



E&R Report No. 09.12

May 2009

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY (PLC) IMPLEMENTATION: WCPSS 2008–09 HIGH FIVE PLC SURVEY RESULTS

Author: Andrew Jackl, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

The Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) continues to implement Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) as a research-based method of increasing student achievement and improving teaching effectiveness. Teachers were surveyed in 2007-08 and again in 2008-09 to obtain data about the status of PLC implementation efforts within the district. The 2008-09 results showed a strong level of support for the PLC concept (71% to 89% of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed with statements pertaining to each of the six core PLC themes). In most instances, teachers responded more positively to the survey items in 2008-09 than they did the year before. In short, survey results suggest that the district is making progress towards its goal of full PLC implementation.

BACKGROUND

The mission of the Wake County Public School System (WCPSS) is to educate each student to be a responsible and productive citizen who can effectively manage future challenges. To this end, the school system's superintendent, Dr. Del Burns, has established four strategic directives. The first of these directives is essential for success and lies at the crux of an effective education: a focus on learning and teaching.

A key initiative for achieving this directive has been the implementation of Professional Learning Communities, or PLCs, throughout the school district. This concept was originally introduced in the 1960s as an alternative to independent teachers working in isolation. Within a PLC, teachers break with tradition by actively collaborating, sharing expertise, improving their skills, and learning from each other.

Contents

Background	p. 1-3
Summary of Results	p. 3-4
Results by Theme	p. 7-30
Discussion and Recommendations	p. 31-32
References	p. 33
Appendix A	p. 34

The author would like to acknowledge the support of Nancy Baenen and Rosemary Reichstetter (retired).

In recent years, the PLC concept has become increasingly familiar to WCPSS education professionals as a “best practice” to increase student achievement and foster professional growth. Today, teacher collaboration is being hailed as one of the most effective ways to turn ordinary schools into extraordinary ones (Honawar, 2008).

The PLC concept can best be defined as:

A professional learning community is made up of team members who regularly collaborate toward continued improvement in meeting learner needs through a shared curricular-focused vision. Facilitating this effort are:

- supportive leadership and structural conditions,
- collective challenging, questioning, and reflecting on team-designed lessons and instructional practices/experiences, and
- team decisions on essential learning outcomes and intervention/enrichment activities based on results of common formative student assessments (Reichstetter, 2006).

The educational research supports the implementation of PLCs at all grade levels as a way to improve student outcomes; the overwhelming consensus is that it is one of the best practices in the teaching profession (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, & Many, 2007; Huffman, Hipp, Pankake, & Moller, 2001; Phillips, 2003; Roberts & Pruitt, 2003).

In 2003 a group of five corporations (SAS, BlueCross-BlueShield of North Carolina, A.J. Fletcher Foundation, Capital Broadcasting, Progress Energy, and The News & Observer) formed a partnership with the five regional school districts of Chapel Hill-Carrboro and Durham, Johnston, Orange, and Wake counties.

This consortium, the High Five Regional Partnership for High School Excellence, combined forces to improve graduation rates and to better prepare students for higher education and the careers of their choice. After reviewing the educational research, it was determined that the foundation of the improvement effort would be the implementation of Professional Learning Communities across all schools and districts. This initiative hoped to compel collaboration across district lines and inspire educators to share their most effective teaching practices.

In April 2004 the corporate sponsors announced their formal five-year, \$2.5 million commitment to improve the public high schools. Since its inception, the High Five partnership has funded numerous training opportunities for teachers and support staff members, bringing in well-known instructional strategists such as Robert Marzano and Rick DeFour. Assisted by the High Five consortium, school administrators worked to fully instill the PLC concept as quickly as possible – but they needed ways to quantitatively assess their progress.

Consequently, three districtwide PLC surveys of WCPSS teachers have been conducted. The first districtwide survey, developed by the Indiana-based Solution Tree group, was administered in the middle of the 2006-07 school year to collect baseline data about the educators’ understanding of the PLC concepts, and to determine the extent to which those concepts were being actively practiced within the schools.

Since then, two High Five PLC surveys have been administered during the 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years. The most recent 2008-09 survey results are the primary focus of this report, and some data from the 2007-08 survey report are also provided to make a relative comparison of district changes (Reichstetter, 2008). It is also worth noting that school staff received individualized reports earlier through QuickPlace (now called Quicker). This comprehensive district report will allow them to compare their schools' trends with system trends and could inform efforts to achieve consistent implementation within the schools.

SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The majority of the survey participants responded favorably to all survey items, with the percentage of positive responses falling between 66% and 87% in the 2007-08 school year, and between 71% and 89% in the 2008-09 school year. As shown in Table 1, the percentage of respondents who expressed agreement with the PLC survey statements increased from 2 to 5 percentage points within every theme area. While the first three themes were very strong (positive responses falling between 85% and 89%), the data suggest that the final three themes were not quite as consistently developed within the PLCs (positive responses falling between 71% and 81%).

Table 1
Overall PLC Survey Results by Theme

Theme	Percent Agree / Strongly Agree		
	2007-08	2008-09	Change
Focus on Learning and Teaching	85%	87%	2%
Collaborative Cultures/Team Processes	87%	89%	2%
Instructional Strategies/Interventions	80%	85%	5%
Common Formative Assessments	79%	81%	2%
Overall Impact	76%	79%	3%
Support and Resource Allocation	66%	71%	5%

2007-08 n = 6,858; 2008-09 n = 7,306

Note: All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number.

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of 2007-08 and 2008-09 High Five PLC Surveys

While the various themes returned different response rates, the data do reveal where the schools are the strongest and where improvement efforts should be focused. A representative sampling of survey responses across the six themes indicates that:

- Nearly all survey respondents (95%) claimed membership in a school-level or a district-level PLC.
- Nearly all of the district's teachers (93%) agreed that their primary PLC team had identified the learning outcomes essential for students' academic success.

- Most of the teachers (86%) agreed that their PLC team had adopted the use of SMART goals and actively worked to achieve them.
- Nearly all of survey respondents (90%) agreed that their PLC team members were open and honest about each others' strengths and weaknesses.
- Nearly all of the survey respondents (93%) reported that their PLC team was working to align classroom instruction with targeted learning outcomes; the vast majority (85%) reported that their team's common formative assessments were aligned with targeted learning outcomes.
- Most of the PLC teams (80%) used the results of common formative assessments to identify students who needed additional support; slightly less than three-fourths of the teachers (72%) agreed that struggling students were required to participate in additional learning opportunities.
- The majority of the respondents (62%) reported that common assessments were currently being administered every three weeks or every six weeks; most educators (77%) reported using the results of the common assessments to evaluate the success of their teaching practices.
- Slightly more than three-fourths of the teachers (76%) agreed that their students are learning more because of their PLC participation, while about two-thirds (69%) believed that the time they invested working with their PLC team was saving them time overall.
- Most of the survey respondents (76%) agreed that they were receiving feedback and support from administration regarding their PLC efforts, and slightly less than three-fourths (71%) reported that their school celebrated the progress being made towards full PLC implementation.

Generally speaking, teachers expressed positive agreement with virtually every survey item. It is important to note that more teachers elected to respond positively to the survey items in 2008-09 than they did in 2007-08. Furthermore, there was a noticeable increase in the number of teachers marking "strongly agree" as opposed to "agree" on many survey items – signifying a stronger level of agreement regarding the core PLC concepts. In summation, a comparison of the survey data from the 2007-08 and 2008-09 administrations suggests that the district is making measurable progress towards full PLC implementation.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY (PLC) IMPLEMENTATION: WCPSS 2008–09 HIGH FIVE PLC SURVEY RESULTS

SURVEY PARTICIPATION RATES

Response rates for the 2008-09 High Five PLC Survey were high. The survey was made available to all 9,455 teachers working within the district's elementary, middle, high, and alternative schools from November 24 through December 23, 2008. The entire survey has been included as an Appendix of this report.

Overall, 87% of the district's teachers voluntarily participated (91% from the elementary schools, 81.2% from the middle schools, 85.8% from the high schools, and 47.6% from the alternative schools). The lower return rate from the alternative schools has some bearing on the analysis; the smaller numbers make generalizing the survey results more problematic. However, the High Five consortium had set a goal of at least 81.7% in order to meet or exceed the previous year's return rate. This target was surpassed. The exact figures, including the number of respondents in each category, are listed in Table 2.

Table 2
PLC Survey Response Rates

School Level	Total Teachers	Number of Respondents	Survey Response Rate
Elementary	4,863	4,423	91.0%
Middle	2,186	1,774	81.2%
High	2,303	1,976	85.8%
Alternative	103	49	47.6%
All	9,455	8,222	87.0%

Data Sources: WCPSS Human Resources and analysis of High Five 2008-09 PLC Survey data

Note: The "number of respondents" included all respondents who submitted a completed PLC survey.

In some cases, that included small numbers of non-teaching and/or non-professional support staff members.

Of the educators responding to the survey, 95.4% reported belonging to at least one PLC – up from 92% in 2007-08. More specifically, 88.9% claimed membership in a school-level PLC, and 6.5% claimed membership in a district-level PLC. The educators claiming membership in a district-level PLC tended to be more specialized, holding positions such as counselors, social workers, psychologists, academically gifted support teachers, media specialists, etc., requiring them to network with similar professionals in other schools. Since the High Five PLC survey was designed and targeted for classroom teachers instead of staff members employed in supporting services, only staff members who reported membership in a school-level PLC were included in the subsequent analyses. Table 3 lists the relevant PLC participation rates.

**Table 3
PLC Participation Rates**

School Level	Number of Respondents	# in a School-Level PLC	% in a School-Level PLC	# in a District-Level PLC	% in a District-Level PLC	Total PLC Participation %
Elementary	4,423	3,879	87.7%	269	6.1%	93.8%
Middle	1,774	1,588	89.5%	129	7.3%	96.8%
High	1,976	1,802	91.2%	130	6.6%	97.8%
Alternative	49	37	75.5%	8	16.3%	91.8%
All	8,222	7,306	88.9%	536	6.5%	95.4%

Data Sources: WCPSS Human Resources and analysis of High Five 2008-09 PLC Survey data

MEETING FREQUENCY AND LENGTH

Similar to 2007-08, more than half (53%) of all PLC teams met on a weekly basis, with most other teams meeting either monthly (20%) or bimonthly (20%). Table 4 lists responses from 2008-09, with data from 2007-08 provided in italics for comparison. For the 2008-09 survey, responses have been disaggregated by school level.

**Table 4
PLC Meeting Frequency**

School Year	Statement	Daily	Weekly	Monthly	Quarterly	Twice a Month	None	No Response
<i>2007-08</i>	<i>My PLC typically meets:</i>	<i>3%</i>	<i>53%</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>4%</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>1%</i>	<i>0%</i>
2008-09	My PLC typically meets:	2%	53%	20%	3%	20%	0%	2%
	Change:	-1%	0%	0%	-1%	0%	-1%	2%
2008-09	Elementary	2%	49%	22%	3%	23%	0%	1%
2008-09	Middle	2%	68%	9%	1%	19%	0%	1%
2008-09	High	4%	60%	15%	1%	19%	0%	1%
2008-09	Alternative	8%	19%	19%	6%	39%	6%	3%

2007-08 n = Elementary: 3,507; Middle: 1,507; High: 1,789; Alternative: 55; Total: 6,858

2008-09 n = Elementary: 3,879; Middle: 1,588; High: 1,802; Alternative: 37; Total: 7,306

Note: All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number; consequently, totals may not equal 100 percent in all cases.

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of 2007-08 and 2008-09 High Five PLC Surveys

As Table 5 illustrates, approximately two-thirds of the PLC teams met for 30 minutes to one hour. The number of teams meeting for less than 30 minutes was down two percentage points from 2007-08, while the number of teams meeting for more than one hour increased by two percentage points. Elementary school teachers were more likely to meet for more than an hour (36%), followed by the alternative (19%), high (13%), and middle (12%) school teachers.

Table 5
PLC Meeting Length

School Year	Statement	Less than 30 Minutes	Thirty Minutes to One Hour	More than One Hour	No Response
2007-08	<i>The length of a typical PLC meeting is:</i>	10%	64%	26%	0%
2008-09	The length of a typical PLC meeting is:	8%	63%	28%	1%
	Change:	-2%	-1%	2%	1%
2008-09	Elementary	5%	58%	36%	1%
2008-09	Middle	13%	75%	12%	1%
2008-09	High	12%	74%	13%	1%
2008-09	Alternative	8%	67%	19%	6%

2007-08 n = Elementary: 3,507; Middle: 1,507; High: 1,789; Alternative: 55; Total: 6,858

2008-09 n = Elementary: 3,879; Middle: 1,588; High: 1,802; Alternative: 37; Total: 7,306

Note: All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number; consequently, totals may not equal 100 percent in all cases.

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of 2007-08 and 2008-09 High Five PLC Surveys

RESULTS BY THEME

The High Five PLC survey was organized around six themes: a focus on learning and teaching, a collaborative team culture, effective instructional strategies and interventions, implementation of common formative assessments, the team's impact on learning, and support/resource allocation. For clarity, these survey results were organized and presented using these six categories:

1. The first theme, a focus on learning, asked five questions pertaining to the team's shared goals and common vision. The first three questions addressed essential learning outcomes, the educators' faith in the students' ability to master those outcomes, and the strength of the team's agreement to use identical standards in assessing learning outcomes. This category also includes the team's adoption of strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound (SMART) goals that are aligned with the school's SMART goals.
2. The second theme, collaborative cultures/team processes, asked six questions about team dynamics. These include establishing and abiding by explicit team norms, being open and honest with fellow team members, and having a process to effectively resolve conflict. Furthermore, questions were asked about the team's decision-making processes, documentation and monitoring, and gathering evidence to support effective instructional practices.
3. The third theme, instructional strategies and interventions, tried to ascertain the extent to which PLC team members were working together to identify and implement effective instructional strategies targeted at the team's essential learning outcomes. Questions were also asked whether the team employed a schoolwide intervention pyramid, and whether struggling students were being required to participate in additional learning opportunities.

4. The fourth theme, common formative assessments, was also crucial to successful PLC implementation. Questions asked whether common formative assessments had been developed, whether the assessments were aligned to the team's essential learning outcomes, and whether the assessments were being used to evaluate teaching practices and/or identify the students in need of remediation. Teachers were also asked to report the frequency with which the assessments were being routinely administered.
5. The fifth theme dealt with the overall impact of the PLC effort. The survey asked whether PLC participation was saving the teacher time, providing a more supportive professional environment, improving his or her job performance, and increasing overall student achievement.
6. The sixth and final theme documented the team's level of support and the availability of resources. More specifically, the teachers were asked whether they received feedback and support from the administration, and whether the school celebrated the team's progress towards the implementation of PLC concepts and/or progress towards the school's universal SMART goals for student achievement.

The following tables and figures explain the survey results in greater detail. In all cases, data from the 2007-08 school year are provided in blue for comparison purposes, and the red 2008-09 data have been disaggregated by school level. On a final note, the following charts and tables counted survey items as a negative response if the teacher reported that he or she "did not understand" the question and/or chose to omit the survey item entirely. Even so, the survey results remained overwhelmingly positive, with relatively subtle shifts in many cases.

A FOCUS ON LEARNING AND TEACHING

Table 6 documents the PLC survey responses to the “focus” area theme discussed above. In all cases, there were slightly fewer negative responses in 2008-09 than in 2007-08.

**Table 6
PLC Survey Responses to Focus-Area Questions, 2007-08 to 2008-09**

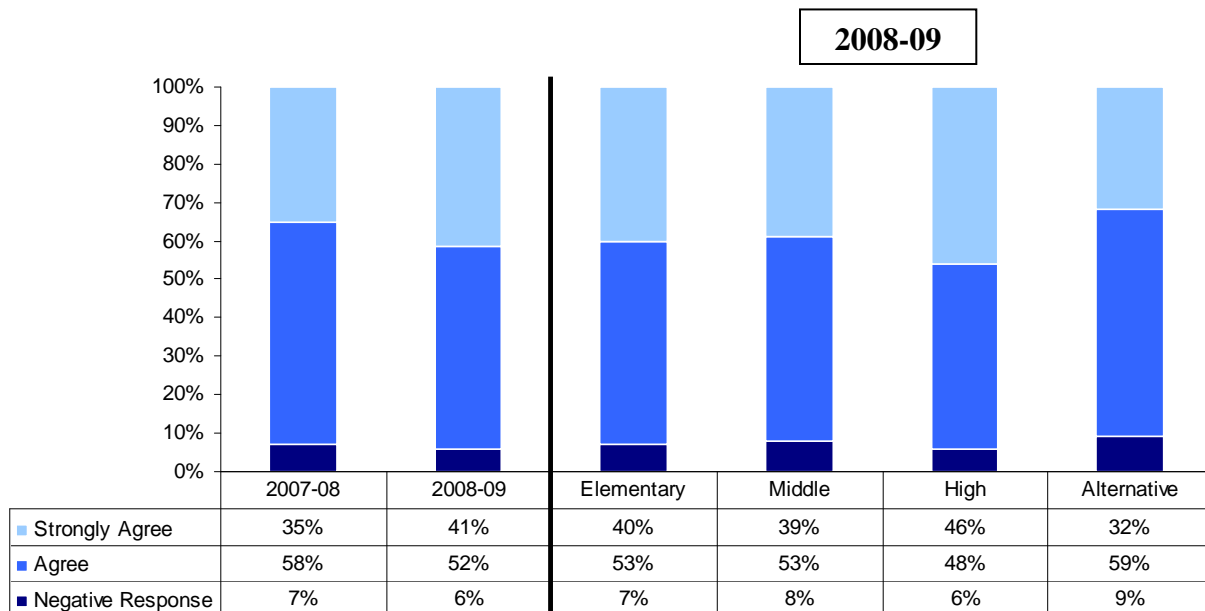
School Year	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/No Response	% Positive	% Negative
2007-08	<i>We have identified essential learning outcomes.</i>	35%	58%	5%	1%	1%	93%	7%
2008-09	We have identified essential learning outcomes.	41%	52%	4%	1%	1%	93%	6%
	Change:	6%	-6%	-1%	0%	0%	0%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	40%	53%	5%	1%	2%	93%	8%
2008-09	Middle	39%	53%	5%	2%	2%	92%	9%
2008-09	High	46%	48%	4%	1%	1%	94%	6%
2008-09	Alternative	32%	59%	5%	0%	3%	91%	8%
2007-08	<i>We believe our students can master these outcomes.</i>	24%	60%	14%	2%	1%	84%	17%
2008-09	We believe our students can master these outcomes.	28%	58%	12%	2%	1%	86%	15%
	Change:	4%	-2%	-2%	0%	0%	2%	-2%
2008-09	Elementary	31%	58%	9%	1%	2%	89%	12%
2008-09	Middle	22%	63%	12%	2%	1%	85%	15%
2008-09	High	24%	54%	18%	3%	1%	78%	22%
2008-09	Alternative	19%	59%	16%	0%	6%	78%	22%
2007-08	<i>We use team-adapted standards to assess learning.</i>	32%	54%	12%	2%	1%	86%	15%
2008-09	We use team-adapted standards to assess learning.	36%	50%	10%	2%	2%	86%	14%
	Change:	4%	-4%	-2%	0%	1%	0%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	38%	50%	8%	1%	2%	88%	11%
2008-09	Middle	29%	53%	14%	2%	2%	82%	18%
2008-09	High	38%	46%	12%	2%	1%	84%	15%
2008-09	Alternative	16%	57%	19%	5%	3%	73%	27%
2007-08	<i>We have adopted SMART goals that we are working to achieve.</i>	29%	55%	12%	2%	2%	84%	16%
2008-09	We have adopted SMART goals that we are working to achieve.	35%	51%	10%	1%	3%	86%	14%
	Change:	6%	-4%	-2%	-1%	1%	2%	-2%
2008-09	Elementary	38%	50%	8%	1%	3%	88%	12%
2008-09	Middle	26%	55%	13%	2%	4%	81%	19%
2008-09	High	36%	50%	10%	1%	2%	86%	13%
2008-09	Alternative	27%	51%	19%	0%	3%	78%	22%
2007-08	<i>Our SMART goals are aligned to our school's SMART goals.</i>	29%	52%	11%	2%	6%	81%	19%
2008-09	Our SMART goals are aligned to our school's SMART goals.	35%	49%	9%	1%	7%	84%	17%
	Change:	6%	-3%	-2%	-1%	1%	3%	-2%
2008-09	Elementary	38%	48%	7%	1%	5%	86%	13%
2008-09	Middle	27%	52%	12%	2%	8%	79%	22%
2008-09	High	37%	47%	9%	1%	6%	84%	16%
2008-09	Alternative	35%	41%	22%	0%	3%	76%	25%

Note: 1. The “% Negative” includes all respondents who omitted the question and/or failed to indicate a positive response.
 2. All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole number; consequently, totals may not equal 100% in all cases.

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

The most fundamental element for instructional success is, arguably, the identification of essential learning outcomes. As Figure 1 illustrates, the overall percentage of teachers expressing a positive response from 2007-08 to 2008-09 was very high (94%) and essentially unchanged. However, it is important to note that the percentage of teachers who “strongly agree” that their PLC team is accomplishing this crucial facet of instruction had increased from 35% to 41%. High school teachers showed the strongest positive agreement (46%), followed by elementary (40%), middle (39%), and alternative (32%) school teachers.

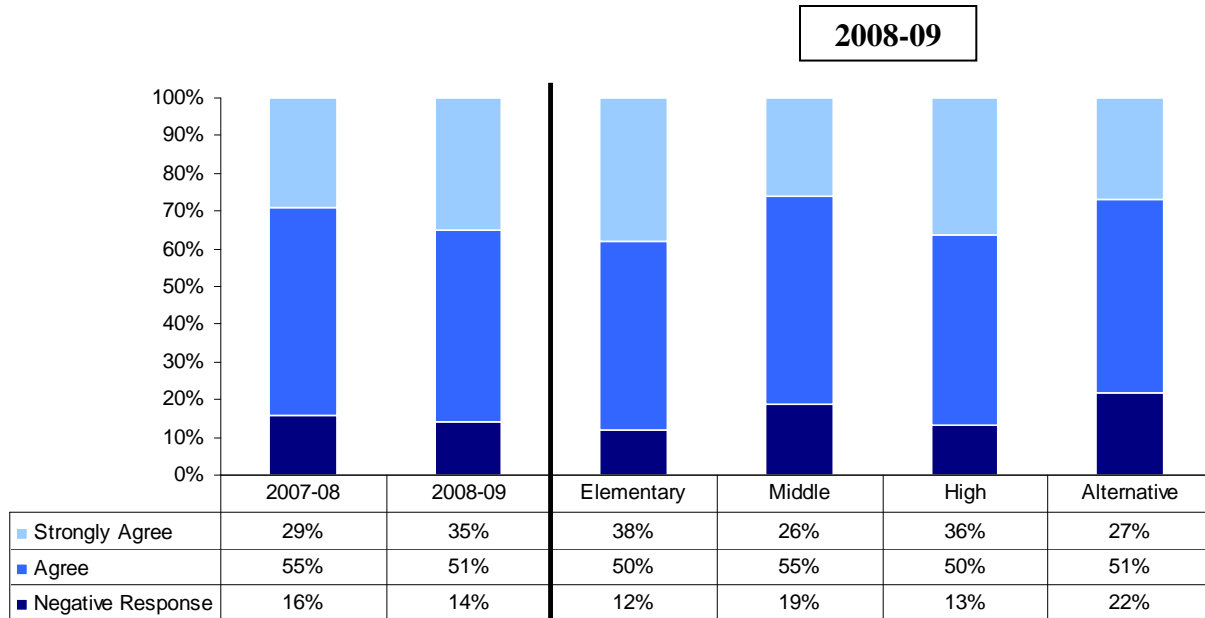
Figure 1
We Have Identified Essential Learning Outcomes



Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

As noted earlier, SMART goals are defined as those that are strategic and specific, measurable, attainable, results-oriented, and time-bound. Teachers were asked whether their PLC team had adopted SMART goals and were working to achieve them. There was a modest decrease in negative responses to this item from the previous school year (from 16% to 14%), and the percentage of teachers who “strongly agreed” that the SMART goal concept was being actively pursued by their PLC team increased from 29% in 2007-08 to 35% in 2008-09. Elementary school teachers were most likely to “strongly agree” with this statement (38%) and were also the most likely to express an overall positive response to the survey item (88%). In contrast, alternative school teachers were the least likely to strongly agree (27%), and the least likely to express a favorable response (78%). Figure 2 illustrates the responses to this survey item in greater detail.

Figure 2
We Have Adopted SMART Goals that We Are Working to Achieve



Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

COLLABORATIVE CULTURE AND TEAM PROCESSES

The section of the survey pertaining to the PLC team’s collaborative culture and team processes was the most comprehensive, and the results of those survey items are shown in Tables 7 and 8. The reasons for having more questions focused on this theme are many; the PLC initiative, in itself, represents a major paradigm shift from individual efforts to a cooperative team concept requiring education professionals to work together toward a common purpose – all while simultaneously learning together and continually improving (DuFour & Eaker, 1998). Yet as Lencioni has noted, “like so many aspects of life, teamwork comes down to mastering a set of behaviors that are at once theoretically uncomplicated but extremely difficult to practice day after day” (2002, p. 8).

Table 7 contains the PLC survey responses to the first four “collaboration” theme questions. Overall, 90% or more of the respondents expressed some level of agreement with each survey statement. Small increases in positive responses may be noted in all cases, with the exception of the survey item that asked whether the team used sound, structured, decision-making processes. For that item, the percentage of respondents who strongly agreed with that statement increased by 5 percentage points from the previous school year.

Table 7
PLC Survey Responses to Collaboration-Area Questions, Part I, 2007-08 to 2008-09

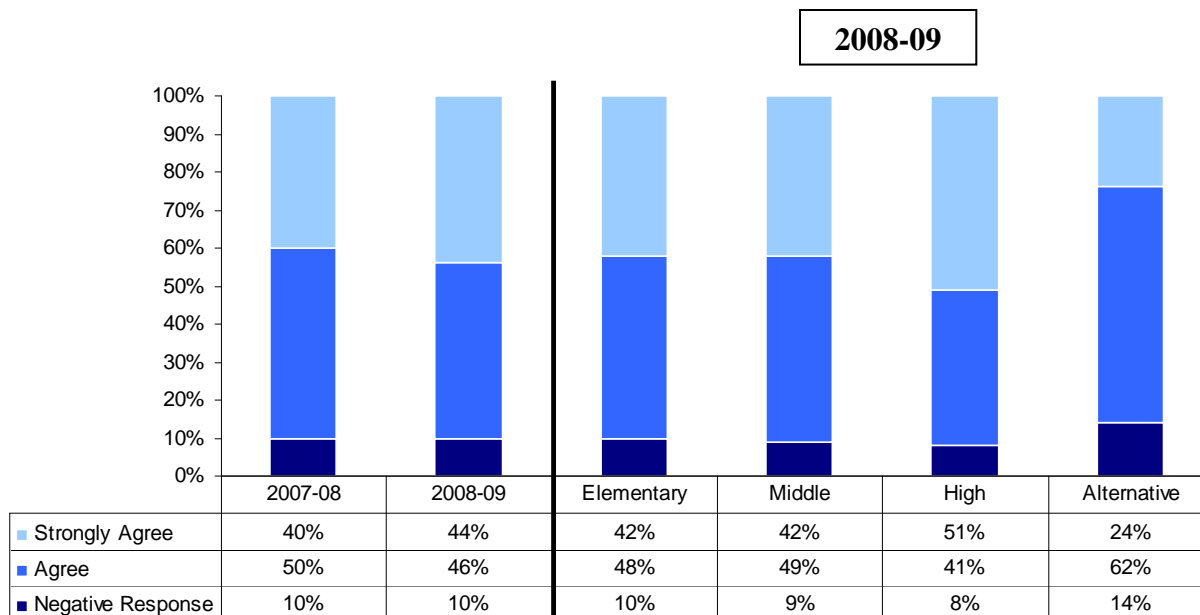
School Year	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/No Response	% Positive	% Negative
2007-08	<i>We have established norms to clarify how we will work as a team.</i>	42%	50%	7%	1%	0%	92%	8%
2008-09	We have established norms to clarify how we will work as a team.	48%	46%	4%	1%	1%	94%	6%
	Change:	6%	-4%	-3%	0%	1%	2%	-2%
2008-09	Elementary	50%	44%	4%	0%	1%	94%	5%
2008-09	Middle	46%	48%	5%	1%	1%	94%	7%
2008-09	High	45%	46%	6%	1%	1%	91%	8%
2008-09	Alternative	30%	62%	3%	0%	6%	92%	9%
2007-08	<i>We abide by the explicit team norms we developed.</i>	32%	57%	9%	1%	1%	89%	11%
2008-09	We abide by the explicit team norms we developed.	38%	53%	7%	1%	2%	91%	10%
	Change:	6%	-4%	-2%	0%	1%	2%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	39%	52%	6%	1%	1%	91%	8%
2008-09	Middle	34%	56%	7%	1%	2%	90%	10%
2008-09	High	38%	50%	9%	1%	1%	88%	11%
2008-09	Alternative	22%	65%	5%	0%	8%	87%	13%
2007-08	<i>We use sound, structured decision-making processes.</i>	40%	54%	5%	1%	0%	94%	6%
2008-09	We use sound, structured decision-making processes.	45%	48%	5%	1%	2%	93%	8%
	Change:	5%	-6%	0%	0%	2%	-1%	2%
2008-09	Elementary	44%	49%	5%	1%	1%	93%	7%
2008-09	Middle	43%	49%	6%	1%	1%	92%	8%
2008-09	High	49%	44%	5%	1%	1%	93%	7%
2008-09	Alternative	32%	57%	8%	0%	3%	89%	11%
2007-08	<i>We are open and honest about strengths and weaknesses.</i>	40%	50%	8%	2%	0%	90%	10%
2008-09	We are open and honest about strengths and weaknesses.	44%	46%	6%	2%	1%	90%	10%
	Change:	4%	-4%	-2%	0%	1%	0%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	42%	48%	8%	1%	1%	90%	10%
2008-09	Middle	42%	49%	6%	2%	1%	91%	9%
2008-09	High	51%	41%	5%	2%	1%	92%	8%
2008-09	Alternative	24%	62%	5%	3%	6%	86%	14%

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

In the four 2008-09 survey items tabulated on Table 7, more than 90% of the survey respondents responded positively when asked about their PLC’s collaborative functions, with the highest percentage of positive responses (94%) going to the survey item asking about the “establishment of norm rules for working as a team.” Overall, the survey data from Table 7 suggest that elementary school teachers were more likely to return a positive response to questions pertaining to their collaboration efforts, followed by middle, high, and alternative school teachers.

The teachers were also asked if they were “open and honest about each others’ strengths and weaknesses.” Overall, the number of WCPSS teachers who strongly agreed with the statement in 2008-09 increased from 40% to 44% since the previous school year. Yet, the data suggest that alternative school teachers are slightly less willing to offer constructive criticism to a colleague (86% showing positive agreement) than elementary, middle or high school teachers (90%, 91% and 92%, respectively). Figure 3 graphically illustrates these differences.

Figure 3
We Are Open and Honest About Strengths and Weaknesses



Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

Table 8 documents results of the last three collaboration-themed survey items, which targeted the teams’ established processes to resolve conflict, documentation and monitoring of the teams’ efforts to improve, and the teams’ ability to gather evidence to support effective instructional strategies. For these items, over 80% of the overall responses remained positive in 2008-09, with a modest reduction in negative responses from the year before. The percentage of teachers indicating a positive response to these three items fell between 81% and 88%, slightly lower than the 90% benchmark established by the first battery of collaboration-area questions listed in Table 7.

In 2008-09, most teachers (81%) agreed or strongly agreed that the team had “established a process to resolve internal conflict,” yet only 76% of the alternative school teachers expressed agreement. Overall, the responses to this survey item were slightly less positive than the other statements with the same theme; elementary, middle, and high school teachers expressed positive agreement with this statement in 81%, 81%, and 82% of the cases, respectively, showing only a modest change (+2 percentage points) from 2007-08.

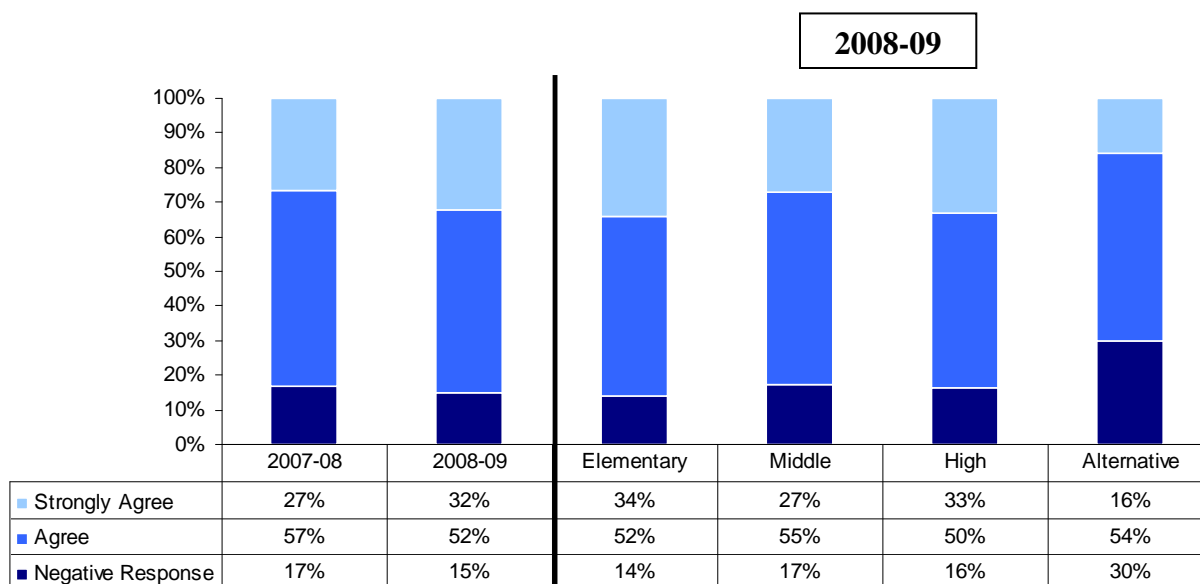
Table 8
PLC Survey Responses to Collaboration-Area Questions, Part II, 2007-08 to 2008-09

School Year	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/No Response	% Positive	% Negative
2007-08	<i>We have a process to effectively resolve conflict.</i>	26%	53%	17%	2%	1%	79%	20%
2008-09	We have a process to effectively resolve conflict.	30%	51%	15%	2%	2%	81%	19%
	Change:	4%	-2%	-2%	0%	1%	2%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	29%	52%	16%	2%	2%	81%	20%
2008-09	Middle	30%	51%	14%	2%	3%	81%	19%
2008-09	High	34%	48%	13%	2%	3%	82%	18%
2008-09	Alternative	19%	57%	16%	3%	6%	76%	25%
2007-08	<i>We document and monitor our processes so that we can improve.</i>	30%	58%	10%	1%	0%	88%	11%
2008-09	We document and monitor our processes so that we can improve.	36%	52%	8%	1%	2%	88%	11%
	Change:	6%	-6%	-2%	0%	2%	0%	0%
2008-09	Elementary	36%	52%	9%	1%	2%	88%	12%
2008-09	Middle	34%	54%	9%	2%	2%	88%	13%
2008-09	High	39%	50%	8%	1%	1%	89%	10%
2008-09	Alternative	16%	73%	5%	3%	3%	89%	11%
2007-08	<i>We systematically gather evidence concerning instructional strategies.</i>	27%	57%	14%	2%	1%	84%	17%
2008-09	We systematically gather evidence concerning instructional strategies.	32%	52%	12%	1%	2%	84%	15%
	Change:	5%	-5%	-2%	-1%	1%	0%	-2%
2008-09	Elementary	34%	52%	11%	1%	2%	86%	14%
2008-09	Middle	27%	55%	13%	2%	2%	82%	17%
2008-09	High	33%	50%	13%	1%	2%	83%	16%
2008-09	Alternative	16%	54%	19%	3%	8%	70%	30%

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

When asked whether the PLC team systematically gathered evidence concerning the effectiveness of various instructional strategies, 84% of 2008-09 survey respondents expressed some level of agreement—a percentage unchanged from 2007-08. As is frequently the case, however, more respondents “strongly agreed” with the statement than the year before (32% versus 27%). Elementary school teachers were the most likely to agree that their team habitually gathered evidence pertaining to their instructional strategies (86%), followed by high (83%), middle (82%), and alternative (70%) school teachers. Figure 4 graphically illustrates these data.

Figure 4
We Systematically Gather Evidence Concerning Instructional Strategies



Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES AND INTERVENTIONS

The third PLC survey theme, instructional strategies and interventions, was structured to determine the extent to which PLC team members were working together to identify and implement effective instructional strategies directly targeted at the team’s essential learning outcomes. Respondents were also asked whether the team employed a schoolwide pyramid of interventions, and whether the team’s struggling students were being required to participate in additional learning opportunities to remediate deficient skills. The percentage of positive responses to items on Instructional Strategies and Interventions was 85% overall. Yet the percentage of positive responses was somewhat variable, ranging from a low of 72% (concerning requiring students in need to participate in other learning opportunities) to a high of 93% (for the item indicating if teachers aligned their instruction with learning outcomes).

The strongest improvement was evident in the question pertaining to the utilization of a schoolwide pyramid of interventions. The total number of teachers expressing agreement with this survey item increased more than 9 percentage points from the previous school year, moving from 70% in 2007-08 to 79% in 2008-09. The seven percentage-point increase in the number of teachers who “strongly agreed” that the intervention pyramid was being used is also worth noting. The elementary school teachers indicated the highest level of agreement (84%), followed by high (79%), alternative (76%), and middle (73%) school teachers. Table 9 documents all survey responses to this theme.

Table 9
PLC Survey Responses to Strategies-and-Interventions-Area Questions, 2007-08 to 2008-09

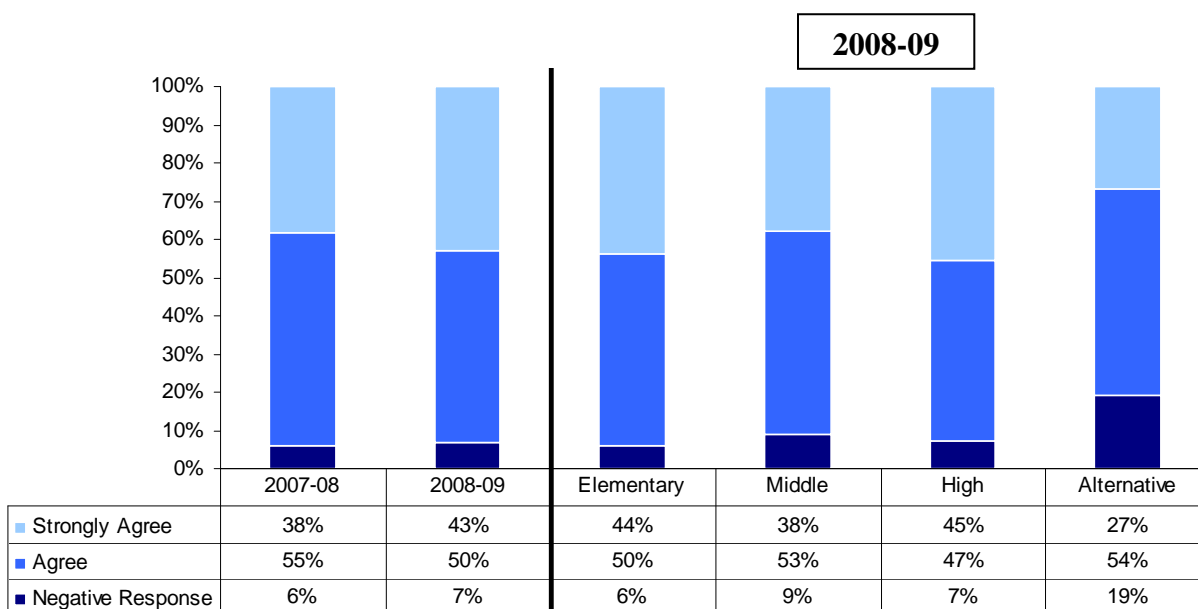
School Year	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/No Response	% Positive	% Negative
2007-08	<i>We have worked to align our instruction with learning outcomes.</i>	38%	55%	5%	1%	0%	93%	6%
2008-09	We have worked to align our instruction with learning outcomes.	43%	50%	4%	1%	2%	93%	7%
	Change:	5%	-5%	-1%	0%	2%	0%	1%
2008-09	Elementary	44%	50%	4%	0%	2%	94%	6%
2008-09	Middle	38%	53%	6%	1%	2%	91%	9%
2008-09	High	45%	47%	5%	1%	1%	92%	7%
2008-09	Alternative	27%	54%	16%	0%	3%	81%	19%
2007-08	<i>We are identifying more effective instructional strategies.</i>	33%	57%	8%	1%	0%	90%	9%
2008-09	We are identifying more effective instructional strategies.	38%	53%	6%	1%	2%	91%	9%
	Change:	5%	-4%	-2%	0%	2%	1%	0%
2008-09	Elementary	38%	53%	6%	0%	2%	91%	8%
2008-09	Middle	34%	55%	7%	1%	3%	89%	11%
2008-09	High	40%	52%	6%	1%	2%	92%	9%
2008-09	Alternative	22%	57%	16%	0%	6%	79%	22%
2007-08	<i>We utilize increasingly more effective instructional strategies.</i>	29%	59%	10%	1%	1%	88%	12%
2008-09	We utilize increasingly more effective instructional strategies.	34%	55%	7%	1%	3%	89%	11%
	Change:	5%	-4%	-3%	0%	2%	1%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	34%	55%	7%	1%	3%	89%	11%
2008-09	Middle	30%	57%	9%	1%	4%	87%	14%
2008-09	High	36%	53%	8%	1%	2%	89%	11%
2008-09	Alternative	16%	57%	19%	0%	8%	73%	27%
2007-08	<i>We utilize the schoolwide pyramid of interventions.</i>	19%	51%	18%	3%	10%	70%	31%
2008-09	We utilize the schoolwide pyramid of interventions.	26%	53%	12%	2%	7%	79%	21%
	Change:	7%	2%	-6%	-1%	-3%	9%	-10%
2008-09	Elementary	29%	55%	9%	1%	6%	84%	16%
2008-09	Middle	21%	52%	16%	2%	9%	73%	27%
2008-09	High	27%	52%	14%	2%	5%	79%	21%
2008-09	Alternative	19%	57%	16%	0%	8%	76%	24%
2007-08	<i>We require students in need to participate in other learning opportunities.</i>	19%	46%	28%	4%	2%	65%	34%
2008-09	We require students in need to participate in other learning opportunities.	25%	47%	21%	3%	4%	72%	28%
	Change:	6%	1%	-7%	-1%	2%	7%	-6%
2008-09	Elementary	29%	49%	17%	2%	5%	78%	24%
2008-09	Middle	19%	47%	26%	3%	5%	66%	34%
2008-09	High	23%	46%	25%	4%	3%	69%	32%
2008-09	Alternative	19%	35%	41%	3%	3%	54%	47%

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

Aligning instruction with learning outcomes is a fundamental instructional goal; without this, many other educational objectives would be unreachable. WCPSS teachers have consistently indicated that this alignment is being facilitated within their PLC teams, with 93% of survey respondents expressing some degree of agreement to this survey item throughout the 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years.

Responses to this survey item are especially positive due to the five percentage-point increase in the number of teachers who elected to “strongly agree” with this statement in 2008-09. High school teachers were most likely to “strongly agree” (45%), followed by elementary (44%), middle (38%), and alternative (27%) school teachers (see Figure 5).

Figure 5
We Have Worked to Align Our Instruction with Learning Outcomes



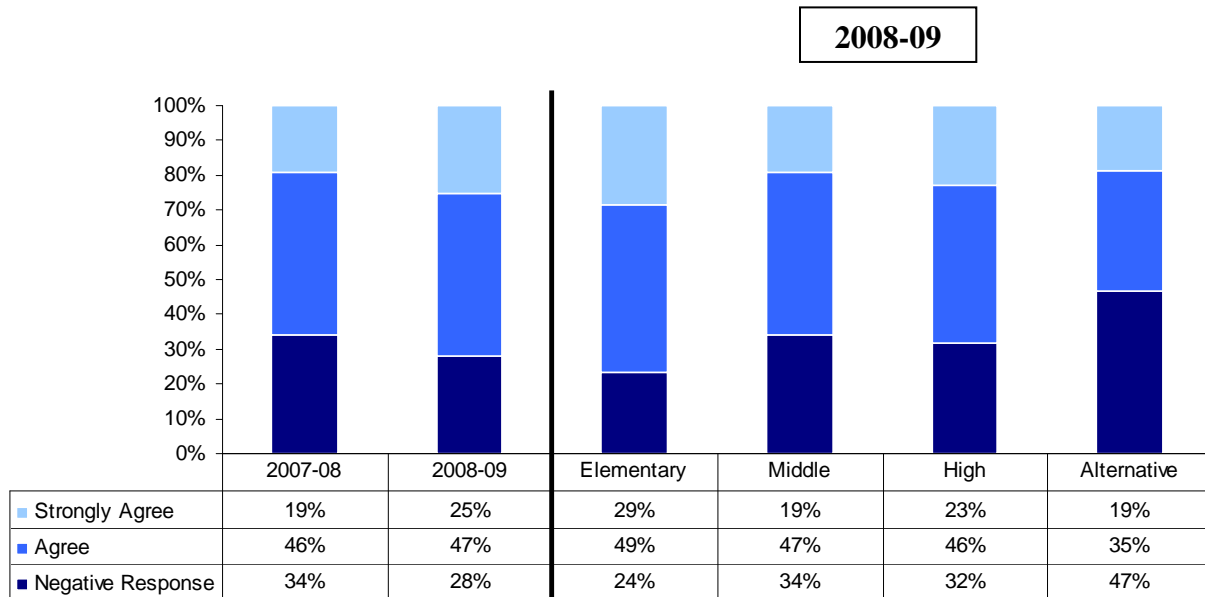
Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

Responses to the strategies/interventions survey item asking whether students in need were required “to participate in other learning opportunities” were less positive than those to other questions, yet still showed noticeable improvement. Collectively, 72% of the 2008-09 respondents expressed agreement with the survey item, which was a seven percentage-point increase from 65% in 2007-08. Furthermore, the number of teachers who “strongly agreed” that this policy was being practiced increased by six percentage points. Increasing this behavior on the part of teachers is critical to the success of PLCs in impacting student learning, and this may be an area to target for continuous improvement.

As Figure 6 illustrates, survey responses varied greatly by school level. While 78% of the elementary teachers expressed positive agreement, 69% of high school teachers and 66% of middle school teachers responded in a similar fashion. Alternative school teachers were least likely to agree with this statement, with only 54% of them indicating agreement. Yet it is

important to remember that the number of alternative school teachers responding to the survey was relatively small (n=37) compared to the other school levels, making accurate generalizations about the target population more difficult. Additional investigation may be warranted; responses could reflect differences in the structures of the learning environment at each level, but providing other learning opportunities is necessary at all levels for students to improve within the PLC framework.

Figure 6
We Require Students in Need to Participate in Other Learning Opportunities



Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

COMMON FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS

The fourth theme encompasses common formative assessments, whose results should be consistently shared and analyzed by all PLC team members (Langston, 2006). This aspect of instruction, a key component of the survey, is also vital for successful PLC implementation. Questions pertaining to this theme asked the teachers whether common assessments had been developed within their PLC, whether the assessments were aligned to the team’s essential learning outcomes, and whether the results from the assessments were being used to evaluate teaching practices and/or identify the students in need of remediation or enrichment.

Before answering those specific questions, however, instructional staff were asked to report the frequency with which the common assessments were being routinely administered, and those results are reported in Table 10.

Table 10
Frequency of Common Formative Assessments, 2007-08 to 2008-09

School Year	Statement	Once Every 3 Weeks	Once Every 6 Weeks	Once a Quarter	Once a Semester	Not at All	No Response
2007-08	<i>Team-developed Common Formative Assessments were administered:</i>	38%	16%	20%	5%	17%	5%
2008-09	Team-developed Common Formative Assessments were administered:	45%	17%	22%	4%	10%	4%
	Change:	7%	1%	2%	-1%	-7%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	43%	18%	25%	3%	8%	4%
2008-09	Middle	44%	19%	18%	3%	12%	4%
2008-09	High	50%	14%	17%	6%	10%	3%
2008-09	Alternative	22%	17%	11%	3%	36%	11%

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

The data suggest that common assessments were being administered on a more frequent basis in 2008-09 than in the previous school year. The number of teachers administering their team’s common assessments every three weeks rose from 38% in 2007-08 to 45% in 2008-09. Those administering the assessments every six weeks and once per quarter rose modestly, by one and two percentage points, respectively.

Conversely, the number of teachers who administered a common assessment only once per semester fell by one percentage point, and the number who claimed that the common assessments were not being utilized at all fell from 17% in 2007-08 to 10% in 2008-09. Approximately one-half of all high school teachers administered a common assessment every three weeks, followed by the middle (44%), elementary (43%), and alternative (22%) school teachers.

Table 11 presents the responses to all PLC survey items pertaining to common assessments in tabular form. Because of the central importance of this theme, survey responses to all four of these questions have been graphically illustrated in Figures 7-10. The percentage of teachers with positive responses to the formative assessment items overall ranged from a low of 77% regarding the evaluation of instructional practices to a high of 85% for alignment of common formative assessments with learning outcomes. While positive, the percentage of teachers responding positively to this theme was slightly lower than for the first three dimensions.

Table 11
PLC Survey Responses to Assessments-Area Questions, 2007-08 to 2008-09

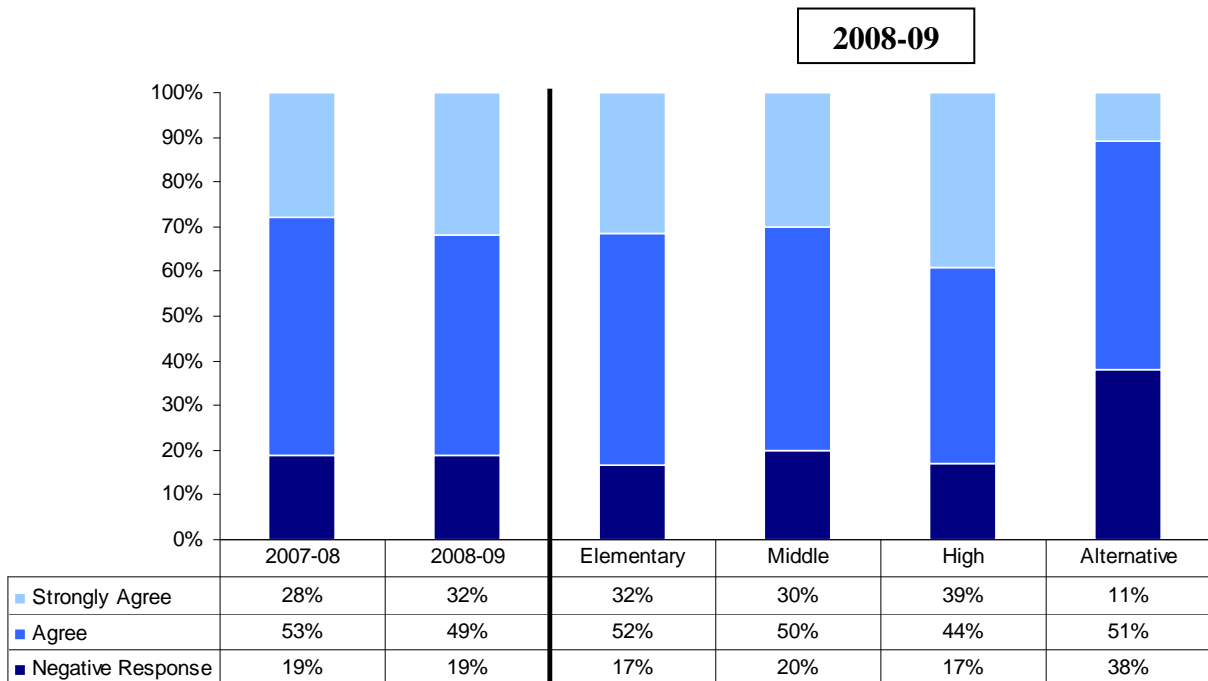
School Year	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/No Response	% Positive	% Negative
2007-08	<i>We have developed common formative assessments using different approaches.</i>	28%	53%	16%	2%	1%	81%	19%
2008-09	We have developed common formative assessments using different approaches.	32%	49%	14%	2%	3%	81%	19%
	Change:	4%	-4%	-2%	0%	2%	0%	0%
2008-09	Elementary	31%	52%	13%	1%	3%	83%	17%
2008-09	Middle	30%	50%	15%	2%	3%	80%	20%
2008-09	High	39%	44%	13%	2%	2%	83%	17%
2008-09	Alternative	11%	51%	32%	0%	6%	62%	38%
2007-08	<i>We aligned our common formative assessments to learning outcomes.</i>	30%	55%	13%	1%	1%	85%	15%
2008-09	We aligned our common formative assessments to learning outcomes.	34%	51%	11%	1%	4%	85%	16%
	Change:	4%	-4%	-2%	0%	3%	0%	1%
2008-09	Elementary	34%	52%	10%	1%	3%	86%	14%
2008-09	Middle	30%	52%	12%	2%	4%	82%	18%
2008-09	High	39%	47%	10%	1%	3%	86%	14%
2008-09	Alternative	11%	54%	32%	0%	3%	65%	35%
2007-08	<i>We examine results to identify students who need additional support.</i>	25%	54%	19%	2%	1%	79%	22%
2008-09	We examine results to identify students who need additional support.	30%	50%	15%	2%	4%	80%	21%
	Change:	5%	-4%	-4%	0%	3%	1%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	33%	51%	12%	1%	3%	84%	16%
2008-09	Middle	24%	50%	19%	2%	4%	74%	25%
2008-09	High	29%	47%	19%	2%	3%	76%	24%
2008-09	Alternative	16%	46%	35%	0%	3%	62%	38%
2007-08	<i>We examine results to evaluate our instructional practices.</i>	23%	53%	21%	2%	1%	76%	24%
2008-09	We examine results to evaluate our instructional practices.	27%	50%	17%	2%	4%	77%	23%
	Change:	4%	-3%	-4%	0%	3%	1%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	29%	51%	15%	1%	4%	80%	20%
2008-09	Middle	22%	51%	19%	3%	5%	73%	27%
2008-09	High	29%	48%	18%	2%	3%	77%	23%
2008-09	Alternative	16%	43%	38%	0%	3%	59%	41%

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

When the teachers were asked whether they had developed common formative assessments using different approaches, their responses were generally consistent: 81% responded positively and 19% responded negatively in both the 2007-08 and 2008-09 school years. It is worth noting, however, that the percentage of teachers who indicated that they “strongly agree” with the statement rose from 28% in 2007-08 to 32% in 2008-09.

Elementary, middle, and high school teachers were very close in their overall positive response rates, returning respective percentages of 84%, 80%, and 83%, respectively. Responses from alternative school teachers were markedly different, with only 62% indicating a positive answer.

Figure 7
We Have Developed Common Formative Assessments Using Different Approaches

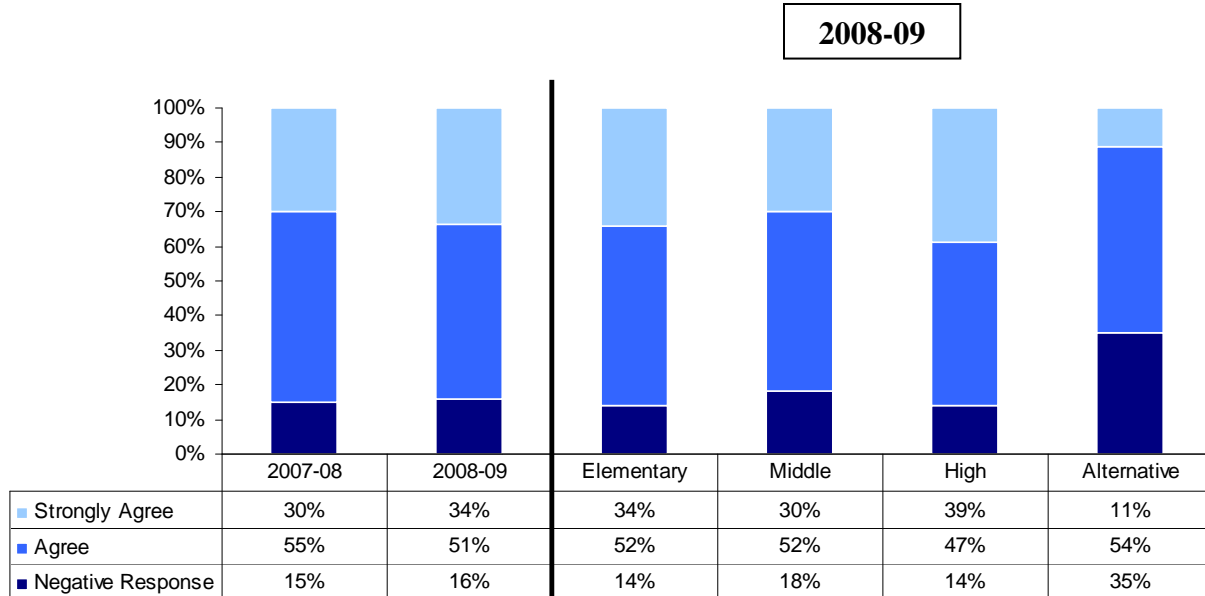


Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

One survey item was structured to determine the extent to which the common formative assessments had been aligned to desired learning outcomes. As Figure 8 illustrates, the percentage of positive responses remained stable at 85% through both PLC surveys. Yet as before, a larger percentage of teachers indicated that they “strongly agreed” than “agreed” with the survey statement (the percentage moved from 30% in 2007-08 to 34% in 2008-09).

Elementary and high school teachers were equally likely (86%) to return a positive response, followed by middle (82%) and alternative (65%) school teachers.

Figure 8
We Aligned Our Common Formative Assessments to Learning Outcomes

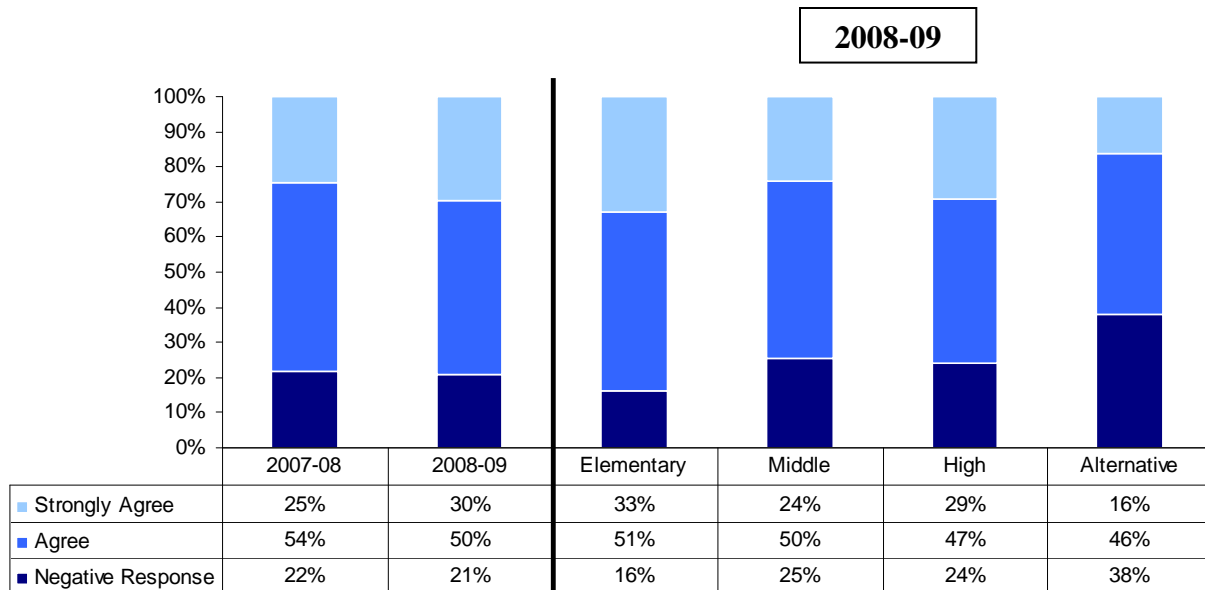


Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

When teachers were asked whether the common assessments were used to identify students who need additional support to be successful, 80% of the teachers responded that this was the case in 2008-09 (up slightly from 79% in 2007-08). The number of respondents who “strongly agreed” that this practice was being implemented rose from 25% to 30% over the same time period.

Elementary school teachers were the most likely to return a positive response (84%), followed by high (76%), middle (74%) and alternative (62%) school teachers.

Figure 9
We Examine Results to Identify Students Who Need Additional Support

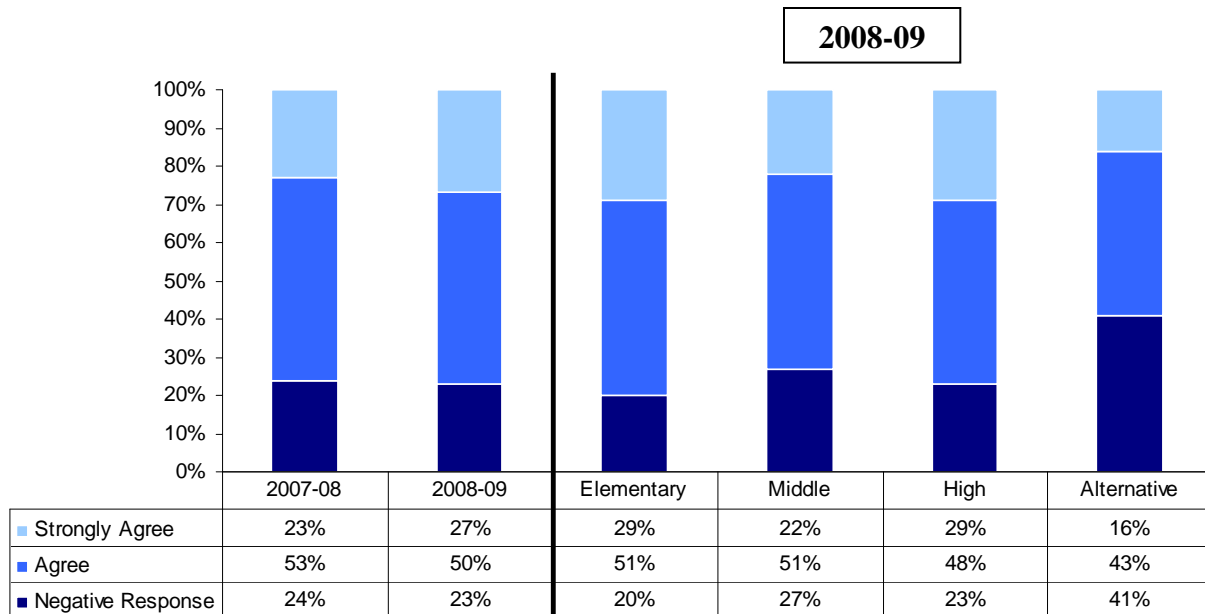


Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

The final question about common assessments asked whether teachers were taking a critical look at test results to evaluate the success of their own instructional practices. Although the overall percentage of positive responses increased by only one percentage point (76% in 2007-08 to 77% in 2008-09), the number of teachers electing to “strongly agree” with the statement showed a more dramatic shift: 23% marked “strongly agree” in 2007-08, while 27% did so in 2008-09.

As before, there was a notable difference in responses among school levels: 80% of elementary school teachers indicated a positive response, followed by high (77%), middle (73%), and alternative (59%) school teachers.

Figure 10
We Examine Results to Evaluate Our Instructional Practices



Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

OVERALL IMPACT

The fifth theme addressed the overall impact of the PLC effort on instructional effectiveness. The survey asked whether PLC participation was saving the teacher time in the larger sense, whether PLCs led to a more supportive professional environment for teachers, whether the PLC effort was improving his or her job performance, and whether the PLC initiative was leading to an increase in student achievement. As shown in Table 12, the percentage of teachers agreeing to the items ranged fairly widely, from 69% indicating PLCs will save them time overall to 92% believing PLCs can provide a more supportive environment for teachers. Across items, 79% agreed or strongly agreed with the statements – two percentage points lower than for common formative assessment items (see Table 1).

Table 12
PLC Survey Responses to Impact-Area Questions, 2007-08 to 2008-09

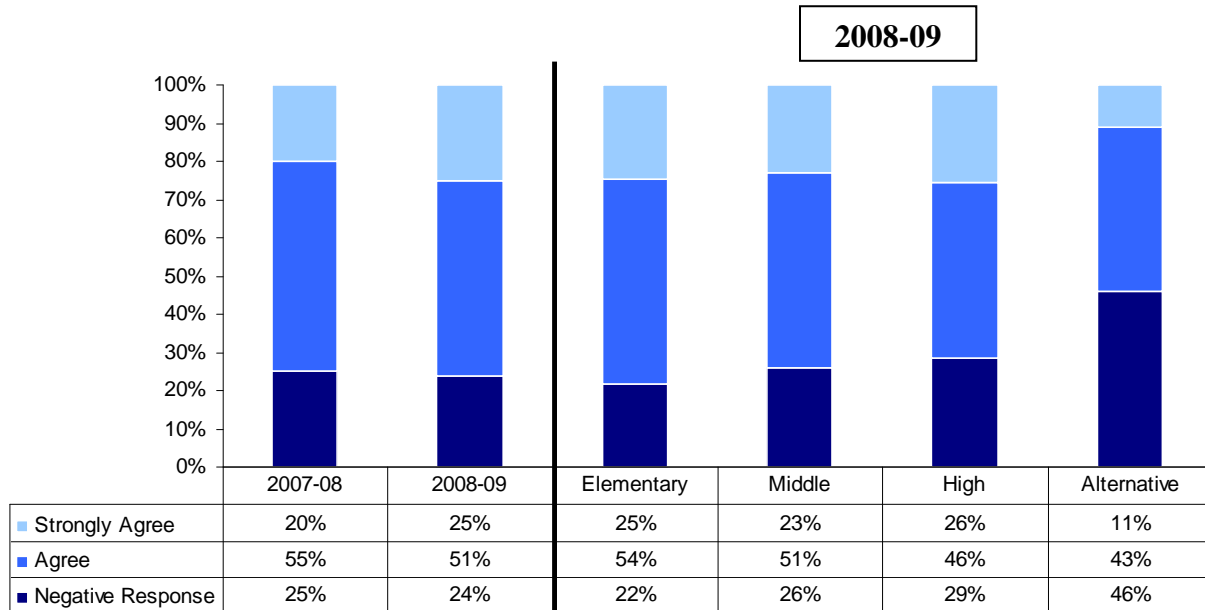
School Year	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/No Response	% Positive	% Negative
2007-08	<i>I am a better teacher because of my work with my PLC.</i>	22%	55%	17%	5%	1%	77%	23%
2008-09	I am a better teacher because of my work with my PLC.	27%	52%	14%	4%	2%	79%	20%
	Change:	5%	-3%	-3%	-1%	1%	2%	-3%
2008-09	Elementary	26%	55%	14%	3%	3%	81%	20%
2008-09	Middle	27%	51%	15%	5%	1%	78%	21%
2008-09	High	29%	48%	16%	4%	2%	77%	22%
2008-09	Alternative	11%	49%	32%	0%	8%	60%	40%
2007-08	<i>My students are learning more because of my work with my PLC.</i>	20%	55%	20%	4%	1%	75%	25%
2008-09	My students are learning more because of my work with my PLC.	25%	51%	18%	3%	3%	76%	24%
	Change:	5%	-4%	-2%	-1%	2%	1%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	25%	54%	16%	3%	3%	79%	22%
2008-09	Middle	23%	51%	20%	4%	2%	74%	26%
2008-09	High	26%	46%	22%	4%	3%	72%	29%
2008-09	Alternative	11%	43%	35%	0%	11%	54%	46%
2007-08	<i>PLCs can provide a more supportive environment for teachers.</i>	34%	58%	6%	2%	0%	92%	8%
2008-09	PLCs can provide a more supportive environment for teachers.	39%	53%	5%	2%	2%	92%	9%
	Change:	5%	-5%	-1%	0%	2%	0%	1%
2008-09	Elementary	37%	55%	5%	1%	1%	92%	7%
2008-09	Middle	38%	53%	5%	3%	1%	91%	9%
2008-09	High	42%	50%	4%	2%	2%	92%	8%
2008-09	Alternative	24%	59%	11%	0%	6%	83%	17%
2007-08	<i>Time spent with my PLC will save me time overall.</i>	21%	47%	24%	8%	1%	68%	33%
2008-09	Time spent with my PLC will save me time overall.	25%	44%	22%	7%	3%	69%	32%
	Change:	4%	-3%	-2%	-1%	2%	1%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	23%	46%	21%	6%	3%	69%	30%
2008-09	Middle	24%	45%	21%	7%	2%	69%	30%
2008-09	High	27%	38%	24%	9%	3%	65%	36%
2008-09	Alternative	11%	30%	49%	0%	11%	41%	60%

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

It is important to remember that the ultimate goal of the PLC effort is an increase in students’ academic achievement. When asked whether students were learning more because of the teacher’s PLC participation, over three-quarters (76%) indicated agreement, up a modest one percentage point from the year before. Yet again, the data suggest that more teachers were able to make this statement with greater conviction. Although 20% indicated that they “strongly agree” in 2007-08, 25% gave the more enthusiastic “strongly agree” response in 2008-09.

Responses varied by school level: elementary teachers returned the highest percentage of positive responses (79%), followed by middle (74%), high (72%), and alternative (54%) school teachers.

Figure 11
My Students Are Learning More Because of My Work with My PLC

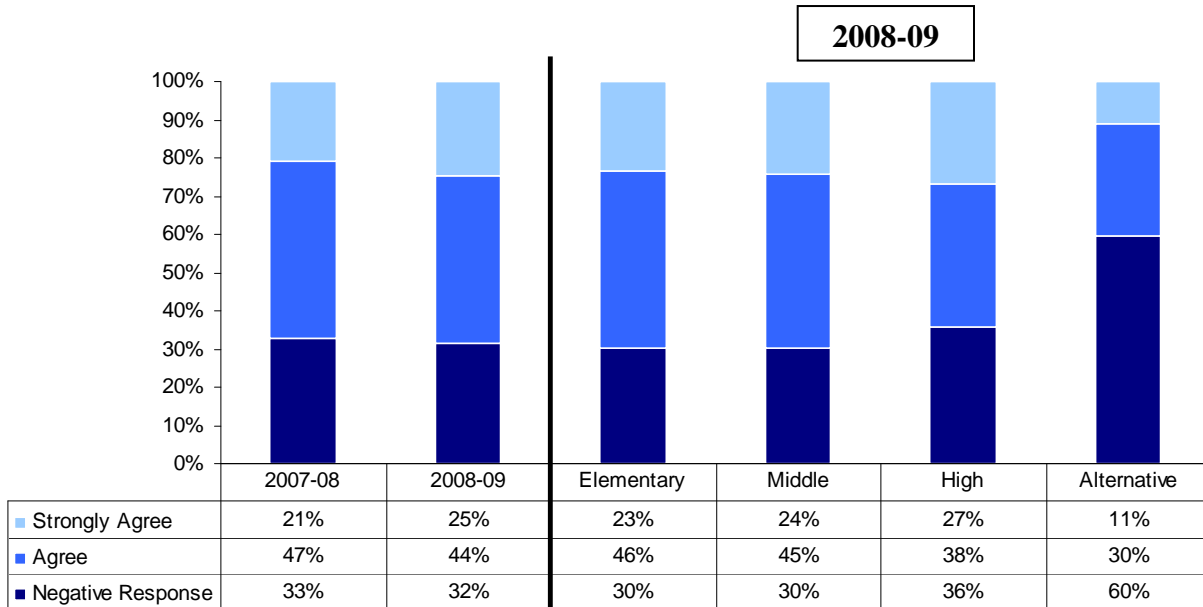


Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

Time is always of great concern to educators, and the survey questioned whether teachers felt that PLC participation would save them time in the overall sense. As Figure 12 illustrates, 68% of the teachers in 2007-08 and 69% in 2008-09 were able to express some level of agreement. As in similar cases, the number of teachers choosing to “strongly agree” showed a marked improvement; in this instance, the percentage moved from 21% in 2007-08 to 25% in 2008-09.

Generally, the survey respondents were optimistic. Elementary and middle school teachers had the highest level of positive agreement at 69%, while the high school teachers were close to that figure with 65%. Alternative school teachers returned a positive response percentage of only 41%, yet the small sample size and lower return rate of alternative school survey respondents complicates attempts to generalize 2008-09 survey results to the entire population.

Figure 12
Time Spent with My PLC Will Save Me Time Overall



Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

SUPPORT AND RESOURCE ALLOCATION

The sixth and final theme documented the PLC teams’ level of support and the availability of resources. More specifically, teachers were asked about the level of feedback and support they have been receiving from their school’s administration, and whether their school celebrated the PLC teams’ progress towards implementation of PLC concepts and/or progress towards the school’s SMART goals.

As Table 13 shows, responses are three to four percentage points more positive than in the previous school year, with the number of negative responses declining across all survey items. However, this theme had the lowest percentage of positive responses, with 71% agreement overall (see Table 1). Positive responses were lowest (67%) regarding school celebrations of progress towards SMART goals (see Table 13).

Table 13
PLC Survey Responses to Support-Area Questions, 2007-08 to 2008-09

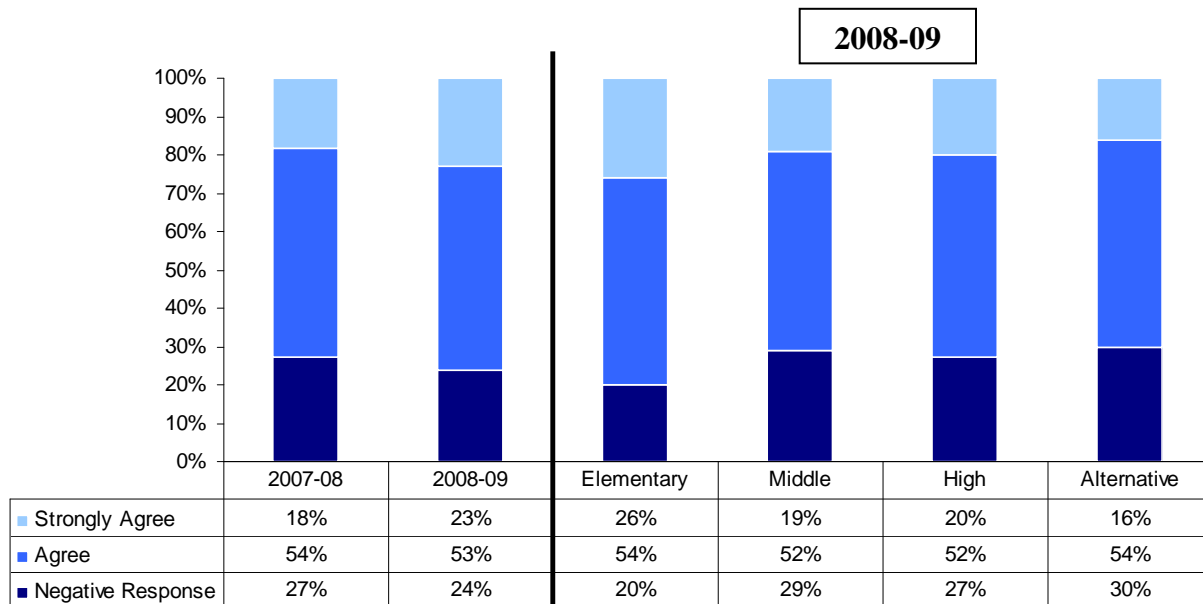
School Year	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Don't Know/No Response	% Positive	% Negative
2007-08	<i>We receive feedback and support from our leadership.</i>	18%	54%	21%	5%	1%	72%	27%
2008-09	We receive feedback and support from our leadership.	23%	53%	18%	3%	3%	76%	24%
	Change:	5%	-1%	-3%	-2%	2%	4%	-3%
2008-09	Elementary	26%	54%	15%	2%	3%	80%	20%
2008-09	Middle	19%	52%	21%	5%	3%	71%	29%
2008-09	High	20%	52%	21%	4%	2%	72%	27%
2008-09	Alternative	16%	54%	19%	3%	8%	70%	30%
2007-08	<i>My school celebrates team progress toward implementing our PLCs.</i>	17%	51%	24%	5%	2%	68%	31%
2008-09	My school celebrates team progress toward implementing our PLCs.	21%	50%	22%	4%	4%	71%	30%
	Change:	4%	-1%	-2%	-1%	2%	3%	-1%
2008-09	Elementary	21%	51%	21%	3%	4%	72%	28%
2008-09	Middle	18%	47%	25%	5%	4%	65%	34%
2008-09	High	22%	50%	20%	4%	4%	72%	28%
2008-09	Alternative	8%	54%	35%	3%	0%	62%	38%
2007-08	<i>My school celebrates team progress toward SMART goals.</i>	15%	48%	26%	5%	6%	63%	37%
2008-09	My school celebrates team progress toward SMART goals.	19%	48%	22%	3%	7%	67%	32%
	Change:	4%	0%	-4%	-2%	1%	4%	-5%
2008-09	Elementary	20%	50%	21%	3%	7%	70%	31%
2008-09	Middle	16%	45%	26%	4%	9%	61%	39%
2008-09	High	20%	49%	22%	4%	6%	69%	32%
2008-09	Alternative	8%	49%	35%	3%	6%	57%	44%

Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

In 2008-09, more than three-quarters (76%) of the survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they were receiving feedback and support from school leadership – up from 72% in 2007-08. Furthermore, the number of teachers who strongly agreed with the statement increased by five percentage points, moving from 18% in 2007-08 to 23% in 2008-09.

Results to this survey item were relatively consistent among different school levels, ranging between 70% and 80%. Elementary teachers were most likely to respond positively (80%), followed by high (72%), middle (71%), and alternative (70%) school teachers.

Figure 13
We Receive Feedback and Support from Leadership

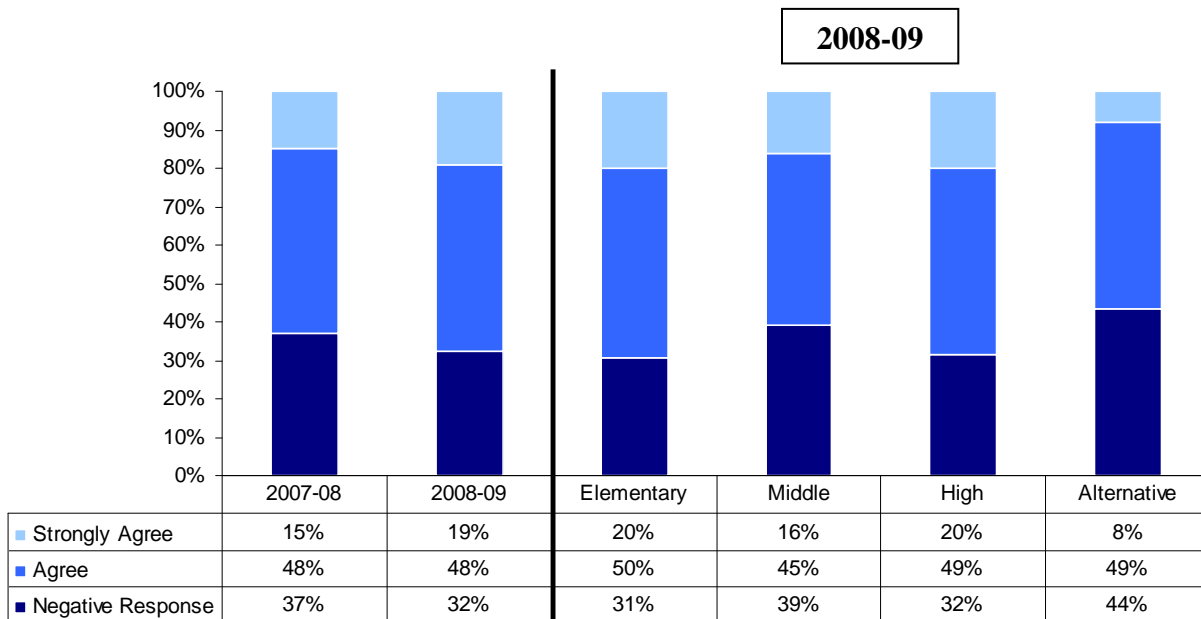


Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

In general, the survey items that asked about the celebration of progress towards the team’s PLC goals, and towards the school’s SMART goals, elicited less enthusiastic responses than items inquiring about the other themes – yet still remained positive. When asked, for example, whether the school was celebrating team progress toward PLC goals, 71% of the teachers gave a favorable response – a 3 percentage point increase from the year before.

Yet when asked whether the school celebrated progress towards SMART goals established for student achievement, 63% responded positively in 2007-08 and 67% did so in 2008-09 (see Figure 14). Note that elementary school teachers were the most likely to relate a positive response (70%), followed by high (69%), middle (61%), and alternative (57%) school teachers.

Figure 14
My School Celebrates Progress Toward SMART Goals



Data Source: WCPSS data analysis of High Five 2007-08 and 2008-09 PLC Surveys

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The PLC initiative represents a deep-seated cultural change in how school and central services staff operate (V. Langston, personal communication, March 20, 2009). The survey results presented in this report suggest that the district is making measureable progress towards its goal of full PLC implementation, as evidenced by the increase in positive responses and attitudes across all six survey themes. It is worth noting, however, that some themes returned a higher positive response rate than others (see Table 1). Conversely, the themes with relatively weaker positive response rates indicate where district improvement efforts should be focused in the coming months.

Three of the survey themes, for example, returned a positive agreement percentage ranging from 85% to 89%. More specifically, the vast majority (89%) of survey respondents expressed agreement with the survey items pertaining to collaborative cultures/team processes, which lie at the fundamental core of the PLC concept. Most survey respondents also expressed positive agreement with the statements concerning their focus on learning and teaching (87%) and, to a slightly lesser extent, instructional strategies/interventions (85%).

Moreover, three of the survey themes formed a secondary subset by returning a less-positive agreement percentage ranging from 71% to 81%. Speaking thematically, the strongest positive response rate in this second subset concerned the survey items pertaining to the use of common formative assessments (81%). This was followed by overall impact (79%), with support/resource allocation (71%) returning the lowest relative level of agreement. As discussed earlier, the survey data were particularly useful in identifying the areas where finite resources should be directed to move the PLC initiative forward.

Now that the High Five PLC survey has been deployed and analyzed for the second time, it is possible to examine the data over a two-year period and, albeit carefully, begin to look for trends that indicate the direction the district is moving. The biggest changes were in the areas of instructional strategies/interventions and support/resource allocation – with both themes showing a five percentage point increase in positive agreement over the course of one calendar year. The other themes showed more modest, yet noteworthy, improvements as well. The theme pertaining to overall impact returned an increase of three percentage points, whereas all other areas (focus on teaching and learning, collaborative cultures/team processes, and common formative assessments) increased by a modest two percentage points.

At the time of this report, the High Five Regional Partnership for High School Excellence is in the process of restructuring. Although many details of this transformation have yet to be decided, it is clear that the High Five consortium will continue to exist, and that a metrics committee will continue to support the administration and analysis of future PLC surveys. The Evaluation and Research Department of WCPSS will continue to monitor the status of PLC initiatives in the future, and analysts are currently studying how the PLC concept is being implemented throughout all divisions of central services.

It is important to note, however, that these survey results represent only a small piece of the larger picture. Although the results are encouraging, the PLC initiative will require a sustained effort to become the norm; if efforts to advance the PLC initiative are neglected by the district's

leadership, classroom teachers and other staff will likely revert to the “business as usual” instructional methodology. To prevent this from happening, the district has established a PLC Steering Committee to plan, monitor, and direct PLC activities so that the established momentum will not be lost. Additional PLC training sessions are being planned and developed; advanced training will be needed to guide veteran teachers working to improve the quality and utility of their PLC activities, and basic training in PLC fundamentals will be needed for new teachers joining the district.

Other central services staff members are working to develop PLC “toolkits” for the schools; these will contain resources such as videos, manuals, and possibly even a web-based PLC Implementation Matrix that could serve as a roadmap to guide PLC teams through the norming process. The school board has approved additional early release days that can be used for faculty training, as well as adjustments to the bell schedule so teachers will have a fixed time to collaborate on a weekly basis.

The leadership role of central services staff, as well as the role of school-based administrators, is critical to the success of the team-based learning concept (Peel, 2009). Consequently, the leadership of WCPSS remains committed to the implementation of PLCs as an essential, high-leverage strategy for improving the quality of academic instruction: the personal performance goals of the district’s superintendent, as well as the district’s chief academic officer, include PLC-related objectives to ensure that the initiative will continue to move forward in a timely manner.

REFERENCES

- DuFour, R., DuFour R., Eaker, R., & Many, T. (2007). *Learning by doing: A handbook for professional learning communities*. Bloomington, IN: Solution Tree.
- DuFour, R. & Eaker, R. (1998). *Professional learning communities at work: Best practices for enhancing student achievement*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- Honawar, V. (2008). Working smarter by working together. *Education Week*, 27(31), 25-27.
- Huffman, J.B., Hipp, K.A., Pankake, A.M., & Moller, G. (2001, September). Professional learning communities: Leadership, purposeful decision making, and job-embedded staff development. *Journal of School Leadership*, 11, 448-463.
- Langston, V. (2006). *What is a professional Learning Community?* Unpublished manuscript.
- Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team: A leadership fable*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Peel, J. (2009). *Building a team-based learning school district*. Unpublished manuscript.
- Phillips, J. (2003, Spring). Powerful learning: Creating learning communities in urban school reform. *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision*, 18(3), 240-258.
- Reichstetter, R. (2006). *Defining a professional learning community: A literature review*. Raleigh, NC: Wake County Public School System, Evaluation and Research Department.
- Reichstetter, R. (2008). *Wake county public school system professional learning communities: 2007-08 implementation status*. Raleigh, NC: Wake County Public School System, Evaluation and Research Department.
- Roberts, S.M. & Pruitt, E.Z. (2003). *Schools as professional learning communities: Collaborative activities and strategies for professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not understand.
	a. As a PLC, we have established norms (e.g., ground rules for team meetings including holding each other accountable for student learning) to clarify how we will work together as a team.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	b. As a PLC, we abide by the explicit team norms we developed.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	c. As a PLC, we use decision-making processes such as brain-storming, problem identification, consensus, and prioritization.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	d. As a PLC, we are able to be open and honest with each other about what we do well and not so well (e.g., in instruction, in teacher-student relationships, in teamship).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	e. As a PLC, we have a process to effectively resolve conflict.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	f. As a PLC, we document and monitor our PLC processes so that we can continue to improve.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	g. As a PLC, we systematically gather evidence about the impact of various instructional strategies on student learning.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

5. Instructional Strategies and Interventions

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not understand.
	a. As a PLC, we have made a conscious effort to align our instruction to achieve our essential learning outcomes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	b. As a PLC, we are identifying increasingly more effective instructional strategies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	c. As a PLC, we utilize those increasingly more effective instructional strategies that our team identifies.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	d. As a PLC, we utilize the school-wide intervention pyramid (sequence of required interventions).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	e. As a PLC, we require every student who has not yet mastered the essential learning outcomes to participate in additional learning opportunities every few weeks.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

6. Common Formative Assessments, Part I

		Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not understand.
	a. As a PLC, we have developed a variety of common formative assessments using different approaches (e.g., performance assessment, essays, tests, quizzes).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	b. As a PLC, we have aligned our common formative assessments to the essential learning outcomes.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	c. As a PLC, we examine the results of our common formative assessments to identify students who need additional learning opportunities (enrichment or re-teaching).	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
	d. As a PLC, we examine the results of our common formative assessments to determine which instructional practices are most effective in achieving student mastery.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

7. Common Formative Assessments, Part II

		About once every 3 weeks	About once every 6 weeks	About once a quarter	About once a semester	Not at all
	As a PLC, we usually administer common formative assessments with the following frequency:	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

8. Impact

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not understand.
a. I am a better teacher because of my work with my PLC.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. My students are learning more because of my work with my PLC.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. The PLC process has the potential to provide a more supportive environment for teachers.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
d. Time spent with my PLC will save me time overall.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

9. Support/Resource Allocation

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	I do not understand.
a. As a PLC, we receive feedback and support from leadership on our implementation of PLC concepts and practices.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
b. My school celebrates team progress toward the implementation of PLC concepts and practices.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
c. My school celebrates team progress toward SMART goals for student achievement.	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

10. Support/Resource Allocation - My PLC typically meets with the following frequency:

- None
- Daily
- Weekly
- Two times a month
- Monthly
- Quarterly

11. Support/Resource Allocation - The length of my typical PLC meeting is:

- Less than 30 minutes
- Between 30 minutes and an hour
- More than an hour

12. Support/Resource Allocation - My PLC typically meets at the following time:

(Mark all that apply.)

- Before school
- After school
- During the lunch period
- During a common planning period
- On workdays
- Other, please specify:

*** 13. Demographics**

a. Years of teaching experience (including current year):

- 1-2 years
- 3-4 years
- 5-10 years
- 11-20 years
- More than 20 years

*** 14. Demographics**

b. My main grade level assignment this year:

- K

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9-12
- Elementary specialist
- Middle grade specialist
- Other, Please specify:

*** 15. Demographics - Which of the following best fits your primary job responsibility?**

(Select one.)

- Regular Elementary Classroom Subjects
- Math
- Math and Science
- Science
- Language Arts / Reading / Writing / Literacy
- Language Arts and Social Studies
- Social Studies / History
- Career Technical Education
- Technology Education
- World Language / Foreign Language
- PE / Health
- Arts / Arts Education / Fine Arts
- Media / Library
- Special Education / Exceptional Education
- AIG (gifted) Teacher / Gifted Ed. Specialist
- Guidance / Counselor / Psychologist / Social Worker
- ESL / English as a Second Language
- Pre-K
- Other

*** 16. Demographics - Base school assignment for this year:**

17. Demographics - My hours of formal professional development that focused on PLC implementation (since September 2005):

	None	1-4 hours	5-8 hours	9-12 hours	13-16 hours	Over 16 hours
High Five sponsored	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
School district sponsored	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>