

Building and Sustaining PLCs: Creating Healthy Learning Environments for All Students

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What is a PLC?

“A Professional Learning Community is a group of educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research in order to achieve better results for the students they serve. PLC’s operate under the assumption that the **key** to improved learning for **students** is continuous, job-embedded learning for **educators**”

DuFour, et. al, 2006

Three Big Ideas

- Ensuring that Students Learn
- Collaborative Culture
- Focus on Results

Six Characteristics

- Shared Mission, Vision, Values, and Goals
- Collective Inquiry
- Collaborative Culture
- Action Orientation and Experimentation
- Continuous Improvement
- Focus on Results

Reflection

- Rate your current level of effectiveness in each one on the six characteristics of a PLC using a Likert scale of 1-5, with 1 being ineffective and 5 being very effective.
- Discuss how you can improve the two weakest areas of performance for the 2012-2013 school year

What Results Matter?

LEARNING

- What do we want students to learn?
- How do we know if they have learned?
- How do we respond when students do not learn?
- How do we respond when students have learned?

Two Forms of Change in a PLC

- Technical
- Cultural

Technical Change

- Technical changes are changes in learning tools/structure
 1. Collaborative time
 2. Common assessments
 3. Data
 4. Educational Technology
 5. Support Classes

Common Misconceptions about Technical Changes

- Changing the structure will lead to higher levels of learning (“Rearranging the seats on the Titanic”)
- Technical changes make up for poor instruction or unprofessionalism
- Technical changes will “fix” kids or “fix” schools which are broken (i.e. dress codes, longer school day)

Two Forms of Change in a PLC

- Technical
- Cultural

School Culture

“School culture is the set of norms, values, and beliefs, rituals and ceremonies, symbols and stories that make up the ‘persona’ of the school”

Kent Peterson (2002)

Apprenticeship of Observation

- Educators have been socialized in their field since childhood and adopt the norms
- The average educator was a good student
- Educators subconsciously protect a system that was of personal benefit
- Educators implement practices that protect the system (academic obstacle course)

(Lortie, *Schoolteacher: A Sociological Study*, 1975)

Predetermination

- Perceptual (Everything is relative)
- Intrinsic (Victims remain victims)
- Institutional

How would our society respond if the Achievement Gap were reversed?

“Healthy” School Culture

“Educators have an unwavering belief in the ability of all of their students to achieve success, and they pass that belief on to others in overt and covert ways.

Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the ability of every student.”

Kent Peterson (2002)

“Toxic” School Culture

“Educators believe that student success is based upon students’ level of concern, attentiveness, prior knowledge, and willingness to comply with the demands of the school, and they articulate that belief in overt and covert ways. Educators create policies and procedures and adopt practices that support their belief in the impossibility of universal achievement.”

Kent Peterson (2002)

“Frustration” – The Root of a Toxic Culture

Frustration = “A feeling of anxiety as the result of the inability to perform a task”

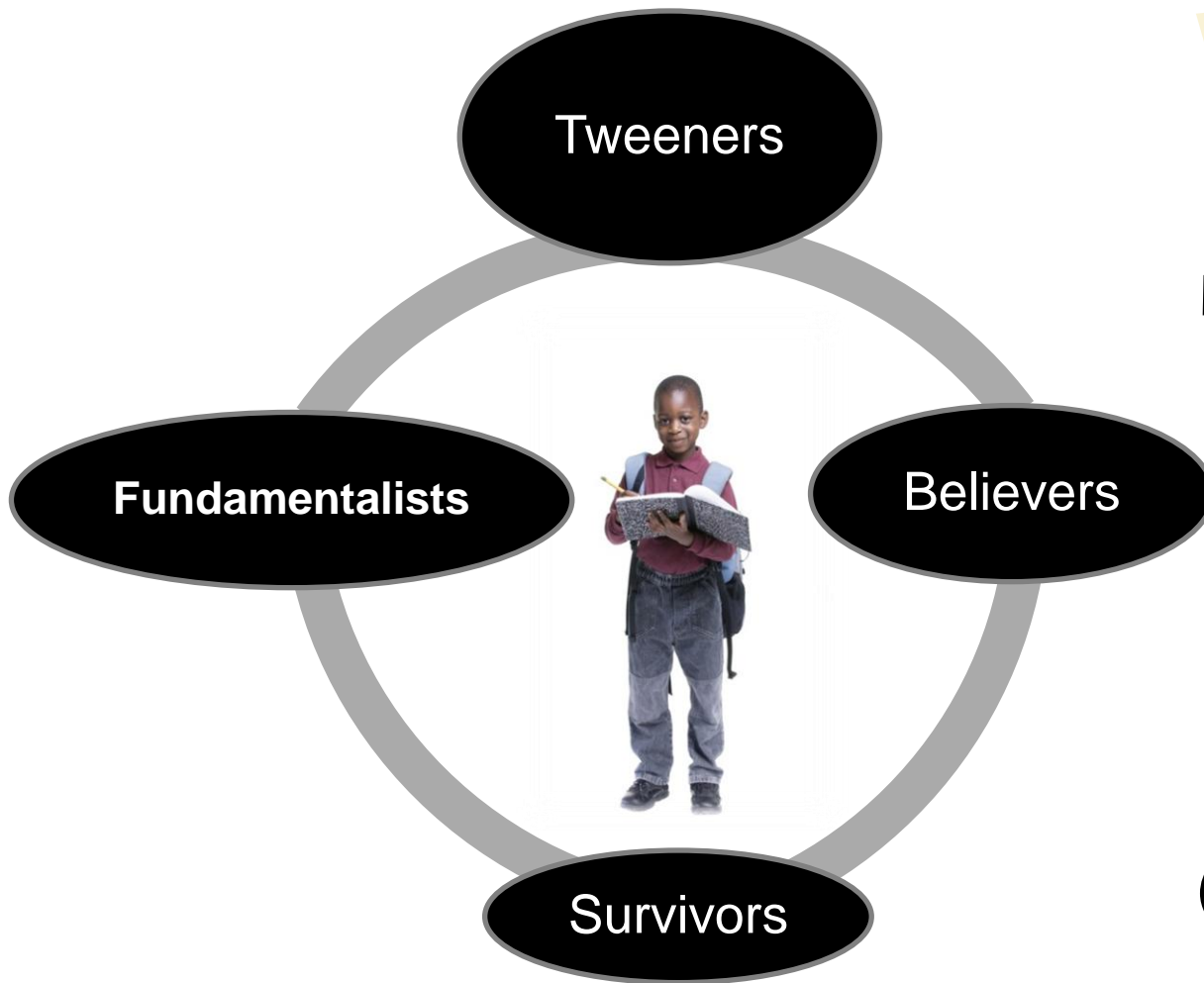
- A mismatch between skill set and task
- Causes people to deflect blame onto others and create covert alliances with people experiencing similar struggle

***Good to Great*, Jim Collins**

What do great corporations/organizations do differently than good/average organizations?

1. They seek and confront the “brutal facts”
2. They get the right people on the “bus” and sit them in the “right seats”

The Quandary



(Muhammad, 2009)

Two Underlying Assumptions in a PLC

- All Children Can Learn
- All Children Will Learn Because of What We Do

(All children DO learn, they just do not always learn what we want them to learn)

Cultural Wars (School Crusades)

- The ***Believers***
- The ***Tweeners***
- The ***Survivors***
- The ***Fundamentalists***

Fundamentalist Activity

Strong

- Informal Organization
- Emotional Realm

Weak

- Formal Organization
- Rational Realm

Control of Language

Believers

- Focus on problem and **problem solving**
- Pragmatic discussions stay within the locus of control

Fundamentalists

- Focus on personal affect of the problem and constant, **emotionally-charged description of the problem**
- Emotional discussions lie outside of the locus of control

The Real Difference

Believers

- Goal: Success for Every Student
- Accepts that change (the right change) is necessary to improve student performance
- Student interest is more important than personal interest (Public Servant)

Fundamentalists

- Goal: Maintain Status Quo
- Rejects any substantive change if it clashes with personal agenda
- Self-interest is more important than student interest (Self Servant)

The Clash

Fundamentalists
(need for
stability/predictability)

The diagram consists of two large, blue, 3D-style arrows pointing towards each other, meeting at a central point. The arrow on the left points right, and the arrow on the right points left. Each arrow contains white text. The overall effect is one of tension or conflict between the two opposing views.

School Improvement
(need to change to
meet organizational
goals)

Fundamentalist

Change Is Not Easy

“Drop Your Tools” Research

- People persist when they are given no clear reason to change (Level 1).
- People persist when they do not trust the person who tells them to change (Level 2).
- People persist when they view the alternative as more frightening (Level 3).
- To change may mean admitting failure (Level 4).

(Maclean, *Young Men and Fire*, 1992)

How Do We Respond?

- **Level 1** Make a clear case for change.
- **Level 2** Develop relationships, do not ostracize.
- **Level 3** Increase capacity and consider the context.
- **Level 4** Monitor strongly.

The Task at Hand

“If schools are to be transformed into learning communities, educators must be prepared first of all to acknowledge that the traditional guiding model of education is no longer relevant in a post-industrial, knowledge-based society. Second, they must embrace ideas and assumptions that are radically different than those that have guided schools in the past.”

DuFour & Eaker, *Professional Learning Communities at Work* (1998), p. 34

Reflection

- Assess your current reality as relates to the two cultural assumptions mandatory for building a high-performing PLC.
- What actions steps can you take next year to get everyone moving in the same direction for the 2012-2013 school year?

Part II

Practical Application of the Concepts: Building a PLC from the Ground Up

First Steps

- Establishing Professionalism
- Collective Inquiry
- Establishing Shared Mission and Vision
- Developing a Culture of Collaboration

Teacher Curriculum

- Review Critical Data
- Choose Goals (No more than four/five)
- Identify best literature/research that helps increase staff ability to meet goals
- Develop study questions that applies the research to school's current reality
- Prepare study guide for teachers and pace their curriculum for the entire school year

SMART Goals

S – Strategic/Specific

M – Measurable

A – Attainable

R – Results-Oriented

T – Time bound

Learning Centers

- Use staff meetings as “learning centers”, not for announcements and trivia
- Make sure that study sessions are used to find solutions for your problems, not for complaints about the current state of your school.
- Be prepared to answer the nay Sayers
- Tie the information learned in your book studies to the vision for the school
- Suggested Reading: *Nothing's Impossible*, Lorraine Monroe, *Turning Points 2000*, Anthony Jackson, *Getting Started*, Eaker, DuFour and DuFour, *Transforming Schools*, Zmuda and Kuklis

Reflection

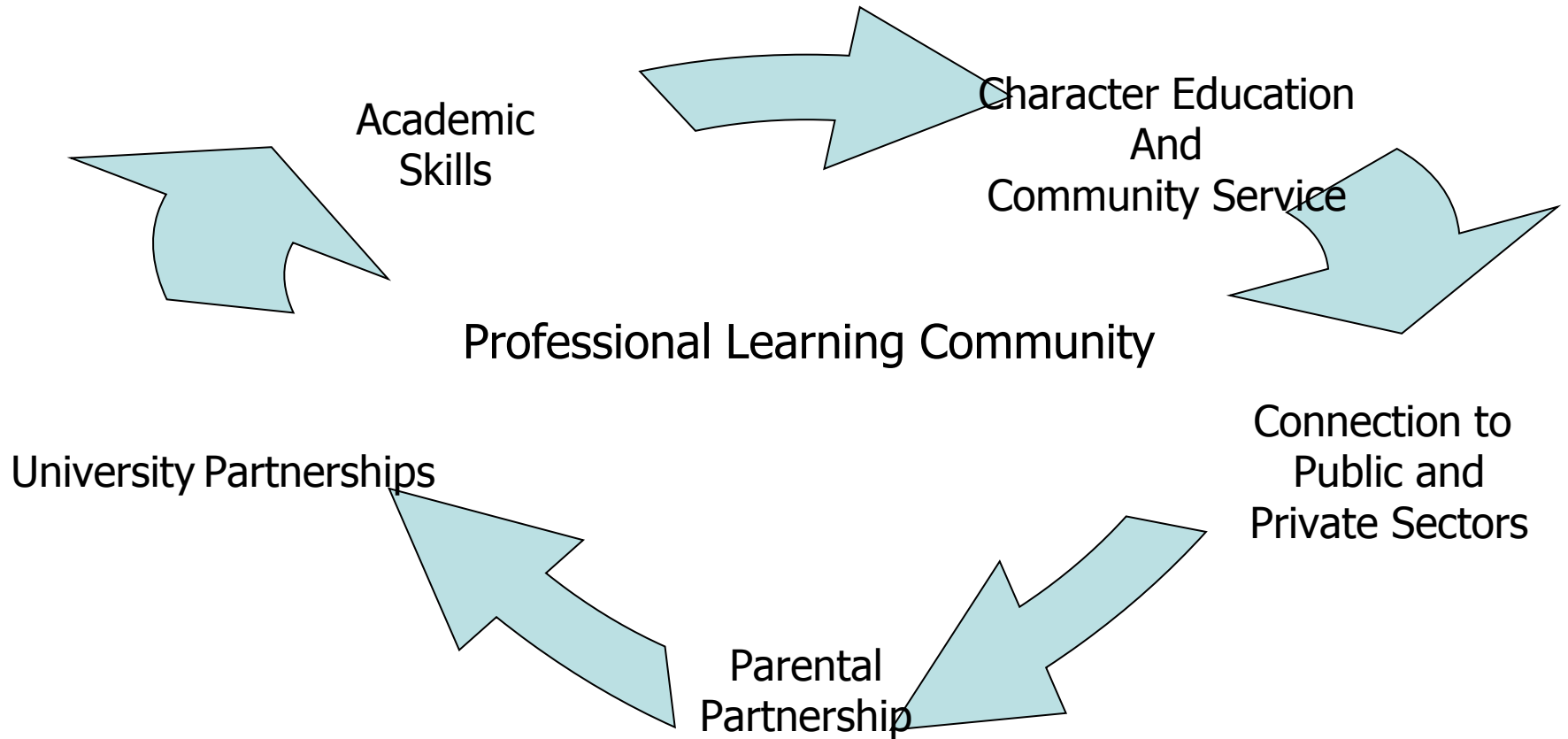
- What is your current system of support for teacher learning?
- Brainstorm ways that your school could possibly institutionalize a system of learning for educators.

Shared Mission and Shared Vision

- Developed school mission statement – ***“We will work collaboratively to ensure that each student will be prepared for post-secondary education.”***
- Vision – ***New Frontier 21***

New Frontier 21 School

A Fresh Approach



Nine Core Beliefs

1. Schools are places built for the education of children, not for adult employment.
2. Schools play a major role in the future life success of students and their community.
3. Education is a profession, and educators should conduct themselves as professionals.
4. Education is a mission, and educators should conduct themselves as missionaries.
5. Schools are a communities' most precious institution, and they have the power to transform a community.
6. Children are at the center of everything that we do, and our practice should reflect their best interest.
7. We believe that schools must partner with other members of the community in order for the educational experience to be optimal.
8. We believe that character is important and that schools can help shape a child's character.
9. We believe that service to the community is important and that it is essential in a democratic society.

Developing Mission

- Who are your students?
- What are the areas where their lives could be enhanced through education?
- What will you collectively commit to focus on in order to enhance their lives?
- Mission must have a **SERVICE ORIENTATION!**

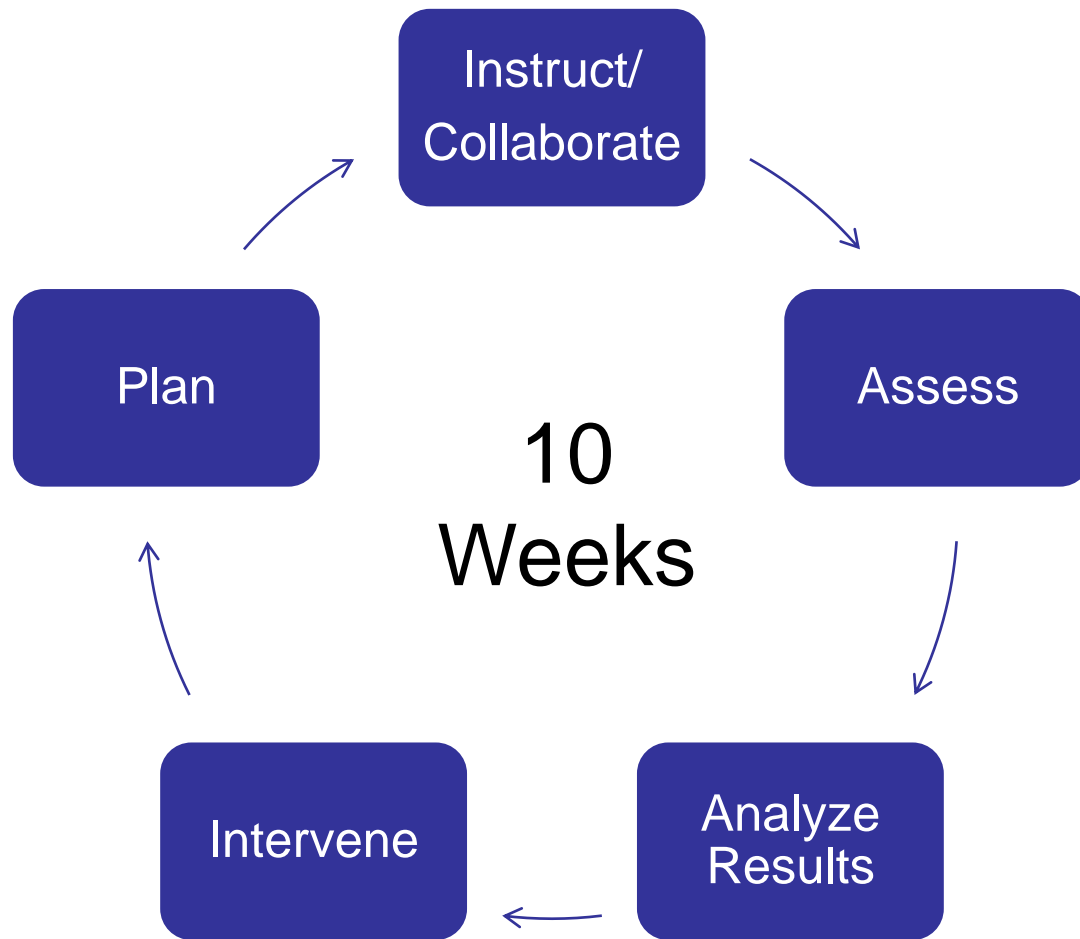
Reflection

- Please review your mission and vision
- How are they being currently used?
- Do you need to revisit them and how would you accomplish this logistically?

Year #2

- Aligning Curriculum
- Developing Common Formative Assessments
- Culture of Collaboration
- Pyramid of Interventions

Levey “10 Week Cycle”



What do we want students to know?

- Identify “Essential Standards/Outcomes”
- Pace them per quarter
- Identify instructional material necessary to ensure mastery of standards by the students

Reflection

- How does your school currently answer the question, “What do we want students to learn?”
- Is it systematic or random?
- How often do teachers get an opportunity to develop shared understanding of the curriculum?

How do we know if they have learned?

- Develop common formative assessments
- Common assessments measure if students can performed the desired tasks
- Common assessments should be given at least each quarter in each core subject matter
- Common assessments should not exceed 25 questions
- Assessments should be developed by the teachers that teach the content
- Assessment questions should be similar to the modality used on the state assessment

Reflection

- How does your school currently assess student learning?
- Who creates the assessments?
- Is it random or systematic?
- What do educators in your school do with the results?

Collaborative Culture

- Develop teams
- Organize team structure and collaboration
- Find time in schedule and make collaboration a priority
- Develop protocol and guidance for teams
- Collaboration must yield results

Exploring the Assessment Data

Pre-question before moving to Question #3

“How do we respond when students do not learn?”

Ask:

Why didn't they learn?

“Levey Student Learning Survey”

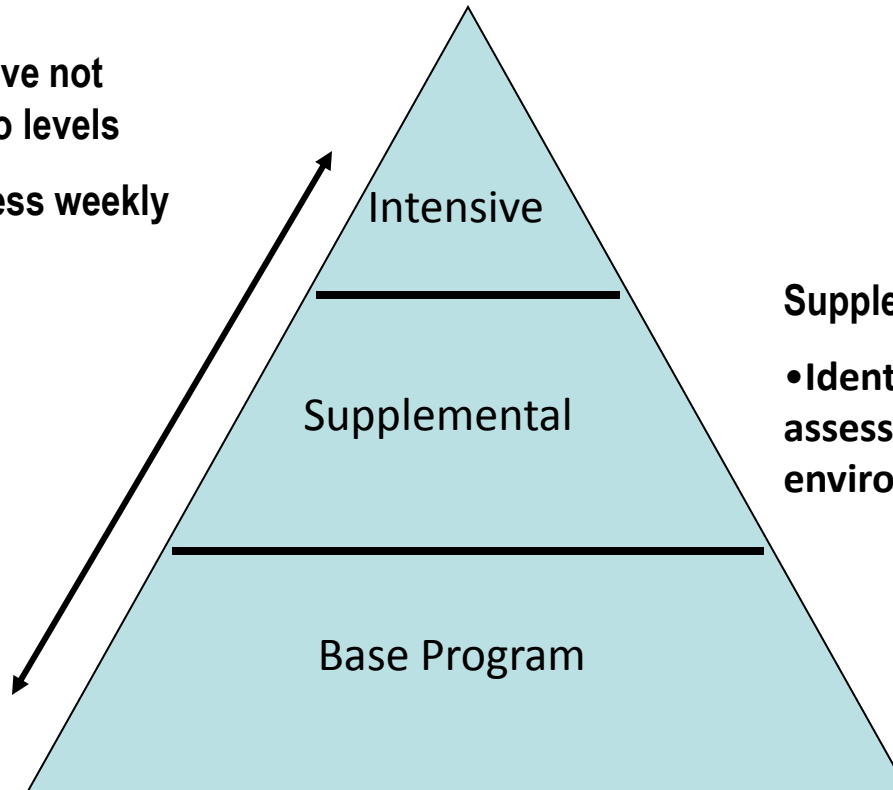
Effective Intervention Criteria

- Timely
- Mandatory
- Directive

Pyramid of Intervention

Intensive Support

- For students who have not responded to first two levels
- Track student progress weekly



Supplemental Instruction and Support

- Identify students with common assessment data, grades, and environment data

Base Program—

- For all students
- Daily best practice
- Should address the needs of at least 75% of your students.

Pyramid of Intervention

What do we do when students do not learn?

- Homework lunch
- In-school tutors
- Student Support Specialist
- After-school tutoring
- Student Success Plan
- Title 1 Summer Institute
- University Summer Program
- ??????????????

Discussion

- What do you currently offer at Tier 1?
- What do you currently offer at Tier 2?
- What do you currently offer at Tier 3?
- What's working at what needs to be improved?

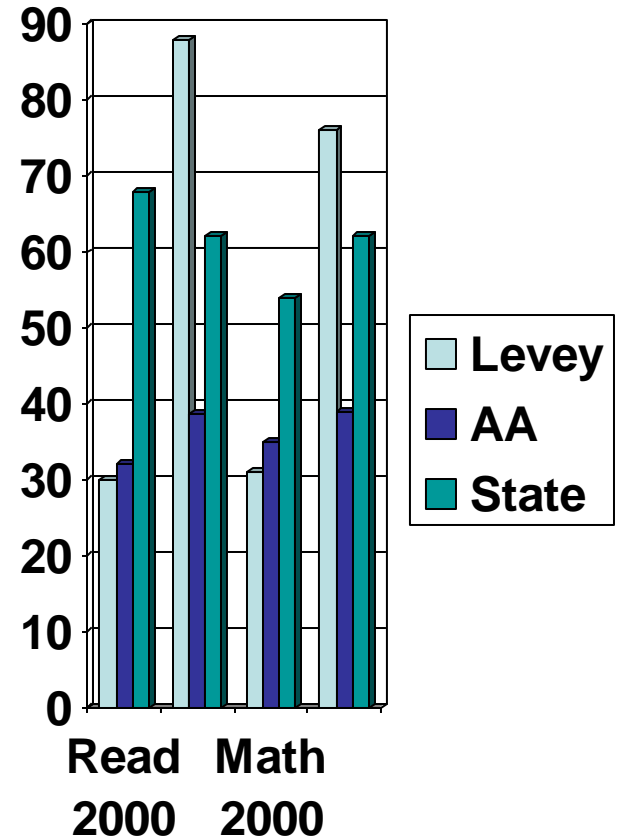
Levey Results

Reading

- 2000 – 30% Proficient (State Avg. 68%)
- 2006 – 88% Proficient (State Avg. 62%)

Math

- 2000 – 31% Proficient (State Avg. 54%)
- 2006 – 81% Proficient (State Avg. 62%)



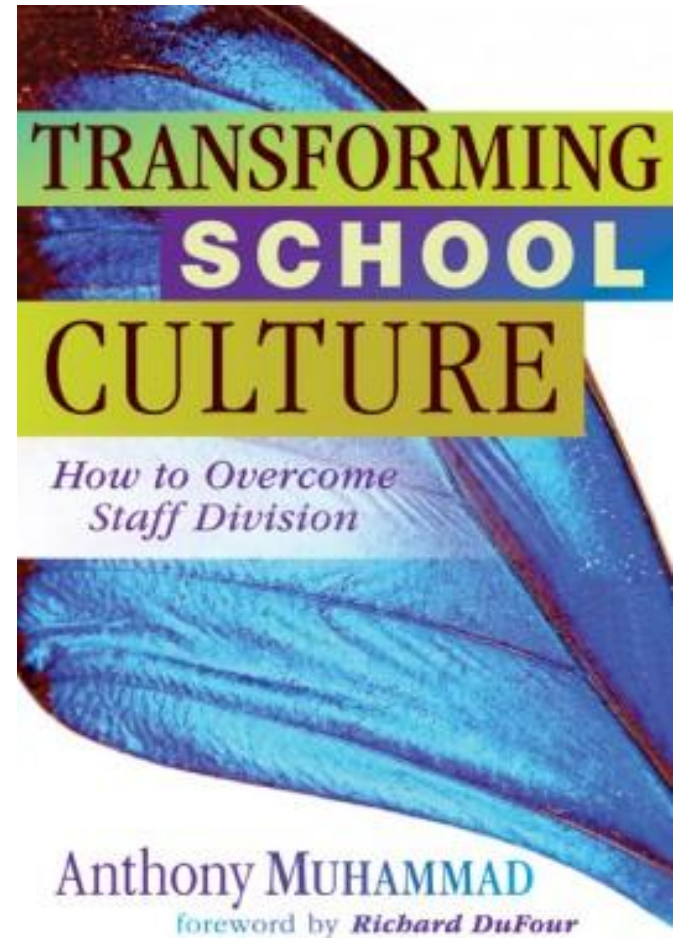
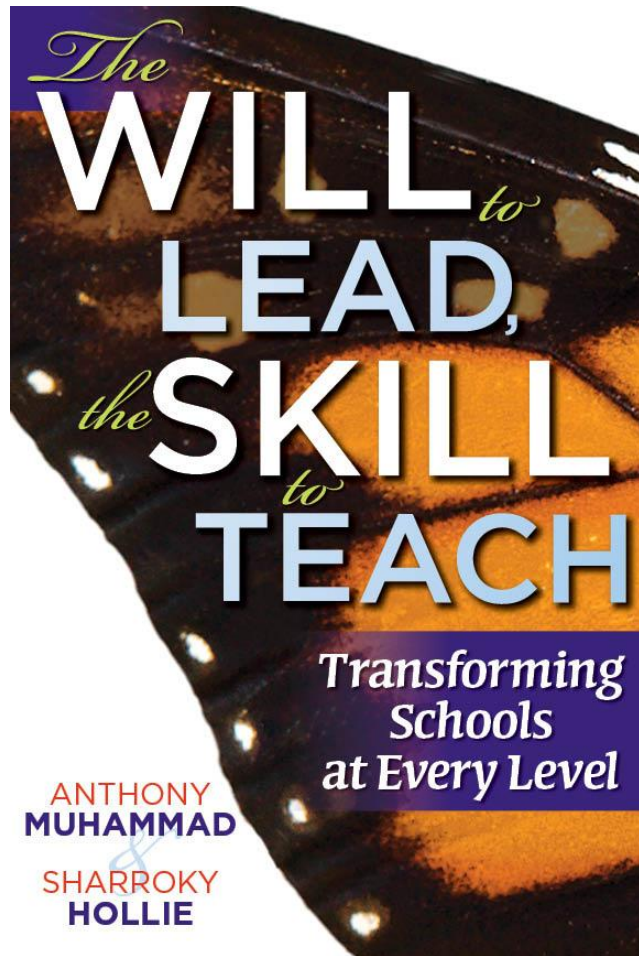
Other Levey Victories

- Named a National Blue Ribbon School
- Chosen as a NASA Explorer School in 2005
- 2005-2006 school year, 0 students failed one or more academic classes, down from 150 in 2001
- 2005-2006 school year, 62 student suspensions, down from over 3000 during the 2000-2001 school year
- 52% of Levey students are on the honor roll
- 18 charitable student service learning projects completed during the 2005-2006 school year
- Trailblazing “Hip-Hop” class that links literacy to pop culture
- Business course and student run store offered for students in grades 6, 7, and 8 – **“The Levey Dollar Store”**

Next Steps

- After participating in today's session, what are your next steps?
- Identify three specific SMART goals and put into action between now and our session in the Spring?
- Be prepared to share and critically analyze your experiments in the Spring and bring supporting documentation and/or data

Two Must-Reads for Follow-Up



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