Lesson Preparation in Professional Learning Communities Guide

# Overview

This guide helps educators plan ongoing instruction in weekly or biweekly meetings of professional learning communities (PLCs). It is drawn from the practices at **Van Buskirk Elementary School** (AZ).

**Who this is for:** All staff involved in a professional learning community, including teachers, special education teachers, teachers of multilingual students, school leaders, and other school support staff (e.g., instructional coach or counselor).

**When to use it:** The tool is most effective when used regularly throughout the instructional cycle, starting from assessment review, backward planning, and preparation through to teaching/reteaching and a formative assessment.

**How to use it:** This is a flexible guide, not a rigid framework, and it should be tailored to the school context. This tool does not replace individual planning, summative data evaluation, and instructional decision making by teachers.

While the protocol addresses trends and gaps in aggregate data, it also empowers PLCs to use that data to plan for the unique needs of individual students or groups of students, ensuring a holistic approach to student growth and achievement.

# Best Practices

A powerful PLC meeting should build a shared understanding of student progress and equip educators to prepare instruction that meets the needs of all learners. If working with high-quality instructional materials (HQIM), teachers should draw from the content and assessments built in the curriculum to create a coherent experience for students. To use this tool well, consider the following best practices:

* **Assessment review:** In conjunction with the instructional materials and resources, teachers review the previous weeks’ formative assessments and look for patterns in student performance, focusing on topics that will be foundational for future student learning. Formative assessments extend beyond traditional quizzes and tests; they encompass a wide range of student work and engagement. These include student-generated solutions to problems, short-answer assignments, concept development tasks, and any activities where students invest substantial effort, providing valuable insights into their learning progress.
* **Lesson preparation:** Using the data, teachers collaboratively plan or review the sequence of lessons from their instructional materials for the upcoming week, identifying assignments that can be used to assess student learning in the next PLC meeting.
* **Plan for reteach and enrichment:** Using the previous week’s assessment data, teachers prepare or adjust lessons for the following week, focusing on content where students need additional practice to successfully engage with the upcoming content as well as enrichment opportunities for students who have already demonstrated proficiency. Use this data to tailor plans to the distinct needs of individual students or student groups**.**
* **Make an action plan:** Teachers capture any decisions made (like instructional strategies to try) and key dates (like when assessments will take place), so everyone knows where to focus in the week ahead.
* **Teach and reteach:** During the week, teachers implement the lessons planned in the PLC and reteach as needed. In individual planning time, they identify patterns in student performance to bring to the next PLC.

# Potential Outcomes

This tool will be most successful if there is already a foundation of trust and open communication among PLC members. Used well, it can help build teachers’ comfort with collaboration, data analysis, and ongoing reflection.

**Collaboration:** Powerful PLCs help shift the culture from individual planning to collective problem solving and instructional improvement. Teachers are encouraged to share ideas to address student learning needs.

**Data-driven decision making:** Weekly reflection helps build a culture of using data to inform instructional decisions. Teachers will actively analyze formative assessment results, identify trends, and proactively reteach if needed.

**Targeted instruction:** With regular data, teachers become more intentional about adjusting instruction to address identified challenge areas, ensuring more targeted support and differentiation for students.

# Lesson Planning Protocol

The protocol has two sections: (1) Tailoring the Protocol to Your School, and (2) PLC Meeting Protocol.

## 1. Tailoring the Protocol to Your School

It's important for schools and teachers to adapt the protocol to work for them. The key is to ensure that there are regular opportunities for assessing student progress, identifying assets and areas of need, and adjusting instruction accordingly.

Regardless of the school context, the best way to make PLC meetings productive is preparation. To make good use of meeting time, it’s essential that teachers come prepared with the materials and pre-work outlined in the protocol.

### High-Quality Instructional Materials

When using high-quality instructional materials, planning time can focus on adjusting and internalizing the content rather than scoping the lessons themselves. Supports for diverse learners are built directly into the curriculum.

Teachers should build a nuanced understanding of texts, questions, objectives, vocabulary, exemplar responses, pacing, and supports for diverse learners. During PLC meetings, they can collectively explore the intricacies of the curriculum, identify potential challenges, and select which of the provided supports and assessments to use.

### Assessment Frequency

Here are some options for schools that do not conduct weekly formative assessments or for classes that do not meet every day, such as those in middle school or high school.

* **Use existing data sources.** Teachers can use other data sources, such as previous assignments, tests, or projects, to gather information about student progress and identify areas of improvement.
* **Focus on mastery.** Teachers can adapt the protocol to prioritize mastery of key skills or concepts over a longer time frame. This approach allows for more flexibility in scheduling assessments.

### PLC Participants

Schools may choose to include school leaders and specialists in PLCs, as well as teachers outside of tested grades and subjects. These additional participants may choose to attend PLCs of the grade levels that need additional support. For more experienced grade levels, they offer less support but check in with them periodically. Additionally, it's important to consider participants from other groups that may be involved, such as coaches, leaders, counselors, paraprofessionals, and more.

**Multilingual learner** teachers bring a wealth of knowledge in language development and culturally responsive instruction. They offer insights into language flexibility during instruction; asset-based pedagogy; and language learning targets, helping teachers tailor instructional strategies to meet the diverse needs of multilingual students.

**Special education** teachers play a pivotal role in understanding the unique learning profiles and needs of students with disabilities. Their expertise in individualized education plans and differentiated instruction helps teachers design targeted interventions and accommodations to support students with special needs and beyond. Consistent participation is key to supporting the needs of students through the PLC.

**Related arts teachers** can participate in the PLC to integrate academic content in their subjects. For example, in Van Buskirk Elementary, after the music teacher collaborates with her peers in the PLC, students in her class edit and revise papers and connect fractions to musical notes. This interdisciplinary approach helps to foster a love of learning.

Include diverse stakeholders in the PLC beyond traditional roles to enrich discussions and support students effectively. Ensure consistent participation from relevant individuals to meet student needs comprehensively.

### Scaffolding by Experience

The level of support school leaders provide during PLCs varies based on the teachers’ experience and needs.

**Novice teams** require more assistance in creating formative assessments and analyzing the data. School leaders should ask questions such as “What are students going to learn?” and “What do they need to learn?” to help teachers deepen their understanding of the curriculum standards.

**Experienced teams** may need support to integrate the curriculum, plot their week, and analyze student work and data. One effective strategy includes asking what students have demonstrated they can do based on the assessment data and how the teams will leverage those assets to close students' gaps.

## 2. PLC Meeting Protocol

**Grade Level:**

**Date:**

**Additional Participants:**

### Pre-meeting Preparation

To make good use of PLC meeting time, it’s essential that all teachers come prepared with the materials and pre-work outlined below.

* **Past week’s assessments:** Collect formative assessments from the previous week. Keep the data organized in a format that allows for easy comparison and identification of trends.
* **Analysis of trends and patterns:** In advance of the meeting, each teacher should review the data from their previous week’s formative assessments and look for patterns and trends in student performance.
* **Next week’s curriculum:** If working with high-quality instructional materials, review the upcoming week’s lessons, specifically the content, objectives, and standards outlined.
* **Next week’s assessments:** If needed, create the formative assessment for the upcoming week.

### Meeting Protocol (Suggested Timing: 60 minutes)

#### Welcome and Purpose (5 min)

The facilitator welcomes all participants and reiterates the purpose of the PLC: to improve instruction and student achievement. Try to set a tone that encourages participation and collaboration.

**Assessment Review and Reflection (15 min)**

Using the note-taking template provided below, review the following:

* **Student responses:** Review specific student responses to understand individual student needs.
* **Growth and success:** Identify the trends in wins. Where were students successful? What contributed to that success? Celebrate wins and think about how to use them to tackle the areas for improvement.
* **Areas of improvement:** Identify the trends in challenges. It can get overwhelming to tackle every misconception or opportunity. Focus on topics that will be foundational for future student learning.

Discussion prompts:

* Are there patterns in the misconceptions or difficulties seen?
* Did our previous week prioritize learning acceleration and focus on the highest-leverage content?
* What might I need to reemphasize, and does it reoccur in an upcoming unit or lesson?

If not, when and to whom should I consider building in a reteach to accelerate their learning?

**Backward Planning: Designing the Instructional Sequence (15 min)**

If working with HQIM, teachers should draw from the content, assessments, and reteach or enrichment strategies built into the curriculum to create a coherent experience for students.

* **Analyze.** Review the upcoming lessons to have a clear vision of what the grade-level expectations look like. Review the assessment methods within the HQIM to understand how success will be measured for the following week. What formative assessment methods will provide the most accurate measurement of student progress toward the desired outcomes?
* **Identify prerequisite skills.** Review the student misconceptions from the past week. Are they prerequisites for accessing the current content? Are there other prerequisite skills, knowledge, and concepts? First, check whether the curriculum provides these acceleration supports. If not, identify how you’ll provide them.
* **Plan the instructional sequence.** Working together, internalize the sequence of lessons for the upcoming week, starting from Monday until the next formative assessment. What instructional strategies and resources can I use to address the challenge areas identified in the assessment data? How can I differentiate instruction to meet the unique needs of each student in my class?

**Review and align the formative assessment.** If using HQIM, review the formative assessment for the upcoming week. HQIM assessments are meticulously designed to align with the curriculum and instructional goals. Research indicates that, whenever possible, teachers should rely on these assessments rather than creating separate ones. However, if the assessment is not curriculum-based, engage in a collaborative discussion within the team to ensure its alignment with the established goals, objectives, and areas of concern identified during the data analysis.

**Planning for Reteach and Enrichment (15 min)**

Using the data, teachers plan scaffolds that help students grasp the highest-leverage content that needs to be reviewed “just in time” in an existing lesson (this [acceleration approach](https://tntp.org/publication/accelerate-dont-remediate/) helps students access grade-level content.) Teachers also plan enrichment opportunities for students who have demonstrated proficiency. If the HQIM provides the reteaching opportunities already, deprioritize that knowledge or concept.

* **Select instructional strategies.** Select ones to address the identified areas of opportunities (e.g., differentiated instruction, hands-on activities, small-group supports). Consider the following:
	+ What instructional strategies have proven effective in addressing similar challenges in the past?
	+ Are there any additional resources that could enhance the reteach sequence?
	+ Does the reteach sequence align with the learning objectives and rigor of the curriculum?

**Discuss enrichment strategies**: For students who have already demonstrated proficiency, consider advanced projects, research assignments, or opportunities for creative application of knowledge.

**Action Plan (10 min)**

At the end, ensure that the key action items and responsibilities are summarized and communicated to each teacher. This includes specific tasks, instructional strategies, and any resources or materials to be used.

* **Assign responsibilities.** Assign responsibilities to each teacher based on their expertise and strengths.

**Confirm dates.** Clarify any upcoming deadlines or important dates, such as when specific reteach or enrichment lessons will take place, when assessments will be administered, or when progress checks will occur.

# PLC Lesson Planning: In Action

This is a fictional composite of a PLC meeting in Van Buskirk Elementary School.

## Background

The fifth-grade math team is a mix of novice and experienced teachers. They are comfortable in the classroom but still relatively new to analyzing data and coming up with next steps on instruction. The campus leadership team makes it a point to attend their PLC meetings to offer guidance and support.

## Participants

* Ms. Alvarez, the school’s instructional coach
* Three fifth-grade math teachers
* The school’s music teacher, who attends most PLCs as an observer and a collaborator

## Welcome and Purpose

Ms. Alvarez reinforces that the purpose of their PLC is to improve instruction and student achievement. They are coming together to share ideas, analyze data, and support each other in their professional growth. The fifth-grade team works well together, and the meeting culture emphasizes collaboration.

## Assessment Review and Reflection

Together they analyze the most missed questions and ask themselves when they taught students how to solve those questions. Several students had difficulty understanding the role of the denominator when working with factions. Next, they look at individual student work samples to pinpoint misconceptions: adding fractions with unlike denominators, multiplying fractions, converting fractions to decimals, and understanding equivalent fractions.

## Backward Planning: Designing the Instructional Sequence

To address these areas, they review next week’s learning objectives from their curriculum materials. Knowing that they need to provide another opportunity with multiplying fractions so that students can access the content for that week, they add an additional learning objective to the week’s plan since one does not exist within their HQIM. Then they review next week’s draft formative assessment, which is focused on learning objectives for the coming week, and add a question on multiplying fractions to capture the previous week’s learning gaps.

## Planning for Reteach and Enrichment

Next, they plan a reteach sequence of scaffolds for the highest-leverage content that needs to be reviewed “just in time” in an existing lesson so that students can access grade-level content. They choose instructional strategies, such as incorporating visual representations like fraction strips or word problems with real-life examples of fraction use. The math teachers share relevant resources with each other, like manipulatives, that could reinforce the tricky concepts.

For students who have already mastered fractions, the team discusses enrichment activities like project-based learning (for example, using fractions to design a cityscape or menu) and additional practice problems with more complex tasks. The music teacher offers to support reteaching by using musical notes to connect with fractions.

## Action Plan

The PLC meeting wraps up with a discussion of action items and responsibilities. Each teacher is assigned specific tasks related to reteaching lessons and enrichment activities.

During the week, teachers use short quizzes and class discussions to gauge students’ understanding. The hands-on activity and visual presentation help students grasp the concepts. In next week’s PLC, teachers will share those reflections and make a note to use them in the future.

Ms. Alvarez checks in with each of the teachers throughout the week to offer support. The principal reads the PLC notes and goals written by Ms. Alvarez and also checks in on progress during her weekly walk-throughs.

PLC Meeting Note-Taking Template

**Grade Level:**

**Date:**

**Additional Participants:**

## Meeting Notes

Assessment Review and Reflection

* Student Responses:
* Growth and Success:
* Areas of Improvement:

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