. Just to make sure you are coinciding with the other teachers that teach your subject.
- 3:31:13 Facilitator: Next line of questioning has to do with the literature on the PLCs which is actually split. One school of thought says you should have a strong results orientation. The other school of thought says you need to get involved in the process. In other words, one school of thought says you worry about the process, the other school says you worry about the result. Which one do ya'll think is more important, being left alone and just being told, "here is what we expect from you, go do it... or being evaluated on whether or not you have your objective on the board, are you getting your lesson plans in on time, are you... um, which one is more important to you?
- 3:32:24 Voice: (new voice) Having time to do our job. (new voice) Being left alone to teach.

3:32:29 Facilitator: To be evaluated on that?

3:32:33 Voice: (previous voice) Yea (new voice) Ultimately the success depends on what we want. (previous voice) That's the whole goal. (previous voice) And so what we should be evaluated on is what our kids learn, not what's on the board.

3:32:48 Facilitator: I know you have a meeting/agenda protocol. How strictly do ya'll adhere to that? Keep the meetings (minutes), ya'll send those out?

3:33:11 Voice: (new voice) We just got those last, you know those official ones to follow those suggested ones we are told we had to have an agenda for our PLCs which I always had but it wasn't that, you know, a formal format. Or an official format that we got recently was suggested to follow but PLCs have always had an agenda and this is what we are going to talk about today. But it's just recently been given an official format that we should. You know, setting time frames and time lines for each category and stuff like that so. Which will help in the organization of the PLCs.

3:33:57 Facilitator: I have one more line of questioning. I just really kind of want to know if it is working for you. And if it is, why, and if it is not, why not. I just want to throw that out there. Is it working?

3:34:17 Voice: (new voice) in the current format I would have to say "no." (new voice) I would happen to agree, no no its not. I don't feel like it is having a positive impact on me as a classroom teacher, I don't feel like it's necessarily improving communication across... it just feels like it's just one more thing, it doesn't feel like it is a productive use of time. (new voice) What is wrong with it is I don't feel like we have had any guidance with a PLC. We were just told we had to do a PLC. (new voice) yea. (previous voice) I mean here recently I came up with a list of things that I thought were important for my classroom management and we talk about classroom management and we are going to rotate about different topics that .... And that's something that you know I had to come up with because I was not guided as to what am I supposed to do so you just have to... (new voice) And coming from a district that had a history of PLCs – that's how it feels, it feels like, "ok go do PLCs" and ok, I'll go do this. It doesn't feel like there has been any formal training as to what a PLC is, it doesn't feel like there has been any real in-depth study across the board, it was kind of like, ok handed out go and do this. And that is how it feels so it feels like it is just one more meeting to go to so it doesn't feel like it is something that should...that is personal and productive to me.

3:35:55 Facilitator: Any others?

3:35:57 Voice: (new voice) I think to make the PLC positive and impactful and valuable we first need to be educated on it, then we need to be guided on it and we need to be shown the value of it. And I think those things haven't been done. I mean the idea of a PLC sounds fantastic. We share best practices, we sit down as professionals we discuss, we talk, we learn. But that is not what happens. So I think there is just an education/communication gap there. (new voice) Also there is another thing, we have to do it at 6:50 in the morning which is kind of like, "hey we are just going to squeeze this in" (laughter). (new voice) yea. (previous voice) If it is truly something that is important – that's really going to improve it, then we need to make time for it. As a district, say, "this is our PLC (another district) has done that. (new voice) They made a very conscious decision to structure it that way. Even the middle school schedules changed in order to ensure that PLC time was put in because as a district top-to-bottom it was a "this is important to us, this is the reason it is important to us, we are going to make the time in order to have that happen." (new voice) And then on top of that it is like they went as far to change the middle school schedule you know whatever we seeing is just the local individual school, and our science department head has a completely different conference period you know then the rest of us do. Whenever we have the same conference period it kind of defeats the purpose of why would that happen? Like there is no attention to detail whenever that occurs. That just (coughing) stops and yet again it that little detail that makes all the world of difference as far as how we communicate as a department – like not talking about us, just the department. Whenever we don't even have our leader in the same time period where we can, I don't know have access to her. (new voice) And I don't know, and I was at (the other school) last year and I had a conference period with my physics teachers and I had a conference period with my chemistry teachers one per day. So it depends depended on whether it was an "A" day or a "B" day as to who I could sit down and meet with but it was done in a very intentional manner. It was, "Ok, all chemistry teachers will have 9<sup>th</sup> period off. All the physics teachers will have 5<sup>th</sup> period off. And then one other. And so it was a con it it was purpose behind why you had that. And so every other week we met as a department as a team so that we could have those conversations and so coming here it is this ..and here is this PLC and let's move on. There is not a- it does not feel like there has been a plan put into place for useful time for that to happen. (new voice) I will say the math department is lucky though in that respect with the exception of the coach who has athletics um, unfortunately you know has afternoon athletics. We all do have common conference last period on the B days so that is when we can meet with the other teachers when we need to and stuff so and I am off that period too so that is one thing the math department is lucky for is that we are able to have that conference period. But science offers so many different subjects so sometimes it's kind of hard for them to get the same period off.

3:39:24 Facilitator: I think we are good., Again, I recorded it but I put on my human subjects at the University of Houston I will not identify anyone. Anything else? I really do appreciate your time, I know, as a teacher, how valuable your planning time is so thank you very much for giving me this few minutes. I will use this to hopefully better the research on PLCs so it's not such a burden on us.

Recording ends at 40:41 just before several people are heard saying thank you and exiting noise of the focus group is heard.

### Fourth Focus Group

*Below is a transcript of a focus group which occurred from 8:57 AM to 9:37 AM on January 16, 2012 at the school under study. Present were ten members of the school's English department. Members of this department had been excluded from the previous focus groups as the principal wanted their discussion to be separate from the others. Before recording started, a question was asked as to the anonymity of the focus group. The transcript begins at the point of the Facilitator addressing this issue.*

- 4:00:00 Facilitator: My human subjects permission to do this requires that I not identify ya'll. It's going to be an anonymous kind of thing. I am going to transcribe it. (The principal) won't -ah- see the transcripts but of course, you might be quoted in my dissertation. They won't know who it is. My name is Glen Hartsoch and I am actually a government teacher in (another district). I am also a certified English teacher, I have taught English in the past. I am working on my doctorate and this is the final leg. I am trying to put together narratives of what PLCs actually look like. So that is what this will be about. So by the time I am through with this I am going to compile this information and write a narrative as to what is going on in Houston with PLCs. How they actually look- not how they look on paper. But what teachers are actually doing with them.
- 4:01:04 Voice: (new voice) So this is common for most schools to have PLCs all over?
- 4:01:07 Facilitator: Well, they actually started in 1998; HISD was the first one in the area and they kind of spread out. They have been starting in central schools and spreading out. PLCs are nothing new. Ya'll have probably seen all this recycled from previous concepts. Do ya'll know the definition of a PLC?
- 4:1:35 Voice: (new voice) Professional learning community? (Some confusion in background)
- 4:01:40 Facilitator: And, what PLCs are ya'll a member of?
- 4:01:44 Voice: (previous voice) We are in the English and then the house of the arts.
- 4:01:49 Facilitator: House of arts. OK, so ya'll are all in the house of the arts. I think I met with them at nine. So I guess (the principal) wanted to break out the English department. That's a huge house. How often do ya'll meet in these PLCs?
- 4:02:13 Voice: (new voice) every two weeks. (new voice) We meet once every two weeks. (Speaker had to stop and think). As English once every two weeks and as house of the arts once every two weeks. So once a week we have a PLC.
- 4:02:29 Facilitator: And what do ya'll do in those meetings?



4:02:31 Voice: (new voice) We listen to what (the department chair) has to say. (laughter). (new voice) She is in charge. So ya'll say we can have this meeting and we can... (new voice) She is in charge and sometimes she will say like what we need to know about the school, like new things that are going to be implemented. Sometimes we will get together with other houses and think about ways to cross curriculum together. Or ways to improve our students like from the perspective a lot of times of being culturally diverse I guess. (new voice) A lot of times just different dates when we are doing things and just catching us up on (new voice) Yes, a lot of times when we have our meetings she will just come back and tell us what the leadership committee came up with. That kind of stuff. (new voice) So a lot of ways we use it as a communication tool and just another way of getting out all the things we need to know. We are supposed to spend a lot of that time like doing development –something were we are learning something or... so I always try to incorporate something like that in every PLC. But usually.. you know like sometimes we only have like 25 minutes so it's really just enough for me to give them information and go but its.. Like for example last PLC in (Another teacher's) room last week – I brought a resource that I think will benefit all of us and I had them look through it and had them let me know if they likes it so I can order it for them if they thought it would be beneficial.

4:04:01 Facilitator: Do ya'll ever get to bring up ideas ya'll have?

4:04:06 Voice: (new voice) we all host PLCs.

4:04:10 Facilitator: Each teacher does?

4:04:12 Voice: It just so happened when I hosted it she had this information to get out so (new voice) yea, it was in her room which was (background discussion)

4:04:19 Facilitator: What is some of the information ya'll have given out?

4:04:22 Voice: A lot of us decided we didn't have the notes so we talk about the notes in the e-mail and we will read it and use the notes to recall what I read. So a lot of time is deciphering... I swear to god sometimes I will read it and I have no idea what she is talking about. We will get to talking about it and she will tell me

4:04:45 Facilitator: How are these meetings working for ya'll? Did it work well?

4:04:50 Voice: (new voice) I think as (a specific department mentioned) department it works well, as a house it's ridiculous. (new voice) I think it gets us caught up on stuff and it helps us know what is going on as a unit. And then if we just have our own department meeting then we could probably actually use it for professional learning versus just catching up on what happened last week that I didn't read right. (new voice) well, and another drawback is that the only time that we can all meet together with the entire English department is in the morning before school and that's only like 20 minutes of time. So you know it's not always nice and helpful.

4:05:40 Facilitator: When you meet as a house, do you get any value out of that?

- 4:05:45 Voice: (new voice) What we did the last few times is we talked to someone else that like teaches the same grade level so that we can come up with something... (new voice) Different subjects. (previous voice) Cross-curricular you know so that I know what they are teaching they know what I am teaching so we can somehow incorporate it together –which you know I think that part of it is beneficial. But (new voice) Do any of us have yet to do it? I haven't actually done it. (previous voice) Right. Actually implementing it and not too much and everyone is so busy and we all have so much on our plate. It's crazy, every single one of us in here has something extra. So to meet like that, to take up that much time is – I know a lot of teachers just want to get out of there because they have a list you know, of so many things they have to get done. (Silence)
- 4:06:37 Facilitator: (Awkward feeling in the room) Just to remind ya'll, I won't be identifying anyone. It will be as if I am talking to one person on the transcript. But hopefully I am getting input from everybody. Ok, next line of questing. You get a lot of interactions with other teachers. Before school, after school, in between classes, at lunch. Does any PLC stuff get talked about- curriculum. I saw some of you doing that actually when you came in.
- 4:07:24 Voice: (new voice) probably more so outside of class. (new voice) yea, because we all teach you know different levels.
- 4:07:29 Facilitator: That's what I am really trying to explore is if the communication is happening in the meeting or is it happening...
- 4:07:35 Voice: (new voice) Outside. (new voice) Outside. (new voice) Outside. (new voice) well, I do cross-plan with (another teacher) but we don't do any of that in meetings. We write it up in the meeting and we give it to someone else because they told us to but we been doing it on our own.
- 4:07:52 Facilitator: So you do it anyway?
- 4:07:53 Voice: (new voice) yea we do it anyway.
- 4:07:54 Facilitator: That's what I am getting at. Any other little stories or like that, like things ya'll've shared with each other. Either in the meetings or out of the meetings.
- 4:08:09 Voice: (new voice) I think we, like this year (looking quizzically at department chair) or last year you shared something with us about something the way you know we do stuff. If we have something that is really exciting we will share it with everybody.
- 4:08:21 Facilitator: In the meeting?
- 4:08:22 Voice: (previous voice) Yea. And sometimes, well in the past we used to have to do that. When we were in the annex we had to come up with our own lesson and teach like I used to have to... I always chose to teach the Gretchen Burn essay and all that stuff. But a yea, if we had something exciting we usually shared.
- 4:08:47 Facilitator: Next line of questioning – A little background I surveyed the school last semester had about 20% response rate on that which is a bit high and also I have gone through the literature for chapter three of my dissertation and I am basically going to ask you questions about the things I see in the literature and what I am seeing in the practices of the teachers in the area. What is your school's mission?

- 4:09:22 Voice: (laughter) (new voice) Um, student behavior or something, parent involvement and community involvement (new voice) you want me to keep telling...  
 (previous voice) well, it's because every time in the meeting we go over it  
 (previous voice) oh (previous voice) there's three. There's three. (new voice)  
 well anyway, so what is it?
- 4:09:47 Facilitator: Um, well, this is what I have. (The mission statement is read at this point but deleted from the transcripts.) So that's a very important part of a PLC is that the PLC and the school have a similar mission. How much input did ya'll get on that?
- 4:10:17 Voice: (new voice) I don't remember that (laughter) (new voice) It was just made up.
- 4:10:22 Facilitator: It was just made up?
- 4:10:24 Voice: (new voice) I thought we were asked. (new voice) We where. (new voice) yea we were. (previous voice) I think back when we were in the annex. (mm huh, and we had to – I remember we had to e-mail – I think something. (new voice) we did – well back then the department chairs had a lot to do with that – and no we didn't even exist back then.
- 4:10:49 Facilitator: How do ya'll feel about the mission statement? Just from what I read here?
- 4:10:57 Voice: (new voice) (inaudible). It's good (Confusion)
- 4:11:01 Facilitator: I'll come back around on this subject. The survey I conducted earlier I did get some information. One thing I did find out – I asked you about your discretion you have over your practice. (Confusion apparent on term) We use the term practice in a PLC. One thing the teachers informed me of was that you/they do feel you have a lot of discretion over your practice. Do you feel you have a lot of discretion over your practice? Over your teaching/experiment to try different things?
- 4:11:47 Voice: (new voice) Yes, (new voice) mm huh. (Several other voices saying "yes")
- 4:11:49 Facilitator: Can ya'll give me some examples of that? Anecdotal stories. (Some silence)
- 4:11:58 Voice: (new voice) I just don't think we would be told "no" if we tried...
- 4:12:01 Facilitator: So no one would tell you "no?"
- 4:12:05 Voice: (previous voice) I have never been told "no." (new voice) They really encourage us to do anything we can to grab the kids attention – and if we come up with a new lesson like -they will tell us and tell everybody they want us to be able to experiment and see what works and what doesn't. 'Cause whatever is going to raise these kids.
- 4:12:21 Facilitator: That's the department chair – the Dean of Instruction?
- 4:12:25 Voice: (previous voice) Department chairs, our principals, it doesn't – you don't really hear anybody tell anyone – like if we say we have this idea for a lesson we want to do – they are like, well ok, as long as you are following school guidelines do it. (new voice) yea, we have had teachers uh reserve the LGI(Large Group Instruction room, the room these focus groups took place in) to do lessons that are out of the norm. Yea, as long as we are, yea – they are fine with it.
- 4:12:48 Facilitator: What if...

- 4:12:49 Voice: (new voice) The main thing is we have to cover out LSs, our learning standards, and if we are doing that pretty much, as of right now they are pretty much give us free reign as long as we cover them.
- 4:13:02 Facilitator: So you get a lot of discretion there. I also asked about levels, the next level was the school level – do you get a lot of discretion there to try new things, do you get to do things at the school level? Where you have input and its real and you are a professional making it happen kind offing?
- 4:13:20 Voice: (new voice) Like we have an idea and we take it to Dr H. – is that what you mean?
- 4:13:24 Facilitator: Yea
- 4:13:26 Voice: (new voice) Not just English related?
- 4:13:28 Facilitator: No, I am talking about the school level. Like you want to do an across unit.
- 4:13:31 Voice: (new voice) yea (new voice) yea. (Much agreement, laughter)
- 4:13:37 Facilitator: What about at the district level? Do ya'll get to do that? The survey said that, the teachers that answered said you get a lot of discretion at the district level. You get it in your own practice, not so much at the district level which countered what you just said, and at the district level ya'll got a lot.
- 4:14:00 Voice: (new voice) we did get a lot of..
- 4:14:02 Facilitator: Yea, what I am trying to do is flush this out.
- 4:14:05 Voice: (previous voice) at the district so I would have thought it would have be the opposite. (Agreement heard in background)
- 4:14:09 Facilitator: The top two tiers ya'll kind of...
- 4:14:11 Voice: (previous voice) When you think of (district level person mentioned), you think of... (new voice) (Inaudible reference questioning district person). (previous voice) yea, she is at the district office. She gives us (cough) she gives us a free reign – you know she lets us decide...
- 4:14:24 Facilitator: Yea
- 4:14:24 Voice: (previous voice) um, but I think so does our school. (new voice) I think probably the school would deal with our... (mumbling). (previous voice) Yea in English... (previous voice) We always (previous voice) English has a little bit... I think we have more leeway. I feel, I believe just from what I have noticed. Their teachers talking, they have to do colors, they have to do a certain thing at a certain time, we don't – we are not as restrictive.
- 4:14:55 Facilitator: That's interesting, fleshing this out. I am going to tell a narrative (Good for the narrative). Ok, let's see what else I got. (pause, page turning) Ok, the next questions deal with a very important part of PLCs, common direction. Do ya'll feel ya'll have a common direction?
- 4:15:26 Voice: (new voice) With each other? (new voice) yea.
- 4:15:28 Facilitator: As a, well first off as a house. Well, English department then house, what do ya'll think? English department, common direction?
- 4:15:37 Voice: (new voice) yea I am sure. (new voice) yea. (previous voice) I am sure especially now-days.
- 4:15:42 Facilitator: What about the house though? (No answer). By common direction, I mean ya'll are all trying to..you know it's the mission, its common values...

- 4:15:53 Voice: (new voice) yea we are trying to (new voice) I would hope with the school direction we all have the same direction.
- 4:15:58 Facilitator: What's that?
- 4:15:59 Voice: (previous voice) I would hope as a school district we would all have the same direction.
- 4:16:08 Facilitator: So ya'll would hope that? Ok, let's see. Next line of questioning how much of your time do you actually spend (actually you might have answered this) working with each other? (pause) How much time to you get to spend working with each other when you plan versus you know doing housekeeping kind of stuff?
- 4:16:29 Voice: (new voice) Well, now all our lessons are shared through the Internet. (new voice)(agreement) (previous voice) and everything is done through "Forethought." We have to put in our lesson plans and we share them throughout the department.
- 4:16:40 Facilitator: Department. Do you share with (Another high school in the district)?
- 4:15:45 Voice: (previous voice) We can.
- 4:16:47 Facilitator: Um, What are some activities you have done with the other houses? You mentioned a couple of those already.
- 4:16:58 Voice: When you say activities you mean?
- 4:17:05 Facilitator: Across curricular activities.
- 4:17:06 Voice: Across curricular type things in our classroom what have we done? Well, we do (another teacher mentioned who teaches another subject) summer reading, we plan our books together and then that kind of morphed into the government and economics classes too
- 4:17:19 Facilitator: Are you working with ( a specific teacher mentioned).
- 4:17:21 Voice: (new voice) teacher mentioned by Facilitator mentioned along with other teachers.
- 4:17:24 Facilitator: Is it because you are the same grade level?
- 4:17:26 Voice: (previous voice) The same grade level and then we do have literature that will cross over. Its not so much that we are doing such a great job it's just that it exists where we can connect easily and the kids see it. (new voice) It's because you are (subject given). (previous voice) Yes (subject identified) um but, I move at the same pace he does because of AP (Advanced Placement). But when I taught regular or level (Subject mentioned) they move at such a fast pace that you can't cross-plan with them.
- 4:17:58 Facilitator: What about some of you others, do you cross curricular activities with other teachers or departments that teach the same grade level you teach? Like (for example, not necessarily the one given below) the freshman teaches 1A – those that teach the freshmen level courses – Do you teach with maybe some of the world geography or maybe freshman teachers in some of the other houses?

- 4:18:28 Voice: (new voice) Well, one of the teachers I am trying to work with, I forgot who it was now, but (laughter from group) we started with (literary author and work specific to subject mentioned) , They are going to focus on the (Time period specific to subject) just like we (specifics given) and so... (new voice) ( another teacher mentioned to try to determine who this teacher was working with). (new voice) I am going to be doing a project with (another subject teacher name given) once they get their (projects) finished, my students are going to have to write a poem. They won't get to see who makes (each project) but they will have to go look at them and then write a poem that like speaks to what that (project) is trying to convey. And then later they will present their poems to the class. They will then get graded by those kids on how well they interpreted (sic) (Laughter) interpreted (laughter). And then my kids will grade them based on if they conveyed the message they were trying to interpret.
- 4:19:44 Facilitator: Ok, so ya'll have different students and you will have the different students working together?
- 4:19:49 Voice: (previous voice) mm huh. Now the school (another teacher working with another literary piece) she will have them um – the different places that ) (the hero of the story) will go, she will have them do some sort of little project.
- 4:20:04 Facilitator: Mrs?
- 4:20:05 Voice: (previous voice) Geography.
- 4:20:06 Facilitator: OK, geography and English. OK. That's 9<sup>th</sup> grade? Um, (pause) The problem is the questions, I write them ahead of time. And by the time I get to them ya'll have already answered. What are some things you have learned from other teacher?
- 4:20:43 Voice: (new voice) Well, um like from my perspective (another teacher), she is not here but we do a lot of back and forth between each other because we both teach (The same two classes). And one of the things she loves to do is she loves to do Pressies (Spelling? This is a presentation program), And so she has shown me a lot of different really cool things we can do back ground and we can do building prior to um actually teaching a specific piece of literature. She has done lots of those and so I have learned quite a bit from her on how to do you know presentations and how to add things in that catch the kids attention and just to make the background more interesting so that it is not a boring day of note taking.
- 4:21:20 Facilitator: Pressies? You mean presentation?
- 4:21:21 Voice: (previous voice) Well it's a "pressie," if you go on-line the on line thing, its PowerPoint except it way cooler. (other teachers talking at once wanting to explain it.
- 4:21:31 Facilitator: I heard our English teachers talking about that, I was "pressie?" What's that?

- 4:21:33 Voice: (previous voice) They are amazing and its nice because it does the same thing that I would typically do in a PowerPoint presentation and I actually learned about them last year from my students. And then (The other teacher) just does an amazing job of putting the information in the background, dates, people, stuff that we already have to do and she does it in a way that the kids actually are engaged in the note taking versus you know falling asleep when we are doing it. Um so and that's been one thing that I have learned.
- 4:21:58 Facilitator: What are some things you have taught other teachers maybe? (pause) What you shared?
- 4:22:12 Voice: (new voice) well.. (new voice) I know I have taught... (new voice talking about another teacher in the room, she was pointing at the other teacher) I have done a research paper and I went to her for a lot of stuff and she gave me ideas on how to give ideas on how to keep on track. Like gave me notes and stuff... (new voice) We definitely share all our stuff, that is a given.
- 4:22:36 Facilitator: So ya'll do share a high percentage of the time?
- 4:22:40 Voice: (previous voice) Yea (previous voice) I have never actually taken an education course, so everything that I know that I do in my classroom has been learned, borrowed, stolen or shared from other teachers so yea. I am not sure if that is the right way.
- 4:22:53 Facilitator: I am not sure if there is a right way. The stuff you shared was useful right? This is useful? This is stuff you were able to use? I think ya'll said that? (room agreeing) And, what are some ways you have been able to experiment? (pause) Maybe you got it right, maybe you got it wrong?
- 4:23:14 Voice: (several teachers talking at once). (new voice) The first year we experiment (several teachers talking about first year at once, laughing). (new voice) As a first year teacher, every day is an experiment. (laughter) (new voice) I use A day to experiment, then I will know how B day will look. (new voice) Yea, until I have done it two or three times. (new voice) First period. (new voice) Every time we get a new lesson I guess we experiment. (new voice) When you teach an old lesson, then you experiment with what is new with it. Occupational hazard.
- 4:23:44 Facilitator: Generally successful when you do that?
- 4:23:48 Voice: (new voice) yea.
- 4:23:52 Facilitator: Generally successful. In what ways have you improved your teaching since being exposed to the PLCs here? (pause) By the way, I am not a advocate of PLCS, and I am not advocating them or not advocating them. I am just doing a study on them for a paper.
- 4:24:15 Voice: (new voice) I do not find that generally enhance my teaching – we only have like something of where she is informing us of what is going on in the school and the cabinet meeting – I guess it will enhance us in that “this is what I need to focus on or take care of o do my job better” but not like in big PLCs, I never walk away an think “man, I couldn't have done without that!” (laughter)

- 4:24:46 Facilitator: Next line of questioning here has to do with focus... On how you are evaluated. There are a lot of different definitions of PLCs out there. I have read the literature, it's not a cohesive body of literature out there. They say different things. Two major schools of thought. One is very process oriented and one is very results oriented. Do you know what I mean by that, does that make sense? (Blank stares). I mean like process, they are looking at your objectives, they are looking at your lesson plans, you get evaluated because you are doing, you get the little check marks. OK, and then the results orientation is you leave the teachers alone and you evaluate them on their results. That was obviously written by curriculum people, Shirley Horde and the Process people would be the DuFours and Eakers. I do not know if ya'll are familiar with them or not. Um, but they are the ones who write about PLCs. Which of those would you agree with, the process people or the results people?
- 4:26:04 Voice: (new voice) Which one is better or which one do we do? (new voice) Which one do we like?
- 4:26:07 Facilitator: Which one do you think is most effective for the kids?
- 4:26:10 Voice: (new voice) I like the results. (new voice) I like the results. (new voice) the results (new voice) results.
- 4:26:13 Facilitator: What do ya'll think ya'll are seeing here?
- 4:26:16 Voice: (new voice) Process. (new voice) Process
- 4:26:18 Facilitator: Process? Any examples that ya'll can give me?
- 4:26:23 Voice: (new voice) Forethought. Laughter. (new voice) yea. (new voice) Forethought. (new voice) We have to put all our lesson plans in on Forethought. And not that lesson plans are a problem but we get kind of graded and evaluated on it. They come in our classroom and make sure we are following our lesson plans and whatever but it is not showing what the kids are learning – it doesn't affect them in anyway whether or not we can actually teach or whether or not we can implement. (new voice) We can type it up well. (previous voice) yea.
- 4:26:47 Facilitator: So the forethought is actually you...
- 4:26:50 Voice: (previous voice) typing our lesson plans. (new voice) that's our lesson plans- That's a software.
- 4:26:55 Facilitator: That's a software? So that's the lesson plans.



4:26:59 Voice: (new voice) um I like for example when I first started in the first year when the whole school was together and I was at (Another high school in the district) you know I was – we were all at (Another high school in the district) I guess. (new voice) mm hu. (previous voice) and that was where everybody had to sign up for -every (subject) teacher had to sign up for- a PLC and you had to host it and you know do a presentation or something – teach them something that you think is important or that you do in your classroom. And honestly, I thought that that was really beneficial you know and I learned several things – that way or just new lesson or new ways to teach this concept or something. Since we have been over her though – we just have like, we could do it that way. And (The Principal) did say kind of to so it that way. And like I did have teachers sign up for PLCs you know to host. But this year honestly I don't think it's a good um year to try that. Because we have so many new things on our plate. That for that teacher to come up with a – that is just putting something else on them and this year has just been crazy.

4:28:00 Facilitator: You were a new teacher when..

4:28:02 Voice: (previous voice) That was my third year teaching actually. But I was still new... um new. So I did think that was beneficial. This year I don't think it has quiet well worked like that. I think it could be beneficial for us but again... (new voice) We had so... (previous voice) We had so much going on this year. So many new things are implemented we are all just... So I didn't want to put that on my teachers- like "you need to come up with you know – you need to come up with this."

4:28:24 Facilitator: And it was just (The principal)'s teachers doing the PLCs right? It was not the other (district's) teachers who were doing the PLCs?

4:28:29 Voice: (new voice) No, this is when we were all one school.

4:28:31 Facilitator: Ok.

4:28:31 Voice: (previous voice) And so it was (The old school), It wasn't (The New School ,(it was (The old school)

4:28:35 Facilitator: Ok, and so do they have PLCs in (The other school)?

4:28:39 Voice: (new voice) they have Tap. (previous voice) Now they have Tap. They used to have...

4:28:45 Facilitator: Um, yea the more I ask questions the more I realize I do not know what is going on.

4:28:52 Voice: (new voice) Well, um like three years ago it was one school and then we separated last year and now it is two.

4:28:59 Facilitator: Yea, I remember that. I was actually taking classes with the principal at (A major, tier-one research institution) and I remember he was showing us the blue prints. I was under the impression that this school was going to PLCs and that school was going to stay traditional.

4:29:13 Voice: (new voice) they are probably traditional in some ways but we have PLCs. (new voice) They have had PLCs for two years.

- 4:29:21 Facilitator: So they do have them? Ok. Um, so your survey indicates a strong results orientation for the faculty here. And do ya'll agree with that? In the survey I just know what a small group of you said. This way I can find out if it is a wide-spread belief that we need to concentrate on the results and not so much the process. Anybody have anything contrary to say to that or? (silence). Um you have a meeting agenda protocol um when you have your meetings. How is that working for you?
- 4:30:10 Voice: (new voice) I am required to come up with an agenda and send it out a day or two before the actual meeting. The idea is that that is supposed to help or it's supposed to... but I am not sure that anyone actually looks at (laughter) (new voice) I look at it. (new voice) I look at it. (previous voice) Someone sent it to me I probably wouldn't either all the time (laughing). So I am just saying you know... (laughter)
- 4:30:38 Facilitator: And what about the minutes? The minutes, are those of any value to ya'll?
- 4:30:45 Voice: (new voice) the minutes I guess the only value it would be is maybe if somebody is not there. No no, I don't know if that is the only value but if someone is not there we let them know what happened or what the need to know or... (silence)
- 4:30:58 Facilitator: And of course they are going to be of value to me in my research hopefully. So I am glad you are taking them but that's the important thing is not the research but is it working for you, that's is what I am trying to figure out. Interactions that ya'll are having with other teachers. Anything you want to say about that? That's what I am really trying to uncover. Again, I am building a narration of what you are actually doing. (no answer). Ok, let's see here last question and this is one I want you to kind of think about. Do you think PLCs are working? Are they working?
- 4:31:38 Voice: (new voice) To make us a better teacher, is that... (pause)
- 4:31:42 Facilitator: Yea, to make yu a better teacher, any kind of value to you at all.
- 4:41:46 Voice: (new voice) I would say no, it hasn't been a big help for me, it doesn't do anything for me. I get in there and I am like tell me what I have to do so I can get to my classroom and do what I really need to do. That is what it is for me right now.
- 4:32:04 Facilitator: But your (Department) PLC?
- 4:32:05 Voice: Our (department) PLC is different because we learn immediately – we are given stuff that we – important knowledge that we need to learn for the school. So for me it's important for me because I can walk away and I have to do this, this, and this this week and so I need to be here at 7:30 for the meeting. (new voice) and to be honest one of the few things that we all have as a school – one of the downfalls has been communication. Teachers get upset about communication or they're not told this or they didn't know – you know. They don't feel like it's... So I have tried to use the PLCs to help that out too – just help communicate things that they need to know. Maybe it's not being a better teacher but being a better employee. But not necessarily a better teacher.
- 4:32:51 Facilitator: So a lot of the paper work kind of stuff?

4:32:53 Voice: (previous voice) yea, like dates and yea. (new voice) Well we talk about essays a lot. (previous voice) yea. I always try to do a lesson on there for every agenda there is always something that should be a learning problem, you should... but because of time and because of – a lot of times it just kind of gets skimmed over pretty quick.

4:33:13 Facilitator: What would make the big house PLC have any value to you? What are some things you think they would do that could add value to... (pause)

4:33:27 Voice: (new voice) if it was applicable I guess. (new voice) We go in there, we chat. (new voice) I think you have too many people going in to many different directions. (new voice) mm hu. (previous voice) I mean you are trying to coerce them into going in one place and if we did that we wouldn't be doing our job. Because I honestly do not think the way this is now, in my mind it doesn't work at all. (new voice) The thing is I think it would be interesting to know what other teachers who teach the same grade level, I think it would be interesting to know what they are teaching but when we have those house meetings its so many different grade levels so many different (new voice) subjects. (previous voice) that its confusing – you know, I do not think it is that helpful.

4:34:09 Facilitator: Ok, any other way it has helped you or has taken? (pause) Hopefully ya'll have gotten – hopefully by spending the 30 minutes with me here the meetings you have in the future will be more valuable to you – that's the purpose of this, it's not just a purely academic thing. I do appreciate your time, I am a teacher, and I know how valuable that planning time is so I do appreciate you coming in here and speaking with me. Um so it's going to be used like I said to have these things work better for us. So I appreciate your time and hopefully you some changes.

4:34:55 Voice: (new voice) Thank you.

*Only communication from Voices to Facilitator at this point was between one of the teachers who indicated she would e-mail minutes to the meetings they have had up to that point.*

## **Appendix B**

### **Study School Staff Responses To Survey Questions**

**From Jan. 24 – Feb. 24, 2012**

*Below is a list of questions with answers asked of the faculty of the High School under study and staff from January 24 to February 24, 2011. Questions were answered on Survey Monkey from either computers at home or work. All respondents were anonymous. No responses were changed, spelling and grammar errors are part of original responses and questions. The only change made was the name of the school was changed with the indefinite article "the." All collected data is included.*

- 1. This survey is designed to study the professional culture of the faculty of the High School. Information used from this study could be used to help administration better plan to meet the needs of the faculty of the High School. Do you currently serve on the faculty of the High School?**

<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>	
<b>Yes, I teach at The High School.</b>	<b>95.5%</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>No, I do not teach at The High School but do work with the faculty on a professional basis.</b>	<b>4.5%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>No, I work at The High School but not in a professional capacity.</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>No, I do not work at The High School.</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>answered question</b>		<b>22</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>0</b>
Other (please specify)		1

Showing 1 text responses

Counselor

2/16/11 11:08PM

## 2. What level of decisions are you allowed to make at The High School?

<b>I can only make classroom decisions such as how the furniture in my room is laid-out and in what order lessons are given.</b>	<b>14.3%</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The above and I contribute to department-wide or otherwise higher-level content decisions such as what lessons will be given and what will be covered in testing.</b>	<b>57.1%</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>All of the above and I contribute to school-wide decisions such as working on a campus improvement plan.</b>	<b>4.8%</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>All of the above and I contribute to district wide decisions such as how involved The High School is with institutions of higher learning.</b>	<b>23.8%</b>	<b>5</b>
		<b>answered question</b>
		<b>21</b>
		<b>skipped question</b>
		<b>1</b>

3. What level of decisions should you make as an educator?

<b>I should only be responsible for my classroom or assignment.</b>	19.0%	4
<b>I should hold shared responsibility for myself and other professionals who do what I do.</b>	28.6%	6
<b>I should hold shared responsibility for the entire school.</b>	9.5%	2
<b>I should hold shared responsibility for the district's efforts to promote learning.</b>	42.9%	9
<b>answered question</b>		<b>21</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>1</b>

#### 4. What is (The School Under Study's) School's mission?

Showing 16 text responses

Our Mission is to provide for every youth, regardless of ability, environment, or race an educational program that will develop the competitive spirit, knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns, which will make each student successful, responsible and productive members of the global community.

1/24/11 11:22PM

To provide for every youth, regardless of ability, environment, or race an educational program that will develop the competitive spirit, knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns, which will make each student successful, responsible and productive members of the global community

1/24/11 11:27PM

Our Mission is to provide for every student an educational program which will make them successful in life.

1/24/11 11:31PM

to equip all students to be successful in today's world (in much more flowery terms)

1/24/11 11:33PM

Would have to look it up

1/24/11 11:34PM

Our Mission is to provide for every youth, regardless of ability, environment, or race an educational program that will develop the competitive spirit, knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns, which will make each student successful, responsible and productive members of the global community.

1/24/11 11:50PM

no time to write it all--please see PHS website :)

1/25/11 12:07AM

To provide our students with a well rounded education to make them responsible, knowledgeable members of society.

1/25/11 2:58PM

To provide all students with equal opportunities, knowledge, and skills to enable them to become active participants in our society.

2/3/11 10:50PM



Our Mission is to provide for every youth, regardless of ability, environment, or race an educational program that will develop the competitive spirit, knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns, which will make each student successful, responsible and productive members of the global community.

2/15/11 2:48PM

To provide for every youth, regardless of ability, environment, or race an educational program that will develop the competitive spirit, knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns, which will make each student successful, responsible and productive members of the global community.

2/15/11 3:34PM

Our Mission is to provide for every youth, regardless of ability, environment, or race an educational program that will develop the competitive spirit, knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns, which will make each student successful, responsible and productive members of the global community.

2/15/11 3:43PM

Our Mission is to provide for every youth, regardless of ability, environment, or race an educational program that will develop the competitive spirit, knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns, which will make each student successful, responsible and productive members of the global community.

2/15/11 3:45PM

To provide for every student and educational program that will develop the competitivespirti, knowledge, skills, and behavior, which will make each student successful, responsible and productive members of the global commubnity.

2/15/11 6:48PM

Our Mission is to provide for every youth, regardless of ability, environment, or race an educational program that will develop the competitive spirit, knowledge, skills, and behavior patterns, which will make each student successful, responsible and productive members of the global community.

2/16/11 11:08PM

To provide a learning experience that can positively affect grades, attendance and safety.

2/23/11 7:08PM

<b>answered question</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>skipped question</b>	<b>6</b>

### 5. What is The High School's Vision?

Showing 16 text responses

The High School will be the best place to learn, teach, and build global community via a winning positive competitive spirit, innovative technologies, rigorous /relevant curriculum, and engaging instruction.

1/24/11 11:22PM

To be the best place to learn, teach, and build global community via a winning positive competitive spirit, innovative technologies, rigorous/relevant curriculum, and engaging instruction.

1/24/11 11:27PM

The HS will be the best place to learn and teach.

1/24/11 11:31PM

be a great place for all to learn (again, in much more flowery terms)

1/24/11 11:33PM

Would have to look it up

1/24/11 11:34PM

The High School will be the best place to learn, teach, and build a global community via a winning positive competitive spirit, innovative technologies, rigorous/relevant curriculum, and engaging instruction.

1/24/11 11:50PM

same as above

1/25/11 12:07AM

To strive to be the best place a student can learn while using new and improved technology resources, knowledgeable and enthusiastic teachers, and positive classroom instruction.

1/25/11 2:58PM

To be the place where students are expected to rise to the highest level regarding learning.

2/3/11 10:50PM

The High School will be the best place to learn, teach, and build global community via a winning positive competitive spirit, innovative technologies, rigorous /relevant curriculum, and engaging instruction.

2/15/11 2:48PM

The High School will be the best place to learn, teach, and build global community via a winning positive competitive spirit, innovative technologies, rigorous /relevant curriculum, and engaging instruction.

2/15/11 3:34PM

The High School will be the best place to learn, teach, and build global community via a winning positive competitive spirit, innovativetechnologies, rigorous /relevant curriculum, and engaging instruction

2/15/11 3:43PM

The High School will be the best place to learn, teach, and build global community via a winning positive competitive spirit, innovativetechnologies, rigorous /relevant curriculum, and engaging instruction.

2/15/11 3:45PM

To be the best place to learn, teach, and build a global community via a winning positive competitive spirit, innovative technologies, rigorous/relevant curriculum, and engaging instruction.

2/15/11 6:48PM

The High School will be the best place to learn, teach, and build global community via a winning positive competitive spirit, innovativetechnologies, rigorous /relevant curriculum, and engaging instruction.

2/16/11 11:08PM

To provide the students with a smaller learning environment that will affectively accomplish the mission.

2/23/11 7:08PM

**answered question 16**

**skipped question 6**

## 6. What are The High School's Values?

Showing 15 text responses

Identify and meet student educational needs Enable all students to succeed Enable all employees to succeed Data driven to ensure institutional effectiveness Ensure institutional innovativeness Create a positive competitive spirit

1/24/11 11:22PM

Integrity, self-confidence, responsibility, leadership, respect for authority, respect for authority.

1/24/11 11:27PM

Honor, Responsibility, and Commitment

1/24/11 11:31PM

A - student achievement B - student behavior C - community/parent involvement/support (success in all areas above)

1/24/11 11:33PM

Would have to look it up

1/24/11 11:34PM

A - Academics B - Behavior C - Community

1/24/11 11:50PM

same as above

1/25/11 12:07AM

We value a good education using new technology, highly qualified teachers, a competitive spirit on and off the court, and the desire for higher education.

1/25/11 2:58PM

not sure

2/3/11 10:50PM

1. Identify and meet student educational needs 2. Enable all students to succeed 3. Enable all employees to succeed 4. Data driven to ensure institutional effectiveness 5. Ensure institutional innovativeness 6. Create a positive competitive spirit

2/15/11 2:48PM

Our whole process of creating the vision for PHS was based upon research in the field. We first gathered a stratified sample of students and teachers to create a council (or study group). From this group we sent surveys, created presentations, and did a book study on vision creation. From the input of the teachers and students, after they gathered data from their peers, we compiled a list of goals for the new school. These goals were based on our core values. The values were our basic beliefs on what education should and can be. Once the goals were set, we composed the mission statement based upon them. From the mission statement we created a focus of the vision statement to give clarity to what we want to achieve. In conclusion, we then brainstormed our Credo. The Credo is a single statement that brings it all together in one simple line. Below are the results.  
GOALS: Identify and meet student educational needs Enable all students to succeed Enable all employees to succeed Data driven to ensure institutional effectiveness Ensure institutional innovativeness Create a positive competitive spirit

2/15/11 3:43PM

Identify and meet student educational needs Enable all students to succeed Enable all employees to succeed Data driven to ensure institutional effectiveness Ensure institutional innovativeness Create a positive competitive spirit

2/15/11 3:45PM

Bsed on a set of goals: 1. Identify and meet student educational needs. 2. enable all students to succeed. 3. enable all teachers to succeed. 4. Data-driven to ensure institutuional effectiveness. 5. Ensure institutional innovativeness. 6. Create a positive competitive spirit. ===basic belief on what education should and can be.

2/15/11 6:48PM

GOALS: Identify and meet student educational needs Enable all students to succeed Enable all employees to succeed Data driven to ensure institutional effectiveness Ensure institutional innovativeness Create a positive competitive spirit

2/16/11 11:08PM

To provide that students with the highest abilities of education in a friendly and exciting environment.

2/23/11 7:08PM

**answered question 15**

**skipped question 7**

**7. How important is it for a faculty and its support to have common goals?**

<b>answered question</b>		<b>22</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>0</b>
	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Each person on the faculty should have a different direction because...</b>	0.0%	0
<b>Each department within the faculty should have a different direction because...</b>	4.5%	1
<b>The entire faculty should have a common and unique direction because...</b>	45.5%	10
<b>(Our) ISD should have a common direction because...</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>11</b>
Please explain the “because” below		19

Showing **19** text responses

we are all in the same district  
1/24/11 11:15PM

We as the faculty should all try to be exemplary educators, role models, and mentors, because we are all here to do the same thing: to help our students have a better future. However, because of the different subject matter and methods which work better with certain levels and subjects as opposed to others, we must also have different, more specific goals.  
1/24/11 11:22PM

It motivates all of our students to strive to achieve their highest potential with goal setting and positive self-esteem.

1/24/11 11:27PM

it will get to a better result.

1/24/11 11:31PM

we can all take different roads, but we need to be heading to the same destination

1/24/11 11:33PM

Apples and oranges

1/24/11 11:34PM

...that is the glue that holds us together and helps us attain our goal for ourselves and for the kids.

1/25/11 12:07AM

....we have shared students, yet varying interests and varying subject matters. Every teacher is actually a unique person as well, and you cant place everyone in a mold.

1/25/11 12:52AM

We are all one district....if one school "looks" bad, it reflects upon the entire district I feel.

1/25/11 2:42PM

we are one unit striving for the same goals: to educate our students not only in our classroom instruction, but in life.

1/25/11 2:58PM

so we can reach our goals.

2/3/11 10:50PM

goals were based on our core values. The values were our basic beliefs on what education should and can be. Once the goals were set, we composed the mission statement based upon them. From the mission statement we created a focus of the vision statement to give clarity to what we want to achieve. In conclusion, we then brainstormed our Credo. The Credo is a single statement that brings it all together in one simple line. With focus and a common vision our goals can be obtained.

2/15/11 2:48PM

with common goals, the needs to the students are ultimately served and that is what is most important!

2/15/11 3:34PM

we all share students and through communication we will be able to improve the achievement of all students within the district.

2/15/11 3:43PM

we should all be working together to achieve the same goal...

2/15/11 3:45PM

A common direction will assist students in their future endeavours.

2/15/11 4:09PM

We are all working for the students to be successful and we need to be on the same page to understand and have a way to get them there.

2/15/11 6:48PM

our school will become a nationally ranked school where true progress can be measured.

2/16/11 11:08PM

...because a common direction among all employees allows unity and conformity in a positive environment.

2/23/11 7:08PM



8. How often do you meet with others to discuss your teaching? Please choose all that apply.

Because I am the only one who teaches what I do or the only one who teaches using my methods, I rarely meet or discuss my teaching or other professional activities with others.	27.3%	6
Although I am NOT the only one who teaches what I do or the only one who teaches using my methods, I rarely meet or discuss my teaching or other professional activities with others.	0.0%	0
I meet daily with other teachers before and after class and during lunch and hold informal conversations in which topics concerning students and lessons are often brought up.	9.1%	2
Our department chair or other leader will have us meet every two or more weeks to discuss what we are doing.	18.2%	4
We usually meet once a week or more to discuss our teaching or other things we are doing.	54.5%	12
answered question		22
skipped question		0

9. Do you think it is important for faculty members to learn from each other and utilize each other's ideas?

	Response Percent	Response Count
I do not believe this is important as our teachers have been teaching for some time and have degrees either in the field taught or close to the field taught.	4.5%	1
Our teachers seem to know what they are doing, but it can't hurt to meet once in a while to share stories and ideas.	27.3%	6
Our teachers seem to know what they are doing, but it is important to meet once a week or two to share professional stories and ideas.	36.4%	8
Even though our teachers are experts on what they do, they still need to meet at least weekly to discuss curriculum changes and changing students' needs.	31.8%	7
answered question		22
skipped question		0

**10. Does your department currently have common planning times?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>63.6%</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>No</b>	36.4%	8
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>22</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

**11. Do you have an established location for these meeting times?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>68.2%</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>No</b>	9.1%	2
<b>NA</b>	22.7%	5
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>22</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

**12. How important is it for professional educators to meet with others in their field to discuss ideas?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>It is not very important.</b>	9.5%	2
<b>It is useful.</b>	19.0%	4
<b>It is important.</b>	<b>38.1%</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>It is vital.</b>	33.3%	7
Please elaborate if you see the need to do so. Show Responses		5

Showing 5 text responses

If we would spend less time meeting, then we could spend more time actually working or planning.

1/24/11 11:34PM

However, time is of the essence and a rare thing this school year.

1/25/11 12:07AM

new/different ideas may lead to more success.

1/25/11 2:42PM

My department is unique because I have fine arts- I believe our department benefits the least from PLC's except for discussing upcoming events, information, and helpful hints or strategies for general teaching.

2/15/11 6:48PM

It is important because no one has the ability to have all the ideas on how something can get accomplished. I believe it can be useful in order to see what others are doing that you may be able to utilize.

2/23/11 7:08PM

**answered question 21**

**skipped question 1**

13. How do you feel about professionals sharing their personal practice? For instance, teachers would observe each other and then report their observations to fellow teachers? Please note that this is not being proposed at The High School through this research project. This is only a means to give administration your honest, anonymous feelings.

	Response Percent	Response Count
<b>Hurt feelings and/or the sharing of bad ideas would often be the result.</b>	4.5%	1
<b>There is very little to be gained.</b>	13.6%	3
<b>It couldn't hurt, perhaps something would be learned.</b>	<b>40.9%</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Definitely something would be gained.</b>	<b>40.9%</b>	<b>9</b>
Please elaborate if you feel comfortable doing so. Show Responses		8

Showing 8 text responses

I have learned and applied valuable information and techniques through observing and receiving counsel from my colleagues.

1/24/11 11:22PM

I don't like the reporting of observations! I think it is a good idea to get new ideas and strategies, though.

1/24/11 11:33PM

I participated in teacher observations in the past. It was uncomfortable for both teachers and I found that it was the same teachers who repeatedly volunteered for their class to be observed. It is a bad idea!

1/24/11 11:50PM

I have always thought observing other teachers - both ones that teach the same subject as you AND ones that teach different but related subjects - such as a math teacher observing a science teacher.

1/25/11 2:42PM

We did this before and I found that I learned something new from each observation. I have taught for 30 years and feel that I still can learn from others.

2/3/11 10:50PM

Maybe the person observing would notice a specific technique that the teacher does not realize he/she is using.

2/15/11 6:48PM

When??

2/15/11 10:56PM

An outside opinion is something that can enhance your personal performance.

2/23/11 7:08PM

<b>answered question</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

- 14. A shared personal practice involves professionals giving and receiving feedback from each other in such a manner that both the individual and the organization are improved. In some schools teachers will observe each other's teaching and make comments to each other without administration nearby. Have you observed a shared personal practice at The High School?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>50.0%</b>	<b>11</b>
Please elaborate if you feel comfortable doing so. Show Responses		<b>3</b>

Showing 3 text responses

We only turned in our observation forms to the Dean of Instruction. I never received feedback on those that observed me. I shared the positive things I learned with the teachers that I observed.

2/3/11 10:50PM

I would be willing to observe other teachers and/or have other teachers observe me.

2/15/11 3:43PM

Mentor teachers, like myself, and I recently had a student teacher.

2/15/11 6:48PM

<b>answered question</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

**15. How often have you and one or more other professionals at The High School collaborated on a lesson plan or other item?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>I have never collaborated at The High School.</b>	13.6%	3
<b>I have collaborated once or twice on such an item this year or last.</b>	<b>31.8%</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>I have collaborated several times a year at The High School.</b>	22.7%	5
<b>I collaborate regularly with my colleagues at The High School.</b>	<b>31.8%</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>answered question</b>		<b>22</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>0</b>



**16. Do you think it is important for teachers and other school professionals to collaborate?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>No</b>	0.0%	0
	Why? Show Responses	15

Showing 15 text responses

No matter how great a teacher you may think you are, there is always something new to learn. These new practices can oftentimes benefit teachers and in particular, his/her students. Times change and information grows, and so do our students' needs.

1/24/11 11:22PM

It keeps us on the same page.

1/24/11 11:27PM

Exchange of ideas, methods of teaching, professional development resources, etc.

1/24/11 11:31PM

equaleducartional opportunity for all students

1/24/11 11:33PM

The same academic rigor can be adhered to with professional collaboration. It can function as a measuring tool to keep teachers on track.

1/24/11 11:50PM

So we can stay centered, and to see others' take on the subject at hand. But this should be at the individual educator's discrepancy. I really don't need anyone telling me to meet---I do it on my own when needed, and anyone else can come to me about anything, too. These pre-set meetings often take away time from other more important teacher tasks.

1/25/11 12:07AM

So that we on the "same page" as another teacher in this school that teaches the same subject matter as you.

1/25/11 2:42PM

I do think it is important, but when they want us to collaborate and "teach" concepts you may not be comfortable with, or it not fitting into your specific classroom instruction, it can be difficult.

1/25/11 2:58PM

Because not only is the learning tiered and consistent but we can learn from others.

2/3/11 10:50PM

More heads are better than one. We can always sharpen the saw.

2/15/11 2:48PM

Again, it is the students who are best served by the adults in their lives actually communicating and making things better for them.

2/15/11 3:34PM

There is always a better way to do something. Teachers must evolve and continue to find new teaching methods.

2/15/11 3:45PM

To achieve a common area - and the students will have rigorous lessons. Also for developing innovative ideas.

2/15/11 6:48PM

Without collaboration the teachers will struggle to meet the needs of all students.

2/16/11 11:08PM

Although I prefer to work independent, having other opinions on what might be added or altered has the potential of making you more effective.

2/23/11 7:08PM

**answered question 22**

**skipped question 0**

**17. Do you feel you are allowed to place ideas you have into action? In other words, are you given administration approval to experiment without fear that if you fail you will be adversely affected?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes, I feel comfortable experimenting at The High School.</b>	<b>86.4%</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>No, if I experiment and time is wasted, I will hear from administration or someone else in a bad way.</b>	<b>13.6%</b>	<b>3</b>
	<b>answered question</b>	<b>22</b>
	<b>skipped question</b>	<b>0</b>

**18. Do you think experimentation is important to your practice? In other words, Should you be allowed as a professional to try different things out without fear that if you do fail, you will be punished?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes, I should be allowed to experiment without fear of punishment for failed ideas.</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>No, experimentation at the classroom level is not a good idea.</b>	0.0%	0
	Why? Show Responses	11

Showing 11 text responses

It is through creativity and ingenuity that great ideas are often born. I believe that as professionals, we should be able to make competent decisions in our field, and that most of the time, we do. As such, it creates a very positive environment when administration has faith in what we are trying to do in the best interest of our students and respects our opinions and input.

1/24/11 11:22PM

Sometimes I know what is best for my students.

1/24/11 11:27PM

You would be more confident in what you teach.

1/24/11 11:31PM

Change is good. You never know how a theory will pan out until it is actually implemented.

1/24/11 11:33PM

BUT, I am not comfortable with this at all, because anything less than a positive outcome will lead directly or indirectly to more levels of involvement on our part as the teacher, and frankly, time is not something very many of us have in excess this academic year. It has been very frustrating.

1/25/11 12:07AM

Different methods of teaching are always a good thing. You find what your kids respond to and don't respond to which can help you to better plan your lessons to keep them engaged and focused. I've found that experimenting with my personal teaching styles and mixing up how I present the material keeps kids interested. They never know what to expect, and they rarely get bored.

1/25/11 2:58PM

Without risk there is no growth. Many people fail not knowing how close they are to succeeding.

2/15/11 2:48PM

Withouth experimentation/trying something different - we would never change...

2/15/11 3:45PM

to ensure our lessons stay innovative and current to the students needs.

2/15/11 6:48PM

There is not a set way to do things. Avenues of exploration should always utilized in order to ensure new and innovative thinking takes place.

2/16/11 11:08PM

Fear of punishment does not allow the potential to get better.

2/23/11 7:08PM

answered question	22
skipped question	0

**19. Are you continually improving the way you teach?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>100.0%</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>0.0%</b>	<b>0</b>
<b>answered question</b>		<b>22</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>0</b>

**20. Have you seen evident of continuous improvement in your colleagues' teaching?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>90.0%</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>No</b>	<b>10.0%</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>answered question</b>		<b>20</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>2</b>

**21. Is it important for an educator to be continually modifying what they do?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Yes</b>	<b>95.5%</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>No</b>	4.5%	1
	Why? Show Responses	16

Showing **16** text responses

As I stated before, times change and information grows. Because of this, there are many good things from the past that we continue to implement, but we also need to adapt in many other ways so that we can best meet the needs of our students.

1/24/11 11:22PM

A teacher will often modify their teaching assignments but not on a continually basis.

1/24/11 11:27PM

To be up to date in the subject she teaches. Information changes periodically.

1/24/11 11:31PM

change with the world!

1/24/11 11:33PM

Each class has its own personality, what works for advanced classes will rarely succeed in challenged classrooms.

1/24/11 11:50PM

Student and teacher needs are always in flux.

1/25/11 12:07AM

each student and each class has different dynamics, abilities and learning styles; so you must be able to adapt to them.

1/25/11 2:42PM

You have a different variety of kids throughout all of your classes. Doing the same thing over and over is not always beneficial to your students. Your students will range in abilities, and you have to adjust your teaching to that.

1/25/11 2:58PM

Because we need to constantly be adapting the best from our lessons, and focusing on the particular needs of each group.

2/3/11 10:50PM

What works with one group, may not with another.

2/15/11 2:48PM

It is important to find things that work. Continual self-reflection, gathering feedback, and experimentation lead you to things that either work or don't.

2/15/11 3:34PM

The way that students learn is always changing and teachers need to be changing so that they continue to meet those needs. There is also changes in the resources available to teachers that they should evaluate for use with their students.

2/15/11 3:43PM

In our society, teaching methods must be changed to reach the students.

2/15/11 3:45PM

to ensure our lessons stay innovative and current to the students needs.

2/15/11 6:48PM

Education is a fluid organism that should not rely on yesterday's ideas to teach tomorrow's generation.

2/16/11 11:08PM

Information changes and new research is continually obtained to help to produce more effective results. The lack of modification does not allow the learning to know what can be more or less effective.

2/23/11 7:08PM

**answered question** 22

**skipped question** 0



**22. Do you feel administration evaluates you on results or intentions? In other words, are you evaluated on what you actually do or what you have said you will do?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Results</b>	<b>81.0%</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Intentions</b>	19.0%	4
<b>answered question</b>		<b>21</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>1</b>

**23. Do you feel administration evaluates OTHERS on results or intentions?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Results</b>	<b>76.2%</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>Intentions</b>	23.8%	5
<b>answered question</b>		<b>21</b>
<b>skipped question</b>		<b>1</b>

**24. How does administration measure results? Please choose all items that administration takes seriously.**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>PDAS</b>	<b>77.3%</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>TAKS scores</b>	72.7%	16
<b>Department Exams</b>	13.6%	3
<b>The administrator's personal opinion</b>	40.9%	9
<b>Student attendance rates</b>	22.7%	5
<b>UIL competitions</b>	18.2%	4
Other (please specify) Show Responses		4

attitude

1/24/11 11:33PM

Off-duty teacher attendance at extracurricular events

1/25/11 12:07AM

and other informal methods

2/15/11 2:48PM

PLCs

2/15/11 6:48PM

**answered question 22**

**skipped question 0**

**25. What's more important?**

	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
<b>Results</b>	<b>81.0%</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Intentions</b>	23.8%	5
	Please elaborate Show Responses	10

Showing **10** text responses

intentions are nice but useless unless action follows  
1/24/11 11:33PM

Neither, there must be a balance between the two. Admin's success is based on performance and success of the campus. Teacher's results are at the whim of hormones and other life issues.  
1/24/11 11:50PM

This results/intentions thing is a "loaded" subset of questions that I am weary of answering! Determining what's more important depends on who you are asking. Results are the bottom line to an administrator; that seems to be their chief concern. Teachers care a great deal about results. Our intentions are always aimed in the right direction as we charge ahead! However, too many factors can spring up to alter outcomes in the classroom--or at least change them from what the teacher originally had planned. Yet the administration looks at it, from the very beginning, with a specific business plan in mind, which they consider a failure if anything gets in the way of it. Unfortunately, school is a business, and teachers are the tools used to attain the sought-after goals.  
1/25/11 12:07AM

Every teacher has good intentions, but if you find something does not work....don't do it again. :)  
1/25/11 2:42PM

You can always have the best of intentions, but if you don't put it into action, all they are are intentions.  
1/25/11 2:58PM

In the end, the student success is the key.

2/15/11 2:48PM

Sometimes the teacher cannot choose his/her teaching situation. Results can vary from year to year due to the type of students in the class.

2/15/11 3:45PM

When you are trying to stay innovative- your first attempt ( year) may not have the intended results- then you should be able to go back and figure out why and improve- ultimately critical thinking skills- we are modeling what we expect the students to do also.

2/15/11 6:48PM

Results can vary from year to year.

2/16/11 11:08PM

The best intentions if not modified to affect results are ultimately fruitless.

2/23/11 7:08PM

### **Appendix C**

#### **Study School AEIS Information for 2010-2011 from the TEA**

*This appendix provides information provided for the school under study by the Texas Education Agency's (TEA's) Academic Excellence Indicator System (AEIS) for the 2010 to 2011 school year. Information before this year is not available for this faculty as it had not yet existed as a separate entity. During the school year being reported, the campus received an accountability rating of academically acceptable by the TEA. Some data that either identifies the school under study or is not relevant to this particular school has been omitted. Other modifications to the chart from the original provided by the TEA have been made so that all relevant data could easily be read.*

		State	District	Campus Group	Campus	African American	Hispanic	White	American Indian	Asian	Special Ed	Econ Disad	LEP
<b>TAKS Met 2011 Standard Grade 9</b>													
Reading	2011	89%	87%	89%	88%>99%	84%	90%	*	> 99%	51%	84%	40%	
Mathematics	2011	72%	68%	68%	70%82%	66%	73%	*	86%	33%	61%	33%	
All Tests	2011	69%	65%	65%	69%82%	64%	71%	*	86%	30%	59%	10%	
<b>TAKS Met 2011 Standard Grade 10</b>													
Eng Lang Arts	2011	91%	91%	90%	92%> 99%	91%	91%	*	*	42%	89%	*	
Mathematics	2011	75%	69%	74%	73%> 99%	72%	72%	*	*	27%	70%	*	
Science	2011	76%	72%	75%	73%	90%	66%	80%	*	*	19%	65%	*
Soc Studies	2011	93%	94%	94%	93%> 99%	93%	93%	*	*	54%	91%	*	
All Tests	2011	65%	59%	64%	63%	90%	57%	68%	*	*	8%	54%	*

		State	District	Campus Group	Campus	African American	Hispanic	White	American Indian	Asian	Special Ed	Econ Disad	LEP
<b>TAKS Met 2011 Standard ^ Grade 11</b>													
Eng Lang Arts	2011	94%	94%	95%	92%	80%	88%	96%	* > 99%		67%	87%	13%
Mathematics	2011	90%	88%	89%	89%	90%	84%	92%	* > 99%		47%	81%	13%
Science	2011	90%	91%	91%	90%	90%	83%	96%	* > 99%		61%	86%	13%
Soc Studies	2011	98%	98%	98%	96% > 99%	94%	97%		* > 99%	67%	94%	88%	
All Tests	2011	84%	83%	83%	84%	80%	76%	89%	* > 99%		39%	75%	13%
<b>TAKS Met 2011 Standard (Sum of All Grades Tested) (Standard Accountability Indicator @)</b>													
Reading/ELA	2011	90%	92%	91%	90%	94%	87%	92%	* > 99%		52%	86%	27%
Mathematics	2011	84%	86%	77%	77%	90%	73%	78%	* 95%		34%	69%	24%
Science	2011	83%	82%	81%	81%	90%	73%	87%	* > 99%		36%	74%	8%
Soc Studies	2011	95%	94%	95%	95% > 99%	93%	95%		* > 99%	59%	92%	58%	
All Tests	2011	76%	78%	70%	71%	84%	65%	75%	* 95%		25%	62%	9%
<b>TAKS Commended Performance (Sum of All Grades Tested)</b>													
Reading/ELA	2011	33%	31%	20%	22%	48%	17%	24%	* 32%		1%	17%	< 1%
Mathematics	2011	29%	27%	18%	20%	19%	17%	22%	* 37%		1%	16%	< 1%
Science	2011	30%	29%	18%	18%	35%	12%	22%	* 17%	< 1%	11%	< 1%	
Soc Studies	2011	47%	39%	44%	41%	80%	31%	47%	* 42%	7%	28%	< 1%	
All Tests	2011	16%	14%	8%	10%	19%	6%	12%	* 16%	1%	7%	< 1%	



		State	District	Campus Group	Campus	African American	Hispanic	White	American Indian	Asian	Special Ed	Econ Disad	LEP
<b>TAKS-M Met 2011 Standard (Sum of All Grades Tested)</b>													
Reading/ELA	2011	86%	87%	83%	48%	*	50%	47%	*	*	48%	48%	*
Mathematics	2011	77%	78%	65%	38%	*	46%	31%	*	*	38%	35%	*
Science	2011	60%	53%	59%	13%	*	13%	14%	*	*	13%	14%	*
Soc Studies	2011	68%	64%	73%	36%	*	38%	33%	*	*	36%	38%	*
All Tests	2011	66%	68%	55%	31%	*	29%	33%	*	*	31%	28%	*
<b>TAKS-Alt Met 2011 Standard (Sum of All Grades and Subjects Tested)</b>													
All Tests	2011	97%	90%	> 99%	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
All Tests	2010	93%	99%	-	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*	*
<b>2011 TAKS Participation (Grades 9-11)</b>													
Tested		98.6%	98.9%	98.6%	98.0%	100.0%	97.6%	99.1%	*	80.8%	*	98.0%	64.7%
By Test Version													
TAKS (1 or more)		91.0%	89.4%	89.5%	90.3%	94.4%	89.6%	91.0%	*	80.8%	20.0%	86.7%	61.8%
Not on TAKS		7.6%	9.5%	9.3%	7.7%	5.6%	8.0%	8.2%	*	0.0%	80.0%	11.4%	2.9%
TAKS (Acc) Only		2.4%	3.2%	4.0%	3.7%	0.0%	4.6%	3.4%	*	0.0%	38.9%	4.9%	0.0%
TAKS-M Only		3.1%	3.5%	2.9%	2.5%	2.8%	2.4%	2.8%	*	0.0%	26.3%	4.1%	2.9%
TAKS-Alt Only		0.9%	0.7%	0.8%	0.3%	2.8%	0.2%	0.2%	*	0.0%	3.2%	0.4%	0.0%
Combination		1.3%	2.2%	1.2%	1.1%	0.0%	0.7%	1.7%	*	0.0%	11.6%	2.0%	0.0%
By Acct Status													
Acct System		94.0%	93.0%	93.7%	91.0%	86.1%	92.0%	91.2%	*	73.1%	85.3%	93.5%	64.7%
Non-Acct System		4.6%	5.9%	4.8%	6.9%	13.9%	5.5%	7.9%	*	7.7%	14.7%	4.5%	0.0%
Mobile		4.6%	5.9%	4.7%	6.8%	13.9%	5.3%	7.9%	*	7.7%	13.7%	4.5%	0.0%
Non-Acct Test		0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	*	0.0%	1.1%	0.0%	0.0%

Not Tested	1.4%	1.1%	1.4%	2.0%	0.0%	2.4%	0.9%	*	19.2%	0.0%	2.0%	35.3%
	<b>State</b>	<b>District</b>	<b>Campus</b>	<b>Campus</b>	<b>African</b>	<b>Hispanic</b>	<b>White</b>	<b>American</b>	<b>Asian</b>	<b>Special</b>	<b>Econ</b>	<b>LEP</b>
Absent	0.1%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%	*	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%
LEP Exempt	0.9%	0.5%	0.3%	0.4%	0.0%	0.9%	0.0%	*	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%	11.8%
Other	0.4%	0.4%	0.7%	1.5%	0.0%	1.3%	0.9%	*	19.2%	0.0%	1.2%	23.5%
Total Count	3,231,780	6,833	537	993	36	452	466	4	26	95	511	34

#### Progress of Prior Year TAKS Failers

Percent of Failers Passing TAKS (Sum of Grades 4-11)

Reading/ELA 2011	47%	54%	49%	41%	*	35%	50%	*	*	< 1%	26%	14%
Mathematics 2011	42%	46%	45%	50%	*	50%	45%	*	*	22%	46%	< 1%

#### English Language Learners Progress Indicator

2010-11	80%	87%	77%	73%	*	72%	*	*	*	39%	71%	64%
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#### COLLEGE READINESS INDICATORS

##### Texas Success Initiative (TSI) - Higher Education Readiness Component

Eng Lang Arts 2011	66%	61%	64%	62%	50%	58%	67%	*	70%	17%	58%	< 1%
Mathematics 2011	69%	63%	66%	63%	60%	51%	71%	*	80%	25%	49%	13%

**STUDENT INFORMATION**

	-----Campus-----		Campus	District	State
	Count	Percent	Group		
Total Students:	1,010	100.0%	39,827	10,089	4,912,385
Students By Grade: Grade 9	384	38.0%	27.7%	7.7%	7.9%
Grade 10	348	34.5%	26.8%	7.4%	7.0%
Grade 11	265	26.2%	23.4%	5.9%	6.4%
Grade 12	13	1.3%	21.7%	4.0%	5.9%
Ethnic Distribution: African American	40	4.0%	10.5%	3.3%	12.9%
Hispanic	469	46.4%	48.0%	42.5%	50.3%
White	462	45.7%	37.4%	50.8%	31.2%
American Indian	2	0.2%	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%
Asian	25	2.5%	2.1%	1.4%	3.4%
Pacific Islander	4	0.4%	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%
Two or More Races	8	0.8%	1.4%	1.3%	1.6%
Economically Disadvantaged	538	53.3%	52.7%	61.8%	59.2%
Limited English Proficient (LEP)	39	3.9%	3.2%	18.4%	16.9%
Students w/Disciplinary Placements (2009-10)	0	-	4.4%	2.9%	1.9%
At-Risk	352	34.9%	45.6%	48.0%	46.3%
Mobility (2009-10)	-	-	18.2%	21.5%	18.2%
Number of Students per Teacher	13.9	n/a	13.4	14.8	14.7

Graduates (Class of 2010):	-----Campus-----		Campus Group	District	State
	Count	Percent			
Total Graduates	0	100.0%	7,913	499	280,520
By Ethnicity (incl. Special Ed.):					
African American	0	-	865	18	36,988
Hispanic	0	-	3,419	168	119,365
White	0	-	3,265	298	108,577
American Indian	0	-	33	1	1,452
Asian	0	-	220	11	9,967
Pacific Islander	0	-	8	0	363
Two or More Races	0	-	103	3	3,808
By Graduation Type (incl. Special Ed.):					
Minimum H.S. Program	0	-	1,434	111	48,391
Recommended H.S. Pgm./DAP	0	-	6,479	388	232,129
Special Education Graduates	0	-	785	37	25,537

**CLASS SIZE INFORMATION**

(Derived from teacher responsibility records.)

Class Size Averages by Grade and Subject:		Campus	Campus Group	District	State
Secondary:	English/Language Arts	22.7	17.3	19.8	17.3
	Foreign Languages	20.6	18.9	17.9	19.0
	Mathematics	20.2	18.0	16.7	17.9
	Science	25.8	19.0	22.9	19.0
	Social Studies	24.7	20.2	22.6	19.6

STAFF INFORMATION		-----Campus-----		Campus	District	State
		Count	Percent	Group		
Total Staff:		89.9	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Professional Staff:		81.6	90.8%	89.5%	59.2%	63.4%
Teachers		72.8	80.9%	78.6%	48.6%	50.5%
Professional Support		5.9	6.5%	6.9%	7.0%	9.0%
Campus Admin. (School Leader.)	3.0	3.3%	4.0%	2.3%	2.8%	
Educational Aides:		8.3	9.2%	10.5%	8.8%	9.5%
Total Minority Staff:		5.6	6.3%	21.4%	18.2%	44.0%
Teachers By Ethnicity and Sex:						
African American		1.0	1.4%	5.6%	1.8%	9.3%
Hispanic		1.2	1.7%	11.4%	9.4%	23.7%
White		67.9	93.3%	80.8%	87.4%	63.9%
American Indian		1.0	1.4%	0.3%	0.3%	0.4%
Asian		0.6	0.9%	0.7%	0.4%	1.3%
Pacific Islander		0.0	0.0%	0.1%	0.0%	0.1%
Two or More Races		1.0	1.4%	1.0%	0.7%	1.3%
Males		31.0	42.6%	41.1%	20.1%	23.2%
Females		41.7	57.4%	58.9%	79.9%	76.8%
Teachers by Years of Experience:						
Beginning Teachers		8.2	11.3%	6.8%	7.5%	6.0%
1-5 Years Experience		21.6	29.6%	28.9%	30.7%	30.0%
6-10 Years Experience		22.8	31.4%	19.2%	21.5%	21.1%
11-20 Years Experience		14.2	19.5%	25.2%	24.4%	25.0%
Over 20 Years Experience		6.0	8.2%	19.8%	15.9%	17.9%
			Campus	Campus	District	State
				Group		
Average Years Experience of Teachers:		8.4 yrs.	11.7 yrs.	10.9 yrs.	11.4 yrs.	
Average Years Experience of Teachers with District:		3.4 yrs.	7.1 yrs.	6.3 yrs.	7.7 yrs.	
Average Teacher Salary by Years of Experience:						
(regular duties only)						
Beginning Teachers			\$40,229	\$38,556	\$41,740	\$41,272
1-5 Years Experience			\$44,391	\$42,341	\$44,201	\$44,013
6-10 Years Experience			\$46,308	\$45,020	\$45,991	\$46,604
11-20 Years Experience			\$49,609	\$49,950	\$49,439	\$50,476

Over 20 Years Experience	\$55,956	\$57,691	\$56,395	\$58,691
Average Actual Salaries (regular duties only):				
Teachers	\$46,493	\$47,560	\$47,615	\$48,638
Professional Support	\$59,401	\$54,502	\$57,804	\$57,045
Campus Administration (School Leadership)	\$82,254	\$72,470	\$74,919	\$70,819
Contracted Instructional Staff (not incl. above):	0.0	18.1	0.0	2,180.4

ACTUAL OPERATING EXPENDITURE INFORMATION (2009-10)	-----Campus-----						-----Campus Group-----		
	General Fund	Percent	Per Student	All Funds	Percent	Per Student	All Funds	Percent	Per Student
By Function:									
Total Operating Expenditures	\$833,783	100.0%	-	\$1,370,974	100.0%	-	\$275,678,471	100.0%	\$7,300
Instruction (11,95)	\$561,460	67.3%	-	\$749,620	54.7%	-	\$191,897,995	69.6%	\$5,082
Instructional-Related Services (12,13)	\$34,273	4.1%	-	\$144,419	10.5%	-	\$7,697,992	2.8%	\$204
Instructional Leadership (21)	\$0	0.0%	-	\$0	0.0%	-	\$2,966,353	1.1%	\$79
School Leadership (23)	\$67,637	8.1%	-	\$82,443	6.0%	-	\$19,703,233	7.1%	\$522
Support Services-Student (31,32,33)	\$13,724	1.6%	-	\$13,724	1.0%	-	\$14,398,463	5.2%	\$381
Other Campus Costs (35,36,51,52,53)	\$156,689	18.8%	-	\$380,768	27.8%	-	\$39,014,435	14.2%	\$1,033
By Program:									
Total Operating Expenditures	\$595,733	100.0%	-	\$894,039	100.0%	-	\$235,021,632	100.0%	\$6,223
Bilingual/ESL Education (25)	\$0	0.0%	-	\$0	0.0%	-	\$1,449,333	0.6%	\$38
Career & Technical Education (22)	\$238,474	40.0%	-	\$238,474	26.7%	-	\$27,090,136	11.5%	\$717
Accelerated Education (24,30)	\$0	0.0%	-	\$0	0.0%	-	\$16,193,827	6.9%	\$429
Gifted & Talented Education (21)	\$0	0.0%	-	\$0	0.0%	-	\$4,310,588	1.8%	\$114
Regular Education (11)	\$302,709	50.8%	-	\$601,015	67.2%	-	\$144,083,432	61.3%	\$3,815
Special Education (23)	\$44,323	7.4%	-	\$44,323	5.0%	-	\$31,828,371	13.5%	\$843
Athletics/Related Activities (91)	\$0	0.0%	-	\$0	0.0%	-	\$22,488	0.0%	\$1
High School Allotment (31)	\$10,227	1.7%	-	\$10,227	1.1%	-	\$8,345,974	3.6%	\$221
Other (26,28,29)	\$0	0.0%	-	\$0	0.0%	-	\$1,697,483	0.7%	\$45

PROGRAM INFORMATION	-----Campus-----		Campus		
	Count	Percent	Group	District	State
Student Enrollment by Program:					
Bilingual/ESL Education	37	3.7%	3.0%	20.5%	16.2%
Career & Technical Education	913	90.4%	66.1%	21.8%	21.0%
Gifted & Talented Education	35	3.5%	7.7%	5.1%	7.7%
Special Education	106	10.5%	10.9%	9.6%	8.8%
Teachers by Program (population served):					
Bilingual/ESL Education	1.8	2.5%	0.7%	4.9%	5.5%
Career & Technical Education	12.0	16.5%	11.2%	4.4%	4.0%
Compensatory Education	0.0	0.0%	1.7%	1.2%	2.9%
Gifted & Talented Education	0.0	0.0%	1.5%	0.8%	1.9%
Regular Education	45.7	62.8%	68.1%	73.9%	73.4%

Special Education	8.3	11.4%	9.1%	11.1%	9.1%
Other	5.0	6.8%	7.6%	3.8%	3.2%

