



Birth-to-College

COLLABORATIVE TOOLKIT

How do school and program leaders prepare to implement professional learning communities within a birth-to-college approach to alignment?

Action Plan for Implementation for School and Program Leaders: Installation

HOW TO USE THE ACTION PLAN

An action plan accompanies each Birth-to-College (BTC) Implementation Guide for school and program leaders. This tool is intended to provide a place to document your school's process of exploring, installing, and implementing birth through 3rd grade alignment. Ideally, this tool is to be used in a group setting such as an alignment leadership team meeting. To use the action plan, first identify up to five (5) priorities out of the key decisions and strategies for implementation listed below for which you and your colleagues would like to focus. Once you have identified priorities, follow the instructions on page 5 for completing the action plan.

KEY DECISIONS AND STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- **Explore the Six Principles of PLC Success:** Using research and case studies on learning communities, T.G. Carroll, K. Fulton and H. Doerr identified six principles for success in PLCs. These six principles guided the formation of the six BTC PLCs as well as the underlying logic model of the BTC Collaborative. In a similar way, these principles should help leaders create the foundation for viable, vibrant BTC PLCs.
 - *Shared Values and Goals:* PLC members “should have a shared vision of the capabilities of students and teachers.” Essentially, PLC members should explore similarities and differences in their beliefs, mindsets and practical approaches to teaching and learning in service of improving student outcomes and their own teaching practices.
 - *Collective Responsibility:* All members are responsible for the functioning of the group, and individual roles are defined by experience and knowledge and agreed on by the team. Team members must hold one another accountable for improving student achievement and family engagement.
 - *Authentic Assessment:* A primary focus of PLCs can be to assess teaching effectiveness and student achievement. Assessments and data provide means of accountability for student and family progress and should drive continuous quality improvement and alignment efforts by the PLC.
 - *Self-Directed Reflection:* PLC members will benefit from reflection, especially those that relate “the [goals], planning, standards, and evaluation” of one’s own practice to the work of the PLC. Moreover, reflection allows PLC members to think about how their own work relates directly to the overarching mission and vision of the partnership, as well as the strategic plan for alignment across early childhood education and K–12 schools. Set aside time for reflection at the end of each meeting.

- *Stable Settings*: Effective teams need structural supports in place to be effective. For example, PLCs should meet regularly and frequently in a space conducive to collaboration. Having a set meeting time and place ensures meetings begin and end on time and provides members with a sense of stability.
- *Strong Leadership Support*: School leaders should provide positive support and clear expectations for PLC members to promote the development of relational trust within and across organizations and to encourage informed risk taking in learning and practice. Carroll and colleagues suggest a “climate of openness and trust in the school,” which empowers team members to focus energy on addressing student needs and enhancing family engagement.
- **Assess Feasibility for BTC PLCs**: Based on these principles and the direction offered in this guide, leaders must determine whether or not PLCs are an appropriate form of professional development for their schools or programs to consider in efforts toward alignment. As the authors have noted, PLCs are a dynamic form of job-embedded professional development that have been shown to dramatically improve both classroom practices and student and family outcomes. However, there are layers of logistical challenge that have the potential to derail efforts to align professional development across multiple schools and programs using PLCs. These challenges may be just too great. Therefore, PLCs may not be an appropriate alignment tool for coordinating professional development activities across schools and programs. In this case, there are other options for aligned, job-embedded professional development. Examples of such options include (1) case discussions, (2) communities of practice with either lectures from experts and/or discussions around pertinent topics relating to shared school improvement and alignment goals, (3) implementing individual growth/learning plans, (4) portfolios and (5) study groups.

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- **Establish BTC PLC Meeting Time**: Create a realistic meeting schedule for individual PLCs based on each organization’s unique circumstances (e.g., context, schedule restrictions and other commitments), bearing in mind that PLCs that meet during the contractual workday, not necessarily during the instructional day, have been shown to be the most effective. Moreover, “if collaboration—focused on learning—is to become part of the routine work of educators, [then] time during the workday and workweek must be provided and protected.”
- **Define the Content Areas of PLCs**: Leaders should take an active role in defining the scope of PLCs. Content areas (e.g., language and literacy, mathematics, family support and engagement) should be informed not only by individual school priorities and data across children, families and staff but also by cross-organizational discussions among school leaders on the BTC Alignment Leadership Team identifying mutual areas for improvement. All content areas or problems of practice addressed by BTC PLCs should be applicable across the age range/grade level of staff represented.

- **Form PLCs:** There are four primary points of consideration for forming PLCs. First, consider the size of your PLCs. Groups of 8 to 12 people are recommended to strike a balance between all voices being heard and efficiency of collaborative work. Second, determine what staff roles and disciplines may be included. Interdisciplinary groups comprising teaching, family engagement, social work, special education or other adjunct educational fields ensure a variety of perspectives but may make it more difficult to apply PLC learning to everyone’s practice. Third, ensure that your PLCs are representative in terms of the ages and grade levels that make up the schools and programs within your partnership. Fourth, establish how staff members will be assigned to PLCs. For example, assignments should be influenced not only by preferences but also the knowledge, expertise and day-to-day work of staff members.

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- **Select PLC Leaders:** PLCs benefit from having leaders among their group whom members can look to for ultimate accountability and guidance. Consider co-leaders, one from each of your partner schools, so that members in each school know whom to look toward and ask questions of, and to ensure that each school’s philosophies, practices and contexts will be represented and jointly shape BTC PLC learning. When identifying potential co-leaders, disposition may be more important than prior leadership experience. For example, ideal candidates should open to (1) learning new things, (2) taking moderate risks, (3) solving problems, (4) communicating effectively both verbally and in writing and (5) putting themselves “out there” as a voice and facilitator for their peers. Moreover, ideal candidates should not only be accountable, responsive and responsible but also have the interest, capacity and time to function in this role. Therefore, newer teachers may not be the best choice.
- **Define the Expectations and Responsibilities of PLC Co-Leaders and Members:** Collaborate with partnering schools around the expectations and responsibilities of PLC co-leaders. BTC leaders must also decide how PLC co-leaders should be held accountable for their work, including partnering effectively with their co-leaders. Any discussions pertaining to the expectations and responsibilities of PLC co-leaders should be shared with PLC co-leaders, themselves, and their feedback should be elicited and considered. Meanwhile, PLC members are expected to actively participate in PLC meetings by sharing knowledge and information about classroom practices with one another. PLC members are also expected to be respectful of others’ beliefs, ideas and thoughts.
- **Determine Coverage or Compensation:** If PLC time must be scheduled during the instructional day rather than during the contractual day, then leaders must provide classroom coverage for PLC members. However, if PLC time can only occur outside of the contractual day, then staff should be compensated for the additional time. Set guidelines around compensation jointly with partnering schools, which may differ in payment structures, as well as authority over budgets. Compensation should be equitable and adequate across organizations. Communicate clearly and effectively across organizations and to staff about this potential logistical and budgetary challenge.

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ACTION PLAN

From the list of Key Decisions and Strategies for Implementation, identify no more than 5 priorities, for which you and your colleagues would like to focus using the template below. For each priority, write in activities related to the priority, what types of tasks are related to the activity, who will be involved in the activity, when the activity will be completed, what supports and resources are needed to complete the activity, and next steps. Print action plans to organize and document priorities and activities as needed.

| PRIORITY #__: | | | | |
|--|--|---------|---------------------------|------------|
| ACTIVITIES RELATED TO PRIORITY #__ | | | | |
| ACTIVITY #__ | | | | |
| Tasks (list creation of "products" or "what to do" to meet activity/outcome) | Who (list all staff involved and lead) | By When | Supports/Resources Needed | Next Steps |
| | | | | |