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Foreword

Robert Eaker

I read *The Collaborative Administrator* with great anticipation and high hopes for a number of reasons. First, I am personally familiar with and have tremendous admiration for the work of each author. Second, I have often thought that the insights and ideas of these highly successful practitioners should be shared with others. Well, I was not disappointed. Simply put, this book is a jewel!

Each chapter reflects both breadth and depth in their understanding of professional learning community concepts and practices. The authors have a broad spectrum of experience, ranging from the world of the classroom teacher to the culture of a district office. They represent rural schools, urban schools, and suburban schools. Some work in large districts, while others work in smaller ones. Some chapters focus on broader, more affective subjects, such as building trust and commitment, while others discuss very specific strategies for critical tasks, such as creating school schedules and negotiating teacher contracts in a professional learning community.

A number of important themes emerge from the writing of these experts. The dominant theme is the critical importance of effective leadership. If nearly 3 decades of effective schools research has taught us anything, it is this: Without strong leadership, the disparate elements of effective practices cannot be brought together and maintained. It is virtually impossible to reculture schools or school districts into high-performing professional learning communities without widely dispersed, high-quality leadership.

However, simply recognizing the power of professional learning communities, or the critical role leadership plays in them, isn't enough. The challenge facing administrators is not just understanding or exhibiting effective leadership practices. The excitement of administrators hoping to transform their school or school district into a professional learning community is often tempered by the nagging question, "What do I do?"

Fortunately, the professional learning community concept itself contains the answer. In a professional learning community, leaders first seek to gain *shared knowledge* by seeking *best practices*. *The Collaborative Administrator* is a treasure trove of "what to do's" and "how to do's" from highly successful administrators who not only possess a deep, rich understanding of professional learning community concepts and practices, but equally important, have actually done it!

Another theme that permeates each chapter is the importance of getting started—of doing the work. While knowledge of what to do is essential, knowledge alone is inadequate. Effective administrators move from *knowing* to *doing*, and *The Collaborative Administrator* is loaded with practical, proven practices that readers will find invaluable. If implemented, these practices will drive the professional learning community concepts deep into the culture of districts, schools, teams, and classrooms.

Of course, becoming a professional learning community is more than simply “doing.” Effective leaders do the right things. Just what are the right things? The reflections and suggestions of the authors connect with the “big ideas” that form the framework of a professional learning community—an intense focus on learning, the use of high-performing collaborative teams, and a focus on continuous improvement and results.

While the authors address issues related to each of these big ideas, they lay heavy emphasis on creating a collaborative culture. The word *collaborative* is at the center of the title of *The Collaborative Administrator* for a reason. Effective leaders of professional learning communities embed a collaborative culture into the day-to-day life of their school. Want to know how to *collaboratively* address the critical issues of learning? Want to know how to *collaboratively* develop and use common formative assessments? Want to know how to *collaboratively* develop plans to provide students extra time and support or enrichment within the school day? Answers to these questions, and more, are found in chapter after chapter of *The Collaborative Administrator*.

However, it is misleading to represent *The Collaborative Administrator* as a mere collection of practical suggestions for reculturing districts and schools into professional learning communities. The authors clearly possess a deep, rich, and broad understanding of the research that forms the framework for their practice. In fact, the issues and ideas each writer examines represent an essential requirement for successful school improvement—a merger of the world of research and best practice with the world of the practicing, successful administrator.

The Collaborative Administrator takes the excuses off the table. Yes, reculturing schools to function as professional learning communities is difficult, incremental, and complex work, but it can be done, and this book shows how. When I came to the end of this book, my thoughts were simply these: “The professional learning community concept—*powerful*. The ideas in this book—*priceless!*”

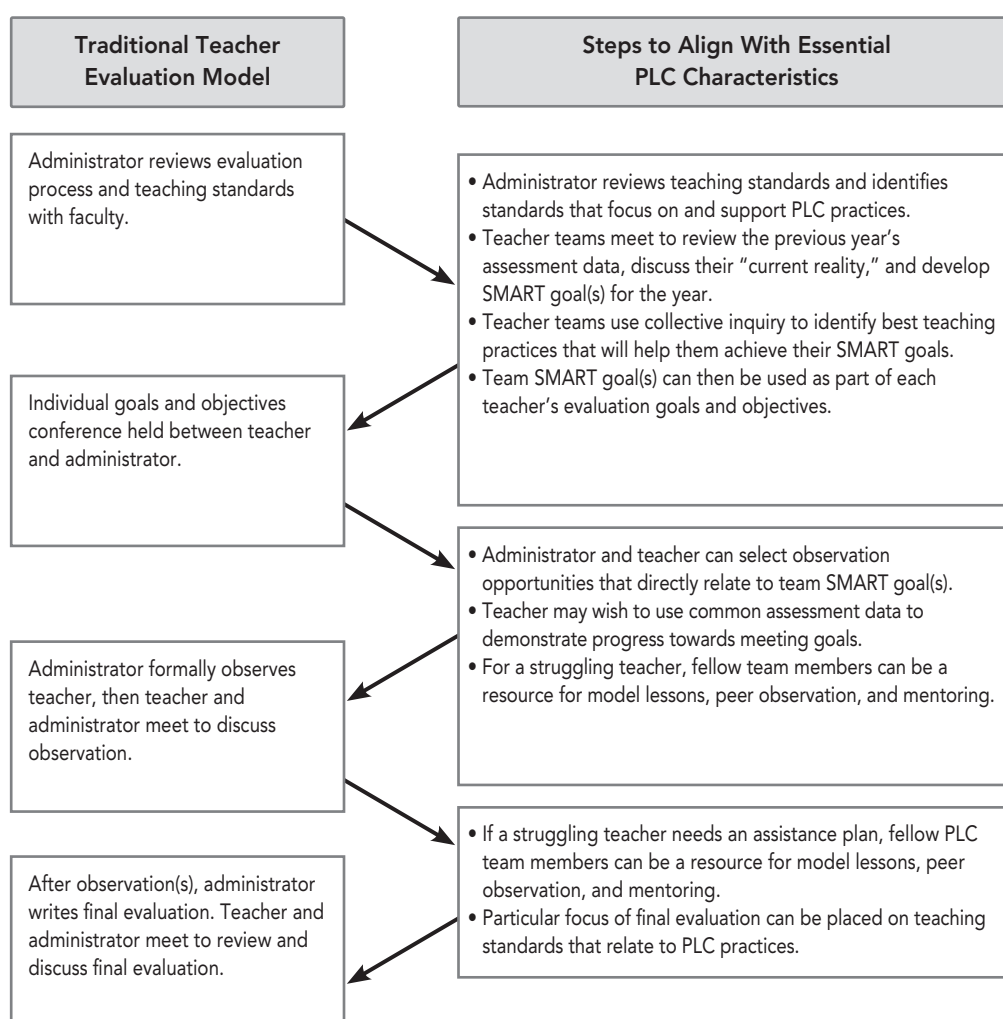


Figure 1-6: Aligning the Traditional Teacher Evaluation Process With Essential PLC Characteristics

By making a few targeted revisions, the teacher evaluation process now supports a focus on learning and collaboration. Considering the amount of time, effort, and emphasis placed on teacher evaluation, it only makes sense to have procedures that complement a school's fundamental purpose.

Final Thoughts

In *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says, "Greatness is not a function of circumstance. . . . it is largely a matter of conscious choice, and discipline" (2005, p. 40). As school leaders, we cannot leave student learning up to luck, hope, or chance. If we want to be a great school, our primary administrative responsibility is to create the necessary conditions upon which high levels of learning for all students are inevitable. This can be achieved if, and only if, we are willing to align all of our organization's practice, procedure, and disposition to achieve the same outcome—learning.