

What Your Colleagues Are Saying . . .

PLC+ The Texas Way is the perfect tool for every team of teachers who is working to elevate the efficacy of their PLC team! This book recognizes the challenges PLC teams face and provides tools that will support educators as they strive to maximize their impact on student learning. This text is a must-read for teams in education and is an indispensable tool for teams looking to have reflective conversations that will drive their students' learning forward. I highly recommend this text to any team of educators who want to elevate their teaching and reflective practices. By providing educators with the necessary tools and practices, this book is keeping PLCs focused on the important things—on every student's growth!

—**Anna Moss**, US History Teacher, Birdville ISD, North Richland Hills, TX

Schools using HQIM will find *PLC+ The Texas Way* relevant and useful in utilizing strong curriculum and instructional strategies for their students. The research and strategies here will guide teachers and administrators in improving teaching and raising student performance.

—**Dr. Edmond Martinez**, Principal, Horizon High School, El Paso, TX

PLC+ The Texas Way is a highly valuable resource, especially for educators working in small rural schools and for teachers currently pursuing certification. The book is practical, teacher-centered, and grounded in real classroom and campus needs rather than theory alone.

One of the greatest strengths of this book is its use of guiding questions that help PLCs stay focused on student learning and continuous improvement. The strength-based approach encourages educators to build on what is already working, which is both empowering and realistic for campuses with limited resources. The book also provides effective grouping ideas, a clear focus on focal students, and strategies that support teacher and student agency. The emphasis on agency-supported classrooms helps teachers reflect on instructional practices while keeping student ownership at the center of learning.

Overall, *PLC+ The Texas Way* offers practical tools, clear examples, and meaningful strategies that teachers truly need. It is an excellent guide for campuses looking to strengthen PLC work, support certification efforts, and create collaborative, student-focused learning environments.

—**Shirla Mullins**, District Intervention/Instructional Coaching/
Mentoring, Winters ISD

PLC+ The Texas Way bridges theory and practice in a way that feels both accessible and immediately actionable across all grade levels and contents. By combining detailed protocols with a flexible, context-responsive structure, it equips teachers and leaders with tools to build powerful PLCs that are responsive, dynamic, and rooted in collective ownership of student learning.

—Colin Davis, Director of High School Curriculum & Instruction,
Uplift Education, Dallas, TX

PLC+ The Texas Way

PLC+ The Texas Way

Transforming Teacher Teams
to Accelerate Student Learning

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Visit the companion website at
<https://companion.corwin.com/courses/TexasPLC>
for downloadable resources.

FOREWORD

Birdville Independent School District has been on a decade-long journey to cultivate a culture of collaboration among educators, grounded in a shared commitment to improving student learning. While the concept of professional learning communities (PLCs) is well established in the field of education, the challenge of transforming collaboration into meaningful, results-driven practice remains persistent.

Three years ago, we began a focused study of the PLC+ framework to deepen our collective understanding of what truly effective professional collaboration entails. Through the work of Douglas Fisher and Nancy Frey, we discovered that the “+” represents something far more powerful than structure or routine. It signifies a purposeful shift toward collaboration anchored in evidence of student learning and collective action.

As we adopted Texas’s new instructional resources for mathematics and reading/ language arts, the principles of PLC+ aligned seamlessly with our evolving instructional priorities. Our focus moved from simply writing lessons to internalizing them, ensuring that teachers deeply understand the standards, anticipate student thinking, and prepare to respond instructionally in real time. This emphasis has strengthened instructional coherence across classrooms and campuses, reinforcing a shared responsibility for both teaching quality and student outcomes.

This shift has started the transformative work of our PLCs. Rather than concentrating primarily on developing lessons and assessments, teams now rehearse instruction, examine student work, analyze data for evidence of growth, and take timely, targeted action to address learning gaps. Collaboration has become both reflective and responsive, rooted in continuous improvement rather than compliance or completion.

Expanding the traditional PLC model to the PLC+ model provided Birdville ISD educators a greater emphasis on student strengths, collective efficacy, and actionable strategies by addressing five essential questions:

1. Where are we now?
2. Where are we going?

3. How do we move learning forward?
4. What did we learn today?
5. Who benefited, and who did not?

These guiding questions have reshaped professional dialogue across our district, shifting the focus from planning lessons to examining the impact of instruction on every learner. Grounded in evidence of learning, our conversations now center on how to respond with clarity and purpose to the needs of each student. Through the PLC+ framework, this disciplined approach has become the connecting thread that unifies our work and elevates our collective practice.

Recently, Birdville ISD has revisited our vision, mission, and beliefs about literacy, uniting our district around research-based instructional strategies (RBIS) across all content areas and reinforcing the belief that every educator is, first and foremost, a teacher of literacy. This work represents not merely a refinement of standards or strategies, but a systemwide shift in how we engage in conversations about pedagogy, growth, and instructional impact.

As we implement high-quality instructional materials in reading/language arts and continue to deepen our use of high-quality mathematics resources, PLC+ has become central to our teaching and learning process. It is our belief that true and lasting transformation occurs when educators work collaboratively, ask probing questions about the effectiveness of their instruction, and embrace shared responsibility for the success of every learner.

By fostering a shared vision, aligned systems, and cohesive, committed teams, PLCs transform individual effort into collective power. Through PLC+, Birdville ISD is building a resilient, adaptive organization where reflective, masterful practitioners work together to ensure enduring success for both teachers and students, creating a lasting impact across our district.

Elizabeth Clark, Ed.D.

Associate Superintendent for Teaching and Learning
Birdville Independent School District
North Richland Hills, Texas

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



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RIGOR Unveiled. Fisher loves being an educator and hopes to share that passion with others.



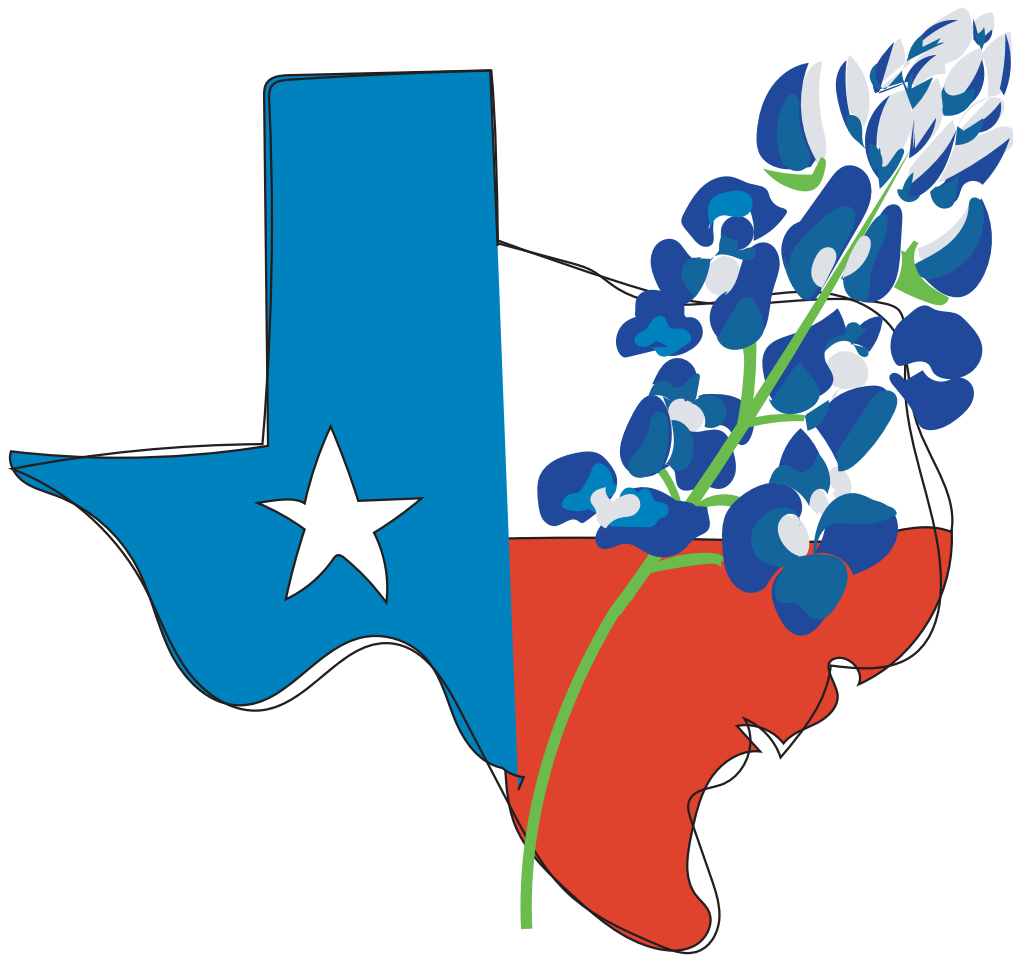
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Introduction

A Look Back: A Road Map for Moving Forward in PLCs

For a long time, teaching was a solo act. The common mindset was *What happens in my classroom is my business, and what happens in yours is yours*. With our doors closed, both literally and figuratively, we planned, taught, and assessed on our own. Although many educators developed deep expertise this way, it also meant that important decisions about lessons, assessments, and responding to student needs were made in isolation. The result? Inconsistent experiences for students and missed opportunities to learn from one another.

Professional learning communities (PLCs) began showing up in research in the 1960s as a way to push back against this isolation. Instead of leaving student success up to chance, PLCs offered teachers a way to collaborate, share expertise, and work together to improve curriculum, instruction, and outcomes for all learners.

Research Roundup



In a study of over 1,200 teachers across 78 schools, researchers found something powerful: When teachers worked together in a culture of collaboration, both teaching and learning improved.^{1, 2, 3}

Schools that embraced this kind of teamwork were described as *learning-enriched*, or places where teachers supported one another and stayed deeply committed to student success. On the other hand, schools without collaboration were considered *learning-impoverished*, where isolation limited growth for both teachers and students. The idea that professional collaboration fuels stronger learning remains a central focus in preK–12 schools today.

In the late 1990s, the adoption of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) by the State Board of Education marked an important shift in the PLC work. With clear grade-level expectations in place, PLCs moved away from individual teachers and schools determining grade-appropriate curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Instead, PLC teams collaborated to make sense of grade-level TEKS and design learning experiences for students to meet the expectations.

More recently, in 2021 during the Texas 87th legislative session, the passage of House Bill (HB) 1605 supporting high-quality instructional materials (HQIM) introduced another shift.^{4,5} These instructional materials aligned to the TEKS and English Language Proficiency Standards (ELPS) were introduced to reduce the amount of time teachers spend creating lessons. Although HQIM reduced the demands of planning, they introduced new points of tension: the internalization of lengthy and complex content, lesson rehearsal, fidelity to the content and pacing, and the pressure of accountability. Together, these demands fundamentally changed how teachers must collaborate effectively within PLCs. PLCs are no longer spaces for lesson creation from scratch. Instead, they are structured opportunities for lesson internalization, rehearsal, evidence analysis, and responsive instruction grounded in HQIM.

In this context, PLCs become a necessary part of teaching and learning. They provide a safe, structured space for teachers to think through complex instructional decisions together and optimize the effectiveness of decisions based on real-time evidence. PLCs are how teachers collectively make sense of instructional materials, translate documents into action, and build instructional consistency across classrooms. The result is strong instruction aligned to the TEKS, consistently delivered across schools and classrooms so that all learners can make meaningful progress and achieve at high levels.

History of HQIM

HB 1605 marked a pivotal shift in Texas's academic landscape by redefining how instructional quality is supported at scale. Rather than positioning curriculum as a local, isolated decision disconnected from classroom practice, HB 1605 reframed instructional improvement in Texas by making high-quality materials the foundation—and professional learning the driver—of effective classroom practice.

Texas established a coherent system that connects TEKS-aligned materials, state review and approval, and sustained professional learning, signaling that what teachers teach and how they are supported to teach it matter equally. This shift reduced variability in access to grade-level content, particularly for students in small, rural, and resource-constrained districts, while creating a common instructional language across classrooms, campuses, and systems. HQIM provides teachers, especially in small and rural schools, with vetted, standards-aligned materials that reduce planning overload and increase instructional consistency.

With the state's endorsement of HQIM, the question for educators shifted from *What should I teach?* to *How do we ensure every student successfully accesses this learning?* This change repositioned PLCs as a critical engine for instructional improvement. HB 1605 made clear that strong materials alone are not enough. Impact depends on how well educators understand, practice, and adapt those materials to meet student needs. This shift allows PLC time to be spent where it matters most: deeply understanding lessons, anticipating student thinking, practicing high-leverage instructional moves, and responding to evidence of learning.

WHAT ARE PLCS ANYWAY?

For some educators, PLCs feel like just another item on the schedule. For others, they're the highlight of the week. At their best, PLCs are more than meetings: They're a way of working together that makes teaching stronger and learning deeper. To understand what PLCs really are, it helps to look at four big ideas.

1. PLCs Are About Collective Problem-Solving

At their heart, PLCs give teachers a structured space to solve the real problems of teaching and learning, especially in settings where educators often wear multiple hats. Instead of working alone to figure out why students struggled on an assessment or how to teach a tricky concept, PLCs bring educators together to pool their expertise through shared thinking, collective sense-making, and instructional clarity. This isn't just "sharing" or "meeting," but rather purposeful dialogue focused on instructional decision-making and finding solutions that make a difference in classrooms.

2. PLCs Focus on Student Learning

The ultimate purpose of a PLC is simple: to improve student learning. Instead of leaving success to chance, PLCs help educators use evidence, including student work, assessments, and observations, to understand how students are doing. When teachers analyze this evidence together, they can adjust instruction, close learning gaps, and build on what's working. In other words, PLCs keep the focus where it belongs: on every student's growth.

3. PLCs Help Teachers Learn Too

Strong PLCs aren't just about students. They're also about teachers learning as professionals because teacher learning drives student achievement. By working together, educators grow their knowledge of both *what* they teach (content knowledge) and *how* they teach it (pedagogical knowledge). PLCs create essential opportunities to develop shared understanding of successful learning, make instructional decisions based on evidence, navigate uncertainty in complex environments, and calibrate teaching and learning across classrooms. This kind of collective professional learning makes teachers stronger and, in turn, benefits students.

4. PLCs Build a Culture of Shared Responsibility

When done well, PLCs go beyond meetings and data: They shape the culture of a school. Teachers develop a sense of collective efficacy, the belief that *together we can make a difference for every student*. This shared responsibility shifts mindsets

and builds trust. Rather than “my students” and “your students,” PLCs encourage us to think in terms of “our students.” They help teams build co-agency and shared ownership of critical instructional choices about HQIM so that these materials are used to optimize learning for each learner. That cultural shift is what makes PLCs transformative, not just another meeting on the calendar.

What Is PLC+ The Texas Way?

PLC+ The Texas Way is a structured, collaborative inquiry process that ensures high-quality instructional materials translate into meaningful student learning through collective responsibility and evidence-based action. Grounded in five guiding questions, PLC+ The Texas Way shifts professional collaboration from lesson creation to lesson internalization, instructional rehearsal, analysis of student evidence, and responsive Tier 1 teaching.

The “+” represents a purposeful commitment to teacher and student learning, collective efficacy, and action grounded in evidence of student learning, not just collaboration for its own sake. At its core, PLC+ The Texas Way transforms isolated practice into disciplined, trust-based teamwork focused on accelerating learning, ensuring access to grade-level TEKS, and building a culture of shared ownership for the success of every student.

The Five Guiding Question of the PLC+ Cycle

PLC+ is guided by a cycle of inquiry that involve gathering, interpreting, and responding to evidence based on five questions:

- Where are we now?
- Where are we going?
- How do we move learning forward?
- Who benefited, and who did not?
- What did we learn today?

These questions create coherence across teaching and learning to bridge instructional materials with student progress and achievement. (See page 146 for **Tool: Establishing a Purpose for the PLC+ Cycle.**) We’ll dive into each of these five questions next.

Where Are We Now?

To answer this question, teams need evidence of student learning to determine where students are in the learning journey. Data such as beginning-of-year assessments, end-of-unit assessments, student work samples, and observation of

student discourse can be used to determine students' current levels of proficiency. An assessment inventory helps prevent the overreliance on a single data point as teams anchor multiple sources of evidence to determine "where to next" for all learners. Teams discuss gaps, bright spots, trends, and patterns to identify students' current learning needs.

Where Are We Going?

Teams that answer this question gain clarity of the TEKS, ELPS, assessments, and instructional materials at the unit and lesson levels. Through intentional internalization, teams build awareness of the knowledge and skills students are expected to demonstrate by the end of a unit and how each lesson contributes to that larger learning arc. This shared understanding establishes a common language of what rigor and proficiency look like, ensuring that all classrooms operate with a daily clear, consistent instructional purpose.

How Do We Move Learning Forward?

This question focuses on intentional instructional decisions that accelerate learning. Lesson rehearsal provides teachers the opportunity to "try on" the lesson, anticipate student responses, and plan intentional moves. By understanding the purpose of strategies and supports for emergent bilingual (EB) students, students with disabilities (SWD), and gifted and talented (G/T) students, teachers are better positioned to exercise professional judgment in response to students' needs. Although initial Tier 1 instruction lives in this question, teachers also respond to student learning through microadjustments to grouping, pacing, scaffolds, questioning, and feedback that help move learning forward for all students.

What Did We Learn Today?

This question is all about individual and collective impact: If teams met, didn't learn anything, and nothing changed because of meeting, then the meeting did not add value. Focusing on this question helps teams examine student progress and achievement. It grounds actions and commitments moving forward by uncovering which instructional decisions had the greatest impact. By analyzing evidence of how teaching and learning are improving across classrooms, this question ensures that every PLC meeting leads to meaningful insight and action. **(See page 148 for Tool: *Creating a PLC+ Agenda.*)**

Who Benefited, and Who Did Not?

This question deepens the examination of student progress and achievement by ensuring growth remains the expectation for every learner. It helps teams look beyond labels (e.g., EB, SWD, G/T, or 504) to focus on evidence of learning. Growth

is something that all students deserve. A focus on this question guides team in making decisions about where to go next for each learner, whether learners are below, at, or exceeding grade-level standards. Examining the impact of supports and extensions helps teams understand what is working and the actions to take to improve what is not.

The Process of PLC+ Through Questions

Each of the PLC+ five guiding questions is a decision that needs to be made. While it is tempting to view the questions as a linear sequence, teaching and learning are rarely linear. PLCs are cyclical, recursive, and messy. Teams don't necessarily move forward by answering all questions in order, nor does learning move forward by camping in one question indefinitely. Learning moves forward by revisiting questions with clearer evidence and deeper understanding to inform next steps. Figure I.1 shows an example of how a PLC+ team used the questions in a cycle of learning.

Figure I.1 • How PLC+ Teams Use the Questions in a Cycle of Learning

As the Team Worked In . . .	The Team Noticed . . .	Which Led the Team to Ask . . .	And Take Action Through . . .
Where are we going?	Internalizing the lesson wasn't enough to impact learning.	<i>How do we move learning forward?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson rehearsal • Choosing supports • Norming on success criteria
How do we move learning forward?	Instruction felt aligned, but many students struggled.	<i>Where are we now?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student work analysis • Focal student review
Where are we now?	Some students accessed the learning, and others did not.	<i>Who benefited, and who did not?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pattern analysis across work samples
Who benefited, and who did not?	Proficiency expectations may need recalibration.	<i>Where are we going?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Revisiting unit intent • Examining exemplars
Where are we going?	Gaps in content and pedagogy emerge.	<i>What did we learn today?</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Microteaching • Peer observation • Collective reflection

Through the use of collaborative inquiry, the PLC+ cycle produces stronger instruction to inform and improve future teaching and learning.^{6,7} The questions are designed to invite and open thinking around an instructional idea. Each question in

the cycle is a moment of sense-making around the instructional materials, delivery, evidence of learning, and response to needs. **(See page 150 for Tool: Questions to Support the PLC+ Inquiry Cycle.)**

The Necessity of Collaboration

But wait! Before you even say it, we know you are thinking it. In fact, we have thought the same thing: “Why should I engage in this work with colleagues when I could just do it by myself?” We could go at it alone. And in some ways, that may even feel easier. But decades of research on collective efficacy, professional learning communities, and organizational performance consistently show that isolation reduces effectiveness. When educators work collaboratively around shared goals, student achievement rises; when they work in isolation, improvement slows and variability increases.⁸ While individual effort may feel efficient in the moment, collaborative instructional work leads to stronger teaching practices and improved student outcomes.

Across preK–12 schools and classrooms in the Lone Star State and beyond, collaboration among our colleagues consistently outperforms working in isolation, both for our own growth and student growth. Decades of research have shown that the traditional “egg-crate” model of teaching—where we work behind closed doors—limits professional learning and reduces opportunities to solve instructional challenges collectively. In contrast, collaborative structures like PLCs that create environments where teachers regularly analyze student data, share expertise, and refine instruction together lead to higher instructional quality and stronger student outcomes.⁹

Studies confirm that when teachers engage in sustained, structured collaboration, they not only strengthen their instructional practices but also become more confident, resilient, and effective classroom leaders.¹⁰ Importantly, successful collaboration is reinforced by strong school leadership. Principals who actively support instructional teamwork by protecting time, clarifying purpose, and modeling collective responsibility create conditions that increase collaboration frequency and significantly boost collective efficacy and student achievement.¹¹

Research is also clear that successful teams shared some common characteristics: a culture of collaboration that engages members in reflective practice and inquiry, leading to professional growth and mutual support;¹² shared beliefs, values, and norms that promote positive professional relationships among PLC members; and relational trust among educators that enables the honest examination of practice, open discussion of student data, and willingness to be vulnerable about instructional challenges.¹³

Collective responsibility for student learning distinguishes productive collaboration from mere coordination of activities. High-impact collaborative teams operate from

the belief that all students can learn and that team members share accountability for ensuring this outcome.¹⁴ This collective ownership drives teams to examine their practices critically and make necessary adjustments to improve student results. (See page 152 for Tool: *PLC+ Continuum of Collective Responsibility*.)

For preK–12 teachers, the message is clear: Working together not only enhances professional practice but also leads to measurable, transformative gains in student learning. Collaboration isn't an "extra"—it's an essential component of effective teaching. So let's get started.

How to Use This Book

Teaching is a complex profession with ever-changing demands and pressures, including these:

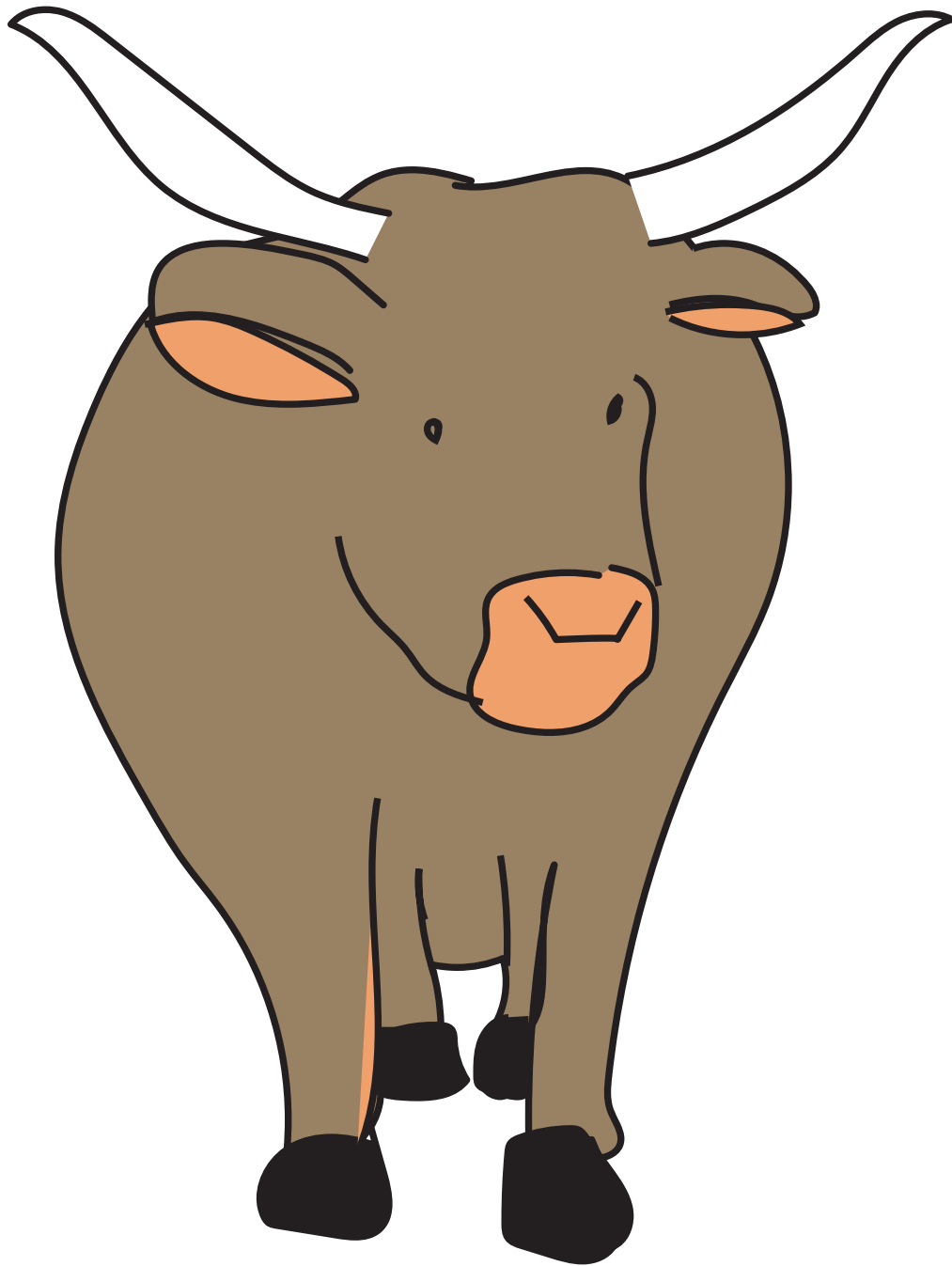
- Internalizing lessons and units
- Rehearsing lessons for the best “first teach”
- Analyzing data and using it before it's too late
- Pacing and fidelity to instructional materials
- Making choices on what strategies and scaffolds to employ
- Opening teaching practice to learn from one another
- Meeting the needs of all learners

And there's never enough time. Our recommendation is to start with the question where your team feels the most pressure. This book is structured the following way:

- **Part I** offers conceptual clarity around each of the five guiding questions. Each question introduces the purpose of the question and includes core practices that support the implementation.
- **Part II** provides tools and protocols to support the sense-making around the questions to give PLC+ teams a starting point for analyzing and acting on the realities of the classroom.

Because teaching and learning occur in complex, ever-changing environments, new learning lends itself to the reexamination of a previous question. Revisit questions as new evidence comes into play and new needs or challenges surface.

Additionally, throughout the book there are “Singleton Spotlights.” A singleton refers to a teacher who is the only one teaching a subject, course, and/or grade-level at the school. Singletons can be found in small schools, rural schools, or departments that have specializations. Because of the unique nature of these PLC+ arrangements, these Singleton Spotlights will give these diverse teams a special point of advice.



THRIVING TOGETHER



CYCLE OF INQUIRY



SAME TEAM



GROW TOGETHER



Part

1

Thriving Together With PLC+

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY, EFFICACY, AND EFFERVESCENCE

PLC+ is not just about questions and processes. It's really about the joy of learning and growing together. When teacher teams work with clarity, purpose, and trust, the result is more than improved instruction. It is a sense of shared energy, belonging, and commitment that sustains the work and keeps it meaningful.

That sense of meaning begins with collective responsibility.¹ Teams first come to understand that every student belongs to all of us. Success is not isolated to individual classrooms. Instead, it is shared work. Challenges are not someone else's problem. They are a shared opportunity for all the educators on a team. Collective responsibility shifts the conversation from *my students* to *our students*.

But responsibility is only the beginning.

As teams consistently engage in purposeful collaboration through analyzing learning, adjusting instruction, and responding together, they begin to see the impact of their collective actions. Over time, shared responsibility grows into shared belief. Teams move from saying, "We are responsible for these students," to confidently declaring, "Together, we can ensure they learn."

That belief is collective efficacy, which is the conviction that through our combined expertise, effort, and commitment, we can positively influence outcomes for every learner.² And when teams reach that level of belief, the joy of learning together deepens even more. In those cases, they develop collective effervescence.

Research Roundup



Recent global research analyzing data from 28,000 adults across 166 countries found a striking connection between emotional capacity and high performance.³ In a six-year longitudinal study (2019–2024), researchers found that individuals with higher

emotional intelligence were more likely to report strong outcomes across effectiveness, relationships, quality of life, and well-being. Teams that experience genuine joy at work are more than 10 times as likely to be high-achieving and satisfied.

These "Success Factors" reflect the very elements that sustain high-performing teams:

- The ability to generate results (Effectiveness)
- Strong relational networks (Relationships)
- Sustained energy and functioning (Well-Being)
- A sense of balance and satisfaction (Quality of Life)

Collective Effervescence: The “Why” of PLC+

French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1912) described *collective effervescence* as the heightened sense of unity and emotional energy people experience when they come together around a shared purpose. In schools, this phenomenon is visible when teams feel uplifted, engaged, and connected through their collaborative work.

Research shows that PLCs built on shared values, collaborative inquiry, and reflective dialogue improve both teaching practice and student achievement.⁴ When educators experience collective effervescence, they also build collective efficacy or the belief in their shared ability to positively impact student learning fed by evidence of their individual and collective impact.

Mechanisms That Build Collective Effervescence

- **Shared Purpose and Identity:** Teams align around common goals, fostering unity.⁵
- **Structures for Collaboration:** Rituals like lesson study or analyzing student work keep teams “in sync.”⁶
- **Psychological Safety:** Trust and openness allow vulnerability and authentic dialogue.⁷
- **Celebration of Success:** Recognizing wins reinforces unity and positive energy.⁸
- **Collective Problem-Solving:** Tackling challenges together creates both innovation and joy.⁹

The cumulative effect of these mechanisms is an energized and cohesive professional community, where teachers are more likely to persist in implementing changes, support each other, and create innovative learning experiences.¹⁰ Building collaborative teacher teams is not simply a logistical strategy; it is a dynamic, emotional process that can create the powerful sense of unity and excitement that is foundational for a positive school culture and continuous improvement.

Research Roundup



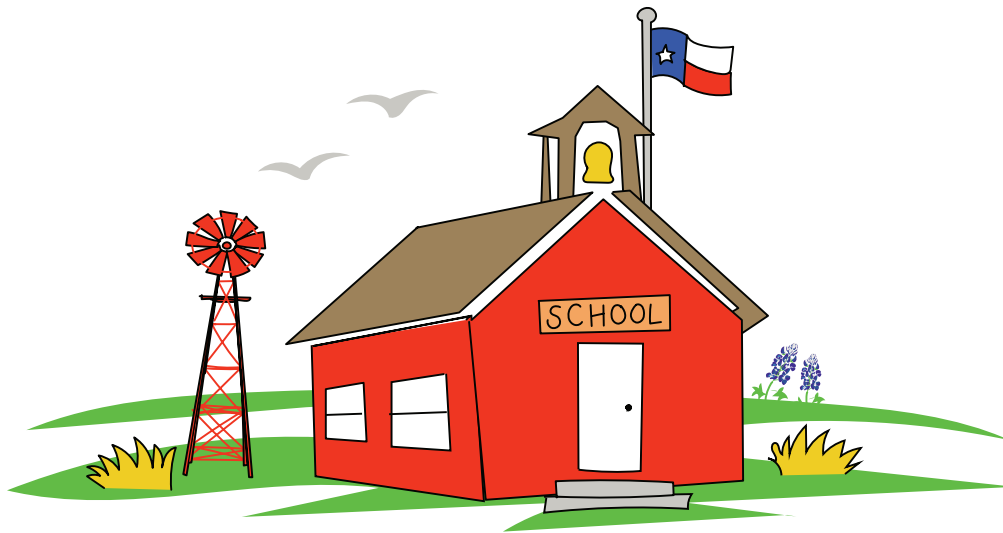
A review of empirical evidence from implementation of professional learning communities (PLCs) noted some essential characteristics of this structure, including shared values, collaborative inquiry, focus on student learning, reflective dialogue, and deprivatized practice.¹¹ The evidence from this review consistently indicates that well-constructed PLCs positively influence teaching by fostering collaboration, empowerment, shared decision-making, and ongoing teacher learning. Moreover, where student learning was assessed, results uniformly showed improved achievement.



Singleton Spotlight

Benefits for Small and Rural Schools

- **Shared Purpose and Identity:** With one or two teachers per grade or content area, clarity around goals and expectations prevents instructional drift and ensures consistency for students. Alignment is immediate.
- **Structures for Collaboration:** Simple, predictable routines, such as brief lesson rehearsal or focused student work review, protect time and reduce the need to re-explain or reinvent.
- **Collective Problem-Solving:** Collective problem-solving is essential in one- and two-teacher teams, turning constraints into shared ownership and practical innovation.



PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

Psychological safety is the shared belief that team members can speak up, share ideas, admit mistakes, and take risks without fear of embarrassment, judgment, or negative consequences.¹²

What Builds Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is foundational for the success of collaborative teacher teams because it allows open dialogue, reflection, and problem-solving, each of which is critical for professional growth and improved student outcomes.

- **Leadership Behavior:** Leaders who balance clear goals with interpersonal support foster environments where teachers feel safe to try on new practices.
- **School Culture:** Cultures of collaboration and shared vision increase safety, while authoritarian cultures undermine it.
- **Team Effectiveness:** Clear goals, roles, and processes combined with strong relationships create the infrastructure where safety can thrive.

Benefits of Psychological Safety

- **Learning and Innovation:** Teams more easily share knowledge, reflect, and problem-solve.
- **Collaboration and Trust:** Teachers build authentic collaboration, mutual understanding, and collective responsibility.
- **Professional Growth:** Teachers are more open to feedback, more willing to try new practices, and more resilient.

In PLC+ team meetings, teachers analyze student data and openly admit uncertainties, request feedback, or suggest new strategies without fear of judgment. This openness strengthens collective action and leads to continuous improvement.

Research Roundup



A study of 600 teachers explored how different leadership behaviors and team effectiveness influence teachers' psychological safety in schools.¹³ The study found that both task-oriented leadership (focus on goals and structure) and relation-oriented leadership (empathy and support) significantly predict higher levels of psychological safety among teachers. Importantly, how well a team works together strengthened this relationship, suggesting that leadership styles matter even more in teams that function effectively. Furthermore, schools with a collaborative and innovation-friendly culture reported higher levels of teacher psychological safety.

CELEBRATION OF SUCCESS AND EMOTIONAL SHARING

When teams build trust and safety, one way that success becomes visible is through how they celebrate and share with each other. Celebration and emotional sharing may seem simple, but together they create the energy, connection, and resilience that help teams keep moving forward.

Celebration

Celebration strengthens the sense of belonging and joy that keeps educators engaged. Recognizing progress, whether a breakthrough for a single student, a successful new strategy, or the completion of a team project, reminds everyone of the purpose behind their hard work. Research shows that celebrations, even small ones, foster solidarity and meaning in teaching.¹⁴ Celebrations also help equalize status, reduce tension, and keep morale high, especially during difficult stretches of the school year.

Emotional Sharing

Emotional sharing deepens collaboration by encouraging teachers to speak honestly about successes and struggles. When educators feel safe to express how the work impacts them, it nurtures psychological safety, which strengthens trust and creates space for risk-taking.¹⁵ Teams that engage in mutual recognition and open sharing demonstrate stronger instructional practice and higher student achievement. In other words, when we share our emotions, we not only build community but also improve our teaching.

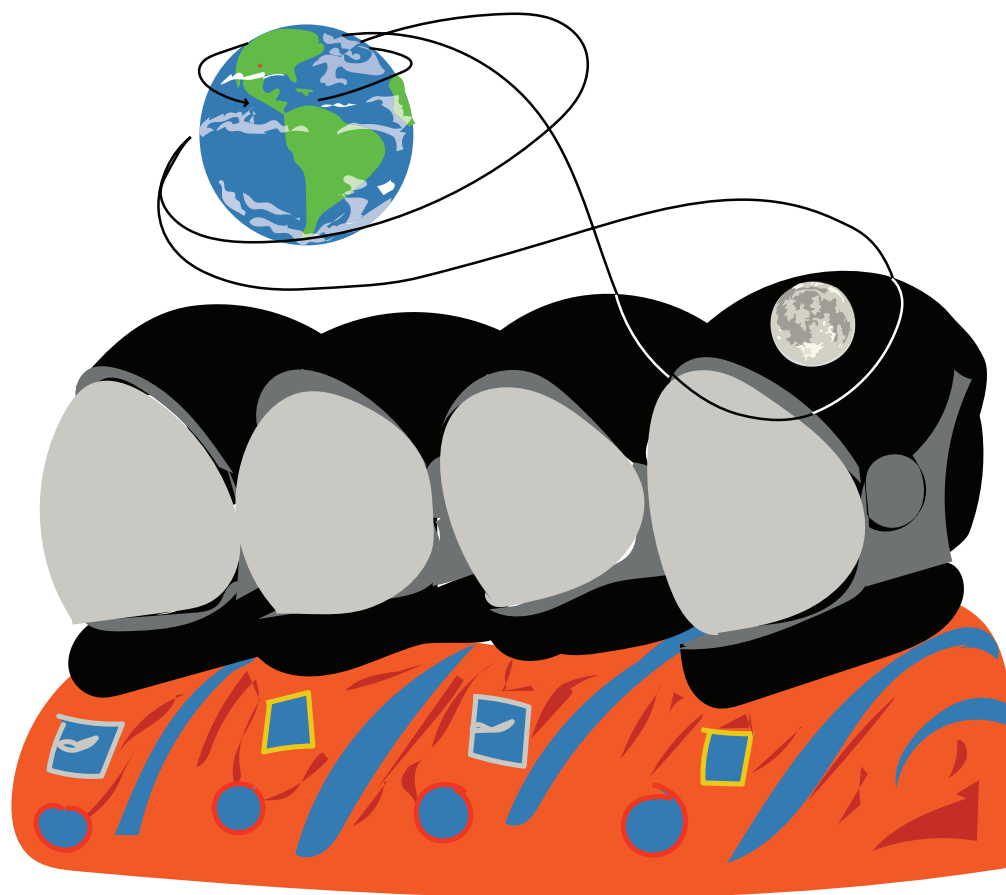
Practical Strategies for Teams

- **Recognize accomplishments** regularly in meetings, celebrating both individual and team milestones.
- **Create rituals** to mark progress, such as celebrating the completion of a project or highlighting notable student gains.
- **Invite personal stories** of success and challenges to build empathy and deepen connections.
- **Offer public acknowledgment** of teachers' efforts, especially from leaders, to reinforce the value of collaboration

Research Roundup



A study of schools recognized for rapid improvement found that successful school change depends on genuine teacher collaboration.¹⁶ These schools created both the structures and the culture to enable teams to work together on instructional issues. When teachers have time to collaborate, free from blame and grounded in trust, they take collective responsibility for student learning, and that teamwork becomes the engine driving deeper instructional innovation and stronger outcomes.



“COPY, MOON JOY.”

QUESTION 1: Where are we NOW?



K KNOW 	W WANT 	L LEARNED
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FOCAL STUDENTS

COLLECTIVE SENSE-MAKING

What do we notice?

Success Criteria

- I CAN...
- I CAN...

EVIDENCE OF LEARNING

- DISCUSSIONS
- BENCHMARKS
- EXIT TICKETS
- OBSERVATIONS
- PROBLEM SETS
- WRITING
- REFLECTIONS

EVIDENCE IS THE FUEL FOR ACTION

Question

#1

Where Are We Now?

***Essential Question:** How does knowing students' current performance support their learning journey?*

PURPOSE DRIVES THE QUESTION

Asking the question *Where are we now?* focuses educators and teams on students' current performance levels. The question ensures that learning goals are not only aspirational but also anchored in the conditions students currently face. This question bridges vision with evidence.

The focus is not on what is missing in student understanding, but instead is on what they already know. It directs attention toward meaningful information that can illuminate learning strengths and opportunities. When teams hold the purpose for the question at the center, they avoid drowning in numbers and instead look for patterns that clarify next moves.

Why This Question Matters

Answering *Where are we now?* establishes the baseline from which growth can be measured. Teams gain a clearer sense of student needs, as well as the resources, strategies, and strengths already available. With purpose guiding the analysis, teaching and learning come into sharper view. Importantly, teams can identify both thriving learners and those not yet fully supported. Collaboration on this question helps teams make sense of the evidence and data in front of them.

What's In It for Us?

PLC+ teams collaborating on this question develop these strengths:

- Knowledge of where students are in their development of essential knowledge and skills, serving as the starting point for instructional decisions
- Shared understanding of student thinking, including effective strategies, misconceptions, and partial understandings revealed through student work and discourse
- Identification of patterns across students and classrooms to determine the highest-leverage instructional priorities within HQIM (high-quality instructional materials) lessons and units

The Shift in Mindset

PLCs exist to make meaning of and extend learning, which goes beyond simply collecting and analyzing data. Collecting data without purpose risks becoming a compliance exercise. Decisions without understanding derail learning, and data

analysis without interpretation and response just adds noise to the already busy schedule of teams. A purpose-driven approach repositions evidence as a tool for action, not an obligation. This mindset helps PLC+ teams focus on possibilities rather than deficits, framing the question as a way to unlock students' potential and educators' professional growth.

Setting the Stage for Team Action

Where are we now? is the compass-setting moment in the PLC+ cycle. In the fast-paced environment of schools, it's easy to dive into the internalization of instructional materials without knowing what students already know and can do. Teams orient themselves to reality before deciding on instructional pathways, including which supports and extensions will be most helpful in moving the learning of every student forward. This step does not predict the journey ahead, but it ensures direction is clear. Understanding the current context more fully allows your team to move forward with confidence that your next decisions will be both informed and intentional.

Clarity of Evidence and Interpretation

Shifting the focus to evidence of learning helps PLC+ teams examine how learning is developing. In conditions of high-stress, fast-paced, complex environments, educators rely on personal experiences and quick judgments related to many different characteristics of learners, especially when evaluating lower quality work.¹ In these moments, it's easy to unintentionally focus on evidence that confirms existing assumptions about learners. These assumptions often operate unconsciously, meaning we may be unaware of how such patterns influence grading, expectations, and instructional decisions.

Using structured processes of collaborative analysis helps teams slow down and examine work thoughtfully against quality indicators to improve evidence-informed decisions.² When teachers work together to analyze evidence, challenge assumptions, and engage in reflective discussions, they are more likely to identify incomplete reasoning and adopt more accurate interpretations of student data. Collaboration expands the range of perspectives considered³ and reduces the reliance on individual intuition so that teams determine next instructional steps with greater precision.

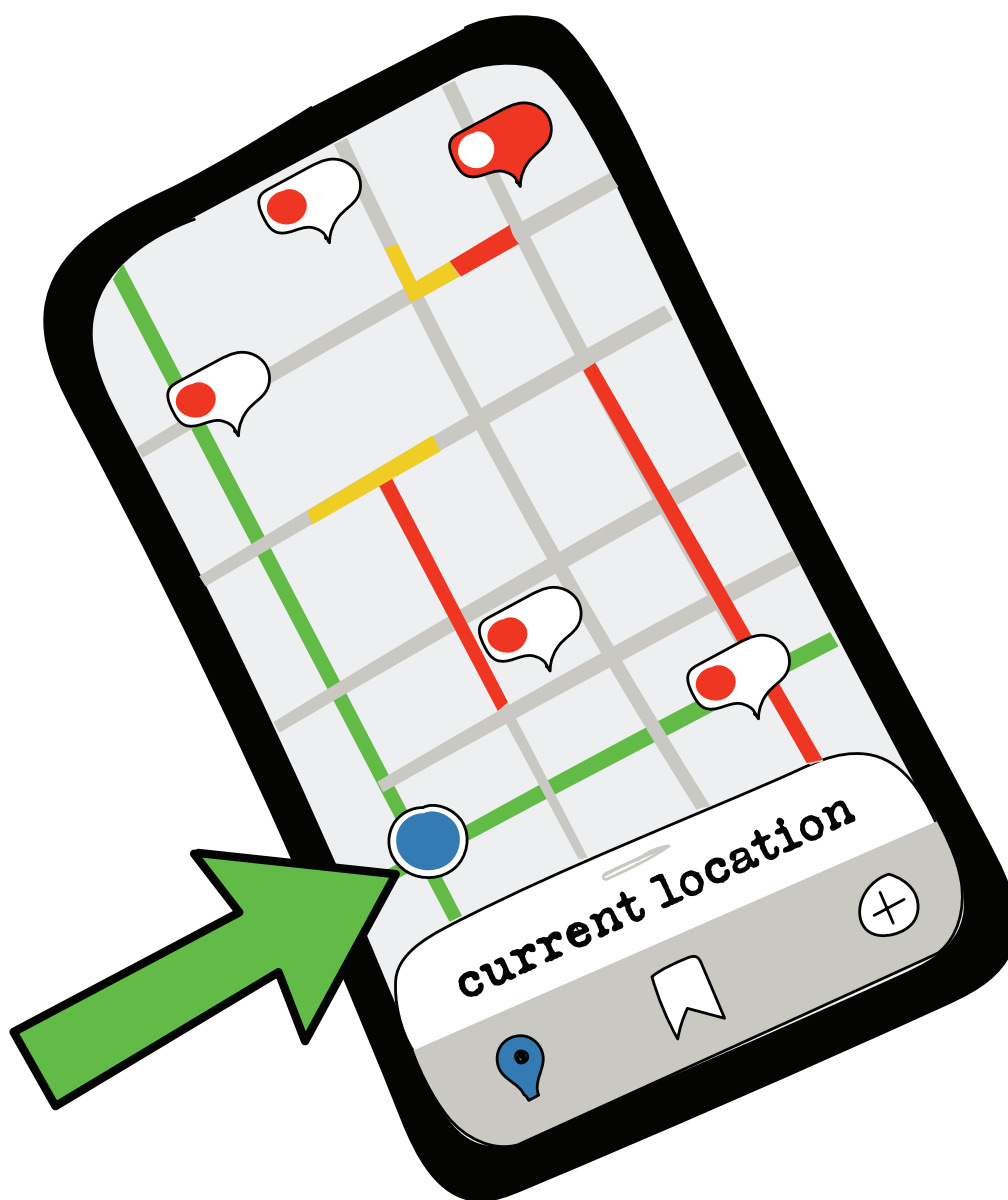
For preK–12 educators, grounding decisions in collaboratively reviewed evidence rather than intuition alone strengthens consistency across classrooms and supports better interpretation of learning.



Singleton Spotlight

Making Meaning

Research on rural and small schools reinforces the importance of this purpose-driven approach. In contexts with smaller student cohorts and fewer formal data points, disciplined interpretation of classroom-based evidence is essential.⁴ Studies on educator sense-making further demonstrate that collaborative analysis strengthens instructional decisions by surfacing patterns, challenging assumptions, and reducing bias—particularly in settings where professional isolation is common.⁵



CORE PRACTICES: HOW TEAMS MAKE SENSE OF EVIDENCE

Data and evidence serve the same purpose. Although educators often interpret “data” to mean numbers and percentages, data and evidence refer to any task, conversation, exit ticket, whiteboard responses, drawings, or text annotations, no matter how formal or informal, that shows where students are in their thinking. Each of the core practices centers around data and how it can be used to answer the question *Where are we now?* Each of the following practices helps push PLC+ team thinking and learning forward:

- **Take a Strengths-Based Approach.** Teams leverage student strengths to bridge the gap between where students are in their learning and the TEKS (Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills) outcomes in HQIM.
- **Conduct Initial Assessments.** Teams identify what students already know and surface misconceptions early to increase instructional efficiency and reduce unnecessary reteaching.
- **Analyze Data.** Teams interpret and act on classroom evidence collaboratively to determine instructional adjustments that close gaps in learning.
- **Select Focal Students.** Teams identify and examine a small set of representative students to identify patterns and guide decisions.
- **Build and Activate Background Knowledge.** Knowing what students already know and building the knowledge they need makes grade-level learning more efficient.

Teams use the core practices throughout an instructional cycle:

- At the beginning of a unit, topic, or module to gain a baseline understanding of what students already know and can do
- During the cycle as teams analyze work samples and observations to make sense of how students are learning while students are still in the process of learning
- At the end of a cycle to determine what content needs to be revisited through spaced practice

A STRENGTHS-BASED APPROACH

A strengths-based approach to analyzing student data emphasizes what learners can do and how those abilities can be expanded with support. It avoids deficit thinking by fostering growth toward grade-level TEKS while still addressing areas of challenge and reinforcing instructional problem-solving.

What a Strengths-Based Approach Is Not

Using a strengths-based lens is not about ignoring challenges, minimizing concerns, or focusing only on positive aspects. It does not mean avoiding honest feedback or overlooking difficult realities. Nor is it about excusing unproductive behaviors. But without this approach, deficit thinking can take hold, placing blame on learners, emphasizing remediation-first mindsets, and diminishing educators' responsibility. A strengths-based mindset acknowledges difficulties while keeping attention centered on students' potential and collective responsibility for growth so that instruction supports access.

Research Roundup



This study examined how teachers interpret student performance data during PLC team meetings.⁶ Analyzing 44 hours of observations and interviews, researchers found teachers attributed student results to instruction only 15% of the time, while student characteristics—especially behavior (32%)—were cited more often. Five categories of explanations emerged, ranging from informed insights to deficit-based blame. The findings highlight both risks and opportunities of data-driven decision-making to support educators' professional judgment while reducing negative, unverifiable assumptions about students.

What a Strengths-Based Approach Is


This perspective begins with students' existing abilities and uses them as a foundation for future learning. As the Victoria Department of Education explains, strengths-spotting teachers notice “what a child can already do, what a child can do when provided with educational support, and what a child will one day be able to do.”⁷ Such an approach values all learners, builds zones of proximal development, and identifies conditions that foster success so that they can be replicated and strengthened. What a student can do *when provided with educational support* is the mission of you and your team. **(See page 159 for Protocol: *Analysis of Student Work Through Strengths-Based Approach*.)**

Figure 1.1 • What a Strengths-Based Approach *Is* and *Is Not*

A Strengths-Based Approach	
Is	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Valuing all learners and focusing on what the child can do rather than what the child cannot do Describing learning and development respectfully and honestly Building on a child's abilities within their zones of proximal and potential development Acknowledging that people experience difficulties and challenges that need attention and support Identifying what is taking place when learning and development go well so that it may be reproduced, further developed, and strengthened
Is Not	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Only about "positive" things A way of avoiding the truth About accommodating bad behavior Fixated on problems About minimizing concerns One-sided A tool to label individuals

Source: Victoria Department of Education and Early Childhood Development. (2019). "A Strengths-Based Approach". *Transition: A Positive Start to School Resource Kit* (pg 126). Retrieved from <https://www.education.vic.gov.au/Documents/childhood/professionals/Transition-to-School-Resource-Kit.pdf>.

Learning happens when students connect new knowledge to existing knowledge. Starting with what students already know and can do helps PLC+ teams make intentional decisions to ensure that new learning sticks. A strengths-based approach helps teachers recognize what students are attempting, how they're reasoning, and what supports need to be added or removed to move students closer to the learning outcomes.

 PLC+ Teacher Checklist for Applying a Strengths-Based Approach	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Did we identify what students can do in relation to intended outcomes, not just what they cannot do?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are we using language that reflects growth, potential, and access to grade-level content?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Are we keeping the focus on instruction and next steps, instead of assigning blame or lowering expectations?

INITIAL ASSESSMENTS

Before launching a unit of instruction, identify an initial or pre-assessment that reveals where students are in their learning. This step provides a foundation for designing responsive teaching that builds from students' current knowledge and skills.

Purpose of Initial Assessments

The primary purpose is to proactively clarify what students already know and where gaps or misconceptions may exist. These assessments help the team identify prerequisite skills and gauge readiness for new content. They also provide a baseline for measuring growth over the course of a unit, topic, or module, ensuring instructional decisions are informed by evidence rather than assumptions.

Types of Initial Assessments

Initial assessments can take multiple forms, ranging from formal diagnostic tests to informal entry activities. Teachers may use pretests, concept maps, or writing prompts to reveal prior knowledge. Quick, low-stakes tasks such as KWL (Know, Want to know, Learned) charts or problem-solving scenarios can be especially effective in surfacing misconceptions. Technology-based tools may also provide adaptive diagnostics that capture both content proficiency and skill development, giving a more nuanced understanding of student starting points.

Avoiding Pitfalls

While initial assessments are valuable, they should be used carefully to avoid misinterpretation or deficit thinking. Overreliance on test-style measures can oversimplify what students know and can do. Results should never be used to label or track students but instead to guide flexible grouping and instructional choices. Ensure assessments are equitable and accessible, honoring the strengths of emergent bilingual learners and students with disabilities while still identifying areas that may require additional support.

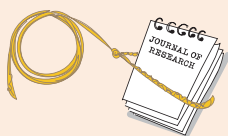
Figure 1.2 is an initial assessment developed by a team of eighth-grade social studies teachers who were going to launch a unit of instruction about the American Revolution. Note the two categories of questions, which were drawn in part from the summative assessment they plan to use after the unit.

Figure 1.2 • An Initial Assessment**Category of Questions: Prerequisite Skills or Background Knowledge Needed**

- What reasons do people have for forming governments and political systems?
- What geographic factors (natural resources, location, climate) influence settlement and economic activity?
- What are some ways governments raise money to operate?
- How can laws affect the daily lives of citizens?
- What does it mean for a group to protest or resist authority?
- How do historians use primary and secondary sources to learn about past events?

Category of Questions: Prior Knowledge of the American Revolution

- What do you already know about American colonies before independence?
- Can you name any acts that caused tension between Great Britain and the colonies?
- Who are some people who come to mind when you think about the American Revolution?
- What comes to mind when you hear the phrase “taxation without representation”?
- Why do you think the American Revolution is considered a turning point in US history?

Research Roundup

A systematic review of more than 60 experimental and classroom-based studies on pre-instruction testing noted that, across formats (texts, videos, lectures, word pairs), pretesting consistently improved retention of the tested material.⁸ These

benefits of pretesting held across short delays and sometimes persisted for weeks, suggesting that pretesting can foster durable learning rather than only short-term gains. The review integrates evidence into a three-stage framework: (1) pretesting activates cognitive processes (e.g., curiosity, prediction errors, mediator generation); (2) subsequent study is encoded more deeply; and (3) improved recall emerges on posttests.

Other initial assessments can be less extensive. The goal is to see where students currently are prior to explicit teaching. This goal should be communicated with students as well. For example, a teacher can conduct other simple preassessments:

- Ask students to solve the following: $41 + 19$
- Ask student to find the unknown variable: $3x = 12$
- Ask students to write a short-constructed response (SCR) to reveal their thinking about the discipline-specific content and the process of writing SCRs.
- Prior to teaching about extended-constructed responses (ECR), have students write an ECR using evidence from text to support their understanding.

PLC+ teams use evidence from these short assessments to determine precise entry points into teaching.

✓ PLC+ Teacher Checklist for Planning Initial Assessments

- Did we collect evidence of what students know and can do relative to the grade-level TEKS before starting new learning?
- Are assessments varied, accessible, and aligned to HQIM lesson expectations for all learners?
- Did we use results to inform flexible grouping, scaffolds, and extensions within Tier 1 instructional supports?



DATA ANALYSIS

Data is the window into learning. Analyzing student data and evidence of learning is central to PLC+ work because it reveals the story of student learning right now. The goal is to uncover patterns, highlight strengths, and identify growth opportunities that guide next steps for instruction.

What Data Should We Examine?

Data is more than test scores. Some of the richest insights come from everyday classroom evidence. In PLC+ teams, consider these evidence sources:

- **Student work samples**—Writing, problem-solving, problem sets, activities, labs
- **Short-cycle checks**—Exit tickets, observations, self-assessments, student responses
- **Medium-cycle assessments**—Quizzes, constructed responses, topic self-reflections, spelling assessments
- **Long-cycle assessments**—End-of-unit/topic/module assessments, culminating projects, essays, benchmarks, standardized tests
- **Focal student progress**—Monitoring a few students closely to see impact
- **Classroom observations**—Participation, discussion, student explanations, and engagement patterns

Looking across multiple evidence sources sharpens the picture of learning and prevents overreliance on a single measure. (See page 161 for Tool: *Data Exploration and Examination*, page 163 for Tool: *Data Interpretation to Inform Instruction*, page 166 for Tool: *Tracking Observational Data*, page 155 for Protocol: *Analysis of Student Work Protocol for Singletons and Small Schools*, and page 164 for Protocol: *Data Analysis of Large Data Sets*.)

Guiding Questions for Teams

PLC+ teams need simple, repeatable questions to guide analysis. Here are some questions that teams might post on chart paper, use as a protocol, or revisit each time you review evidence:

What patterns or trends do we notice in the results?

- Who is making progress? Who isn't yet?
- What strengths can we build on?
- What misconceptions or barriers are emerging?

- What do these results suggest about our instruction?
- What other data sources should we consider?
- What are our next steps based on the findings?

Avoiding Pitfalls

Not all data conversations move learning forward. Watch for these pitfalls:

- **Data admiring:** Talking about results without deciding on actions
- **Deficit thinking:** Focusing on what students lack instead of what they can build on
- **Blame game:** Attributing performance to outside factors instead of reflecting on instruction
- **Overreliance:** Using one assessment source instead of multiple evidence points
- **Competition:** Comparing results across classrooms in ways that cause defensiveness and discourage collaboration
- **Getting stuck:** Focusing on weaknesses instead of moving toward instructional problem-solving
- **Remediation-first thinking:** Defaulting to reteaching instead of identifying targeted instructional adjustment that preserve access to grade-level TEKS

Remember: Evidence is not the final destination; it's fuel for action.

From Analysis to Action

The value of data analysis comes when it drives change. After reviewing results, PLC+ teams should be able to answer these questions:

- What's the priority for our instruction right now?
- Which students need additional support, and which are ready for enrichment?
- What approaches will we try, and how will we know if they work?

Teams then circle back to the next round of evidence, asking: *Did our action make a difference?* This cycle—evidence → action → evidence—keeps the work dynamic, responsive, and student-centered.

The Big Idea

Data analysis in PLC+ isn't about charts, spreadsheets, or compliance checks. It's about conversation, curiosity, and action. When evidence becomes a tool for learning, both teachers and students grow.



PLC+ Teacher Checklist for Analyzing Data

- Did we review multiple forms of evidence (student work, short/medium/long-cycle assessments, observations) aligned to TEKS and HQIM lessons?
- Did we look for patterns and trends across groups of students?
- Did we identify both strengths and needs in the data?
- Did we agree on specific instructional actions to address what we found?



IDENTIFY FOCAL STUDENTS

PLC+ teams can sharpen their focus by selecting focal students, which are specific learners whose progress helps reveal the impact of instructional changes. These students act as a litmus test for whether strategies are effective, responsive, and meet the needs of all learners.

Why Focal Students Matter

- **Every Learner Counts:** Focal students help ensure that every learner’s progress matters, not just the “average” student.
- **Clarity of Impact:** By zooming in, we see whether instructional moves are making a real difference.
- **Manageable Focus:** Tracking a few students deeply is more actionable than trying to monitor everyone at once.
- **Collective Responsibility:** Focal students belong to the whole team, not just an individual teacher.

Selecting Focal Students

Focal students are chosen intentionally to represent a range of learners in the classroom or grade level. This is not simply focusing on students who struggle with school. A team might select students with a variety of characteristics:

- A student who is currently excelling (to see how enrichment activities support growth)
- A student who is “on the bubble” (close to proficiency, where small changes can have big effects)
- A student who is struggling (to test how instruction and intervention impact learning)

Other considerations may include emergent bilingual students, students with disabilities, or students who require additional support to access grade-level learning.

TIP

Three to five focal students per team is often a manageable number.

How to Use Focal Students

PLC+ teams use focal students as touchpoints during cycles of inquiry by doing the following:

- Reviewing their work more frequently
- Discussing their progress in team meetings
- Noticing how they respond to new instructional strategies
- Adjusting supports when growth stalls

Importantly, focal students are not a label or a permanent group. They are simply a lens for monitoring impact, and the group can shift across instructional cycles. Expectations should not differ across focal groups, but the embedded supports or enrichments they need might.

Guiding Questions for Teams

- Who are our focal students for this cycle, and why did we choose them?
- What baseline data do we have for these students?
- How will we know if our instructional changes are making a difference for them?
- What evidence will we collect along the way?
- What adjustments will we make if they are not responding as expected?



PLC+ Teacher Checklist for Identifying Focal Students

- Did we intentionally select focal students who represent a range of learners?
- Do we have baseline evidence aligned to HQIM lesson expectations for each focal student?
- Are we tracking their progress consistently and connecting changes in learning to specific instructional moves?
- Are we ready to adjust if our strategies are not working for them?

BUILD AND ACTIVATE BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE

Before new learning, PLC+ teams must ask what students already know and what they need to connect with new content. Activating and building background knowledge grounds instruction in students' starting points and prevents confusion or disengagement.

Why Background Knowledge Matters

- **Starting Where Students Are:** Learning builds on prior understanding; identifying what students already know makes new content more accessible.
- **Bridging Gaps:** Recognizing what's missing helps teams use or design embedded scaffolds that support success.
- **Connecting Learning:** Background knowledge links new concepts to students' experiences, making learning more meaningful.
- **Supporting All Learners:** Purposeful activation ensures emergent bilingual students, students with disabilities, and those with diverse experiences can participate fully.

Planning With Students' Background Knowledge in Mind

When considering background knowledge, PLC+ teams identify what prior knowledge is needed for students to engage with the new unit of instruction, which skills and concepts were required in earlier standards that will bridge to the ones that will be used in this unit or module, and what experiences will best build on that foundation. This helps further develop scaffolds that will be necessary for all learners to access the content. Instructional materials often contain vertical alignment documents, coherence of models one-pagers in math, and/or module or unit overviews that establish knowledge and skills students have learned in prior years.

Strategies to Activate and Build Knowledge

Teams can use a variety of approaches to uncover and extend background knowledge:

- **Quick checks**—Concept maps, brainstorming, KWL charts, anticipation guides
- **Discussion prompts**—Open-ended questions that surface what students think they know

- **Interactive video**—Short videos that pause and require students to interact with the content
- **Connections to experience**—Linking content to real-life contexts or familiar examples
- **Pre-teaching key ideas**—Vocabulary previews to level the playing field
- **Scaffolding**—Visuals, sentence starters, graphic organizers, and modeling that make content more accessible

Research Roundup



Using data from 3,534 high school students across 37 schools, the researchers gave a background knowledge test on ecology (measuring both topical vocabulary and factual knowledge), followed by a comprehension test on ecology texts.⁹ They identified a knowledge threshold. When students scored below 59% correct on the knowledge test, comprehension scores barely improved with additional knowledge. But above that point, comprehension increased strongly. These findings indicate that a minimum critical mass of topic knowledge is necessary before background knowledge begins to meaningfully support learning and understanding.



PLC+ Teacher Checklist for Building and Activating Background Knowledge

- Did we identify the prerequisite knowledge and skills needed for this learning?
- Did we verify prerequisite understanding using student work, discussion, or formative assessment?
- Did we use scaffolds and supports within HQIM lessons to ensure all learners can access content?
- Did we plan opportunities for students to connect new learning to prior knowledge, language, and student experiences?

NEXT STEPS

The PLC+ Guiding Questions set teams up for a cycle of inquiry. Once teams have a strong grasp on student strengths and needs, teams are ready to ask one of several questions:

- **Question 2: *Where are we going?***
 - If we know students' current levels of understanding and performance, what is the grade-level expectation we are pushing them toward?
 - If student work doesn't match expectations, how do we develop success criteria to calibrate grade-level proficiency so that students have a clear understanding of what lesson success looks like?
- **Question 3: *How do we move learning forward?***
 - If we know now what students know and can do, what instructional decisions are we going to make to help students bridge the gap between the goal and their current performance?
 - If assessment data doesn't reflect our hard work and instructional fidelity, what do we need to do (or not do) so that students progress?
- **Question 4: *What did we learn today?***
 - If we noticed inconsistent patterns in data across classrooms and teachers, how can we engage in microteaching, reciprocal peer observation, or learning walks to support our alignment?
- **Question 5: *Who benefited, and who did not?***
 - If we notice patterns in data vary by student group, what strategies, supports, or enrichments do we enact to ensure all students are progressing?



PLC+ Reflection Tool: Where Are We Now?

Lonestar Look-Fors and Listen-Fors	Red Flags and Mistakes to Avoid
Teams highlight student strengths first before discussing challenges.	Teams engage in <i>data admiring</i> , or talking about results without deciding on actions.
Evidence comes from multiple sources (student work, observations, short/medium/long-cycle assessments).	Deficit language dominates, focusing on what students lack instead of what they can build on.
Focal students are regularly referenced to check the impact of instructional moves.	Teams attribute performance mainly to factors outside their control (e.g., behavior, home life, demographics).

Lonestar Look-Fors and Listen-Fors

Background knowledge and prerequisite skills are explicitly discussed to identify readiness for learning.

Dialogue reflects shared responsibility for all students' learning ("our students" language).

Red Flags and Mistakes to Avoid

Teams skip conversations about background knowledge and prerequisites, assuming readiness or unfinished learning.

Responsibility for student learning is described as individual ("my kids") instead of collective ("our kids").

