

THE COLLABORATIVE TEAM

Plan Book

for PLCs at Work[®]

Kim Bailey • Chris Jakicic

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Table of Contents

Reproducible pages are in italics.

<i>The Collaborative Team Plan Book for PLCs at Work®</i>	iv	What Is Our Team’s Vision?	43	How Can We Benefit From Collective Teacher Efficacy?	87
About the Authors.....	iv	Success Story: Windsor Central School District—Creating a Compelling Vision.....	45	How Do Effective Teams Find Time to Respond to Assessments?	89
PART 1: PLC Fundamentals and Protocols	1	How Can We Create a Learning Culture With Students?.....	47	How Can We Sustain Norms and Commitments?	91
What Is a Professional Learning Community?.....	2	What Roles Do We Need to Assign for Our Team?	49	Success Story: Eastside Elementary School—Recognizing the Power of Collective Commitments.....	93
Cultural Shifts in a PLC	4	How Can Singleton Teams Be Effective With the Work of a PLC?	51	How Do We Use Student Work to Plan Our Response?	95
Structural Shifts in a PLC	6	How Do We Effectively Use Benchmark and End-of-Year Data?	53	What Does It Mean to Have a Standards-Based Mindset?.....	97
The Work of Collaborative Teams	7	How Do We Keep the Essential Standards the Focus of Our Work?	55	How Do We Use Feedback With Students?.....	99
<i>Are We Focused on the Right Work? Graphic Organizer</i>	10	What’s the Difference Between Common Planning and Common Pacing?.....	57	What Routines Can Our Team Use to Give Students Timely Feedback?	101
<i>Identifying Team Norms Protocol</i>	11	How Do We Support New Team Members?.....	59	Success Story: Westmont High School—Using the DuFour Award as Continuous Improvement	103
<i>SMART Goal Template</i>	12	What Do Powerful Vertical Conversations Look Like?	61	Why Can’t We Use Our Benchmarks as Common Formative Assessments?	105
<i>The PDSA Cycle</i>	13	What Do High-Performing Teams Look Like?.....	63	How Can Our Assessments Impact Our Professional Practice?	107
<i>Critical Issues for Team Consideration</i>	14	Are We Lesson Planning or Learning Planning?.....	65	How Can We Make Time for Reflection?	109
<i>Team Meeting Agenda Template</i>	15	Success Story: Cherokee Bend Elementary School—Getting Started the Right Way	67	How Can We Use Pop-Up Professional Development to Keep Getting Better?.....	111
Priorities for Learning	16	What Does a Balanced Assessment System Look Like for Collaborative Teams?.....	69	When Students Are Proficient, How Do We Extend Their Learning?	113
<i>Identifying Essential Standards Protocol</i>	18	How Do Teams Use Formative and Summative Assessments Effectively?	71	How Can Our Team Do Action Research?	115
<i>Unwrapping Standards Protocol</i>	19	How Do Teams Differentiate Between Standards and Learning Targets?	73	Success Story: Woodlawn Middle School—Sustaining Success.....	117
<i>Unwrapping Standards Template</i>	20	Do We All Have the Same Picture of Proficiency?	75	PART 3: Epilogue and References	119
<i>Five-Step Unit-Planning Template</i>	21	How Do We Know We’re Approaching Our Assessments in the Right Way?.....	77	References and Resources	120
<i>Developing Assessments Protocol</i>	24	Why and How Do We Build Celebrations Into Our Work?	79		
<i>Analyzing Common Formative Assessment Data Protocol</i>	25	What Are Systematic Interventions?.....	81		
<i>Essential Standards Student-Tracking Chart</i>	26	How Can Teams Use Mindset to Help All Students Be Successful?	83		
Team Information.....	27	How Do We Get Actionable Data?	85		
Substitute Teacher Information.....	28				
Holidays and Birthdays	29				
Year-at-a-Glance Guide for Leadership and Collaborative Teams.....	30				
PART 2: Weekly Planners	33				
Are We Lesson Planning or Learning Planning?	35				
Weekly Planning Page Topic Index	36				
How Does Our Team Make the Mission Live off the Wall?	39				
What Is Consensus?.....	41				

The Collaborative Team Plan Book for PLCs at Work[®]

The *Professional Learning Communities at Work Plan Book* (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2006) introduced a series of resources designed to support teams in doing the work of a professional learning community (PLC) to ensure learning for all. The intent of *The Collaborative Team Plan Book for PLCs at Work* is to supplement that work and provide collaborative teams with key information and curated tools that team members can take to their meetings and use to guide their actions throughout the school year.

In this book, we highlight several resources that detail in depth the work of a PLC. First and most foundational is *Learning by Doing: A Handbook for Professional Learning Communities at Work* (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, Many, & Mattos, 2016). Written by a team of PLC at Work experts and architects, it clarifies the *why*, *who*, and *how* of PLCs that lead to schoolwide improvement in student learning. We believe *Learning by Doing* (DuFour et al., 2016) is the pivotal resource educator teams should use when doing the work of a PLC, and it still serves as our go-to resource. In addition to this essential resource and to support your team's implementation of the PLC process and culture, we have derived and adapted additional resources in this plan book from the following.

- ▶ *Common Formative Assessment: A Toolkit for Professional Learning Communities at Work* by Kim Bailey and Chris Jakicic (2012)
- ▶ *Concise Answers to Frequently Asked Questions About Professional Learning Communities at Work* by Mike Mattos, Richard DuFour, Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Thomas W. Many (2016)
- ▶ *Make It Happen: Coaching With the Four Critical Questions of PLCs at Work* by Kim Bailey and Chris Jakicic (2019)
- ▶ *Simplifying Common Assessment: A Guide for Professional Learning Communities at Work* by Kim Bailey and Chris Jakicic (2017)
- ▶ *Taking Action: A Handbook for RTI at Work[™]* by Austin Buffum, Mike Mattos, and Janet Malone (2018)

Part 1 of *The Collaborative Team Plan Book for PLCs at Work* concisely establishes foundational information about the PLC process and culture, and then focuses more specifically on the work of collaborative teams. It offers essential knowledge and reproducible resources to support guiding coalitions and collaborative teams in their work, regardless of whether their school or district is just getting started on the PLC journey or is doing the work of continuous improvement to ensure learning for all. Organized by topics, this part includes updated protocols for identifying and unwrapping essential standards, planning and pacing units, developing SMART goals, creating common assessments, analyzing the results of common assessments, and developing targeted interventions for students. In addition, we provide a

year-at-a-glance list to help teams consider key actions for their work throughout the school year.

Part 2 consists of forty weekly planning pages teams can utilize in several ways. Team members can use them for both individual lesson plans and the organization and documentation of collaborative team meetings and decisions. These pages offer a place to keep notes during collaborative meetings and calendarize key actions, such as those related to pacing instruction, determining assessments, and planning interventions. Each week also features a short article or a testimonial from a model PLC school on a topic of interest to collaborative teams. (A model PLC school has shown a long-term commitment to PLC concepts and has shown clear evidence of improved student learning.) Teams can reference these articles and testimonials as food for thought, perhaps engaging in a brief discussion about them during the first few minutes of their team meetings.

Finally, part 3 offers a short epilogue and a list of the references and resources we cite throughout this plan book.

We hope this plan book can serve as a useful resource for collaborative teams. Let's get started!

About the Authors



Kim Bailey is former director of professional development and instructional support for the Capistrano Unified School District in Southern California. Her leadership was instrumental in uniting and guiding educators throughout the district's schools on their journey to becoming PLCs. She also taught courses in educational leadership as an adjunct faculty member at Chapman University in Orange, California. Prior to her work in professional development, Kim served as an administrator of special education programs and a teacher of students with disabilities.



Chris Jakicic, EdD, is a former middle school science teacher and principal. Through her work with teachers and administrators across the United States, Chris emphasizes that effective teaming is the heart of professional learning communities. She also shares practical knowledge about how to use data conversations to interpret classroom information for effective instruction. She has worked closely with schools and districts that want to use the power of common formative assessments to increase learning for all students. She provides specific, practical strategies for teams that want to make the best use of their limited common planning time to write effective assessments and give students exactly what they need next.

What Is a Professional Learning Community?

In *Learning by Doing*, Richard DuFour and colleagues (2016) define a PLC as “an ongoing process in which educators work collaboratively in recurring cycles of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve” (p. 10). Schools engaged in the PLC process build a culture focused on continuous professional growth and improved practices in order to positively and collectively impact students’ learning. Three big ideas drive this work (DuFour et al., 2016).

1. **A focus on learning:** This idea is based on the premise that the fundamental purpose of any school is to ensure its students learn. Schools don’t improve by only focusing on teaching. They improve by focusing specifically on students’ learning of essential skills and by embracing the notion that educators exist to achieve high levels of learning for *all* students. Teachers acknowledge that challenges in students’ learning require them to continually refine and adjust their practices to meet students’ evolving needs.
2. **A collaborative culture and collective responsibility:** This idea is based on the concept that the only way educators can ensure all students learn at high levels is by working collaboratively and taking collective responsibility for the success of each student. Educators are far more effective when they learn continuously with their colleagues and work interdependently rather than in isolation, merging their strengths to yield high levels of learning for all students.
3. **A results orientation:** This idea emphasizes that a PLC is focused on results, so teams closely monitor the impact of their instruction on student learning by continually gathering evidence. Through a cycle of continuous improvement and collective inquiry, grade- or course-level collaborative teams use common assessments to monitor students’ learning of essential skills, adjust their instruction based on the data, and identify any students requiring

additional support. Through this process, teams achieve collective efficacy; in other words, they see the impact of their work on student learning and continue to improve their practices so they meet the goal of high levels of learning for all.

When a school or district decides to embrace these big ideas and become a PLC, the school or district must take steps to build a strong foundation that will support the culture it needs to be successful. This foundation consists of four pillars (DuFour et al., 2016).

1. **Mission:** The mission of a school answers the question, “Why do we exist?” (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 39). For schools on the PLC journey, the answer is that the purpose is high levels of learning for both students and staff. When a school develops a mission statement, it tries to capture its purpose in words, and those words must not become just a saying posted on the wall of the school. Instead, all educators in the school must determine how to make that mission come alive through the work they do.
2. **Vision:** The vision answers the question, “What must we become in order to accomplish our fundamental purpose?” (DuFour et al., 2016, p. 39). This shared vision helps guide the school as it implements the practices to make the vision a reality. While developing the school’s vision, staff take stock of the school’s current reality in order to establish a compelling picture of its future and make plans for that better future.
3. **Values:** Values or collective commitments answer the question, “How must we behave—today and every day—in order to make our shared vision a reality?” (Mattos et al., 2016, p. 24). All teams develop collective commitments by describing the specific agreements they must make to each other and to the school community, such as, “We commit to work collaboratively to ensure all students learn at high levels,” or, “We commit to use the results of common formative assessments to provide additional time and support for students who haven’t mastered essential learning targets.”

4. **Goals:** Shared goals ensure all staff members work collaboratively for the good of all students. They task staff with answering the question, “Which steps must we take and when?” (Mattos et al., 2016, p. 12). In this process, schools develop annual goals that reflect their district goals and are based on measurable data about their school’s current reality. These data may include, for example, student achievement scores, discipline referrals, attendance numbers, participation in extracurricular activities, graduation rates, and student and teacher perception data. Then, each collaborative team writes goals that align to the school goals. Because team goals are aligned to these school and district goals, everyone in the organization is working toward the same outcomes, so the likelihood of success is much greater than for individual teachers working in isolation.

Schools might first approach the process of establishing the foundational pillars with their *leadership team*, which is typically composed of representative members of the school’s grade levels or course departments who work as a guiding coalition to engage the rest of the school in the process and keep an eye on the continuous improvement of their school. This leadership team (some schools call it the *guiding coalition*) is continuously examining both the culture of the school and its structures to ensure alignment with these pillars. They are responsible for making decisions about systematic topics, such as how to distribute resources and maximize time for collaboration.

At the same time, the leadership team works together to represent and support each of the school’s collaborative teams. Members of the leadership team typically take the role of facilitating their grade- or course-level collaborative team meetings and can serve as a feedback loop to update the leadership team, sharing products generated during collaborative time and bringing successes and challenges to the table. (For more on collaborative team structures, see *Structural Shifts in a PLC*, page 6.) If a collaborative team is struggling, the leadership team can provide support to the team leader and

suggest ways to make the team more effective. To routinely keep abreast of team progress and be responsive to the needs of the school teams, we recommend the leadership team meet at least monthly.

When a school empowers teacher leaders to guide the work of the PLC, the school no longer has just one leader or administrator leading the work; instead, it has shared leadership across the organization. *Shared leadership* means that everyone is responsible for continuously referencing and monitoring alignment of their actions with the four pillars, prompting school members to consider questions such as, “Are all the decisions we’re making consistent with the mission of the school?” and, “Is the work of the teams focused on achieving our mission and advancing our vision?”

To move forward in their work and systematically improve student learning, collaborative teams continuously pose and seek answers to the four critical questions of a PLC (DuFour et al., 2016).

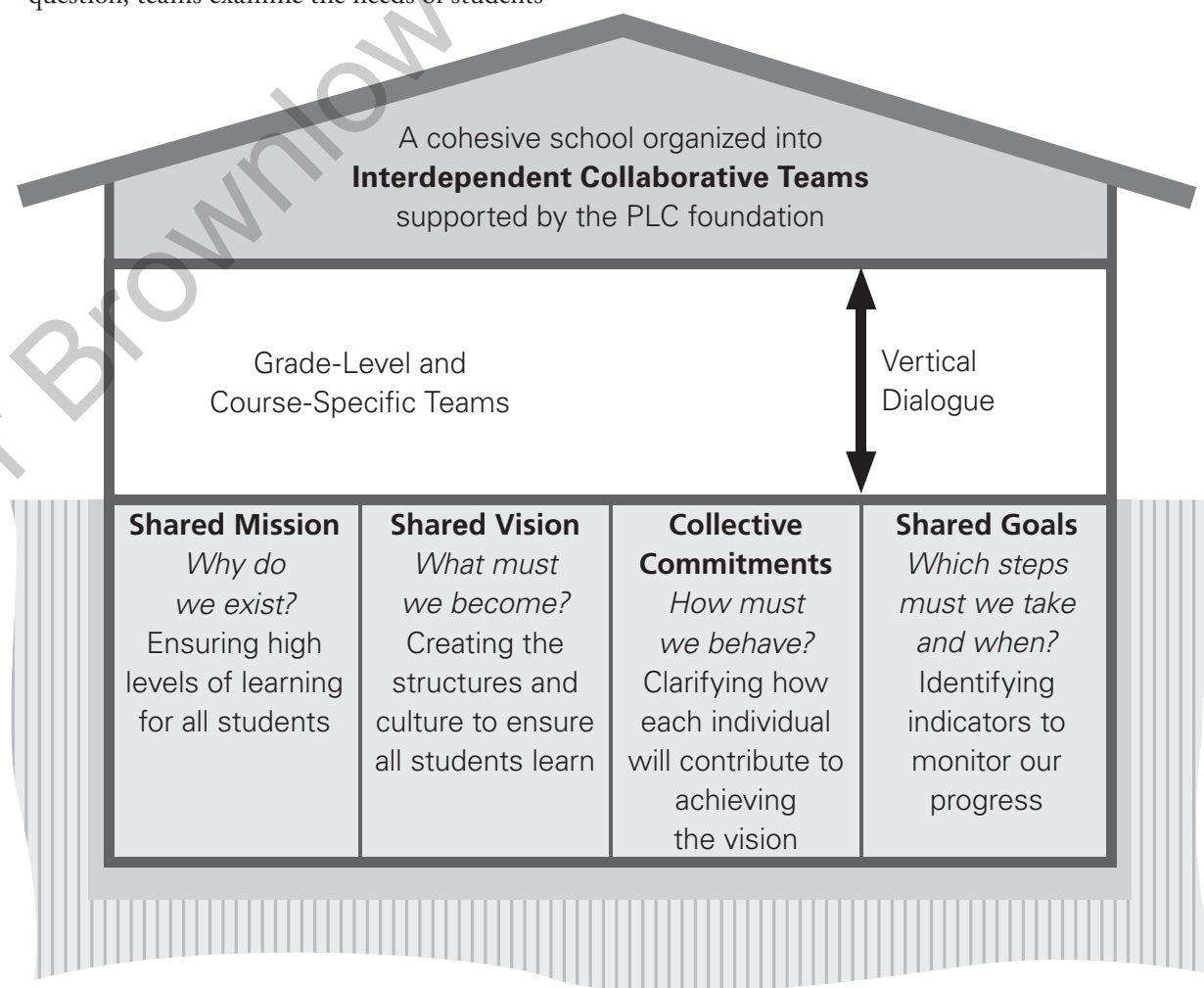
1. **What do we want our students to learn?**
By asking this question, teams get clarity on what learning they will guarantee for students. Together, team members must determine what is essential for students to know and be able to do and clarify what proficiency looks like. In doing this work, unit-by-unit, they determine which learning standards are essential and unwrap them to establish the individual learning targets that build to a specific standard.
2. **How do we know if they have learned it?**
This question propels teams to define and gather evidence of student learning of essential standards. Team members collectively identify or create common assessments that give specific feedback on student learning. They then use the

data to determine next steps, as specified in the third and fourth critical questions.

3. **How will we respond when some students don’t learn?** This question asks teams to follow through on their commitment to student learning for all by providing additional time and support for students who haven’t yet learned essential standards. By answering this question, teams take action and design their targeted interventions for students needing additional time and support to achieve grade- or course-level learning.
4. **How will we extend the learning for students who are proficient?** Through this question, teams examine the needs of students

who have achieved grade- or course-level proficiency of essential standards and would benefit from extended learning opportunities. By answering this question and providing proficient students with these opportunities, teams facilitate student achievement beyond grade- or course-level learning.

The critical questions of a PLC work in concert to systematically support high levels of student learning, and all teams, regardless of their configuration, continually work to answer these questions.



Source: Mattos et al., 2016, p. 12.

Cultural Shifts in a PLC

These pages summarize the different shifts that occur when a school implements a PLC culture. These cultural shifts happen over time as a school and a district deepen their implementation; in other words, they don't all happen at once or in a particular sequence. Use these pages during early implementation to discuss what the current reality is for your school's and district's culture; use them again later to see how the culture is changing.

These pages are also an important reference for schools that are more experienced in the work; they can use them to reflect on their ongoing practices to ensure they are sustaining the development of the culture necessary for a successful PLC.

One cultural shift we want to emphasize is that schools need to build in and sustain celebrations from

the beginning of their implementation of the PLC process. These celebrations should include the successes of collaborative teams, individual teachers, and students. Celebrations energize and help continue to motivate teams by making sure short-term wins are recognized. (See more about successful celebrations on page 79.)

A Shift in Fundamental Purpose	
From a focus on teaching . . .	to a focus on learning
From an emphasis on what was taught . . .	to a fixation on what students learned
From coverage of content . . .	to demonstration of proficiency
From providing individual teachers with curriculum documents such as state or provincial standards and curriculum guides . . .	to engaging collaborative teams in building shared knowledge regarding essential curriculum
A Shift in the Use of Assessments	
From infrequent summative assessments . . .	to frequent common formative assessments
From assessments to determine which students failed to learn by the deadline . . .	to assessments to identify students who need additional time and support
From assessments used to reward and punish students . . .	to assessments used to inform and motivate students
From assessing many things infrequently . . .	to assessing a few things frequently
From individual teacher assessments . . .	to collaborative team-developed assessments
From each teacher determining the criteria to use in assessing student work . . .	to collaborative teams clarifying the criteria and ensuring consistency among team members when assessing student work
From an overreliance on one kind of assessment . . .	to balanced assessments
From focusing on average scores . . .	to monitoring each student's proficiency in every essential skill
A Shift in the Response When Students Don't Learn	
From individual teachers' determination of the appropriate response . . .	to a systematic response that ensures support for every student
From fixed time and support for learning . . .	to time and support for learning as variables
From remediation . . .	to intervention
From invitational support occurring outside the school day . . .	to directed (that is, required) support occurring during the school day
From one opportunity to demonstrate learning . . .	to multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning

A Shift in the Work of Teachers	
From isolation . . .	to collaboration
From each teacher clarifying what students must learn . . .	to collaborative teams building shared knowledge and understanding about essential learning
From each teacher assigning priority to different learning standards . . .	to collaborative teams establishing the priority of respective learning standards
From each teacher determining the pacing of the curriculum . . .	to collaborative teams of teachers agreeing on common pacing
From individual teachers attempting to discover ways to improve results . . .	to collaborative teams of teachers helping each other improve
From privatization of practice . . .	to open sharing of practice
From decisions made on the basis of individual preferences . . .	to decisions made collectively by building shared knowledge of best practice
From “collaboration lite” focused on matters unrelated to student achievement . . .	to collaboration explicitly focused on issues and questions that most impact student achievement
From an assumption that “these are my students, those are your students” . . .	to an assumption that “these are our students”
A Shift in Focus	
From an external focus on issues outside the school . . .	to an internal focus on steps the staff can take to improve the school
From a focus on inputs . . .	to a focus on results
From goals related to completion of projects and activities . . .	to SMART goals demanding evidence of student learning
From teachers gathering data from their individually constructed tests in order to assign grades . . .	to collaborative teams acquiring information from common assessments in order to inform their individual and collective practice and respond to students who need additional time and support
A Shift in School Culture	
From independence . . .	to interdependence
From a language of complaint . . .	to a language of commitment
From long-term strategic planning . . .	to planning for short-term wins
From infrequent generic recognition . . .	to frequent specific recognition and a culture of celebration that creates many winners
A Shift in Professional Development	
From external training (workshops and courses) . . .	to job-embedded learning
From the expectation that learning occurs infrequently (on the few days devoted to professional development) . . .	to an expectation that learning is ongoing and occurs as part of routine work practice
From presentations to entire faculties . . .	to team-based action research
From learning by listening . . .	to learning by doing
From learning individually through courses and workshops . . .	to learning collectively by working together
From assessing impact on the basis of teacher satisfaction (“Did you like it?”) . . .	to assessing impact on the basis of evidence of improved student learning
From short-term exposure to multiple concepts and practices . . .	to sustained commitment to limited focused initiatives

Structural Shifts in a PLC

When a school chooses to start its PLC journey, one of the first decisions a leadership team must make is about team configurations—the membership of the teams and their schedules for collaboration. The following sections examine potential team configurations and ways to find common meeting time in a master schedule.

Team Configurations

The ideal option for team configurations is for teachers who have a common curriculum to work together at the grade or course level. In small schools, there are often many singleton teachers—teachers who are the only ones who teach a course or grade level—whom leaders must consider when developing the master schedule. Even in larger schools, where multiple teachers teach some grade levels or courses, there are likely to be some teachers who are considered singletons (such as the band director, the ceramics teacher, and the AP physics teacher). A school's leadership team might consider the following team configurations.

- ▶ **Grade- or course-level team:** This is the most common team structure within a PLC and consists of teachers who instruct on a common curriculum, such as all fourth-grade teachers in an elementary school or all U.S. history teachers in a high school.
- ▶ **Vertical team:** This team includes teachers who have similar curricula, either below or above one another's. For example, a grades K–5 elementary school might team up its primary (K–2) teachers, if only one teacher teaches at each of those grade levels. A small middle school might have a vertical grades 6–8 English language arts (ELA) team. A small high school might have a team composed of all the teachers responsible for mathematics courses.
- ▶ **Cross-school or cross-district team:** In this configuration, teams are formed across multiple schools or school districts. For example, the art teachers from three elementary schools in a district might form a team, or AP physics teachers from multiple districts might collaborate. These teams may meet electronically or in person, depending on

the team members' proximity to each other. The key is that all the schools' master schedules must include common meeting times for these teams' work to happen.

- ▶ **Interdisciplinary team:** Members of interdisciplinary teams have the same students but teach different curricula. For these teams, emphasis shifts away from traditional talks only about students to conversations about overlapping (interdisciplinary) standards they share. For example, many interdisciplinary teams start by discussing the ELA standards because of the various ways they can share responsibility for reading, writing, speaking and listening, and language. As these teams work together over time, they monitor a multitude of other learning targets they share, such as modeling in mathematics and science; developing arguments in mathematics, science, and social studies; and thinking critically in all content areas, to name a few.
- ▶ **Logical link:** This configuration augments the preceding team structures by including staff with a logical link to those other teams. This typically means members of a special education, English learner, or support staff team are included on a grade- or course-level team or a vertical team because they provide additional support to a subset of that team's students.
- ▶ **Problem of practice:** Some schools configure teams around a problem of practice that teachers are working to solve. These teachers might use the critical-friends protocol (Pieratt, 2015) to collaboratively work to solve the problem they've identified as impeding student learning.

Regardless of team configuration, the leadership team typically builds an initial master schedule it thinks will be effective for providing common meeting time for teams. We specify *initial* here regarding the master schedule because once teachers find the work of collaborative teams worthwhile, they often suggest variations that allow them to do their work more effectively. Leadership teams will review and potentially adjust their master schedule annually, not only to ensure that

collaborative time is effective for all teams, but also to reflect any additional opportunities to provide students with support.

Common Meeting Time and the Master Schedule

As we noted in the previous section, the leadership team typically determines the master schedule for common team-meeting times during the school day. Initially, the leadership team needs to adjust its master schedule to ensure embedded time for teams to collaborate regularly. There are several ways that schools find time in their master schedule including:

- ▶ **Provide teams with time while students are in a specials class, like art, music, physical education, or technology:** This may allow teams the flexibility to meet one or more days per week. If specials classes are short, the schedule may have two specials classes back-to-back to allow teams more meeting time. It's important to note that specials teachers also need time to meet as a collaborative team, which often occurs while students attend classes in core academic disciplines.
- ▶ **Use either a late-start or an early-release schedule one day per week:** Because students aren't in the building during this time, teams can meet without having to manage their in-classroom responsibilities.
- ▶ **Repurpose schoolwide faculty or traditional in-service meeting time:** In this way, schools may allocate more traditional in-service or professional development time for collaborative teams to accomplish their work.

There is no one way in which schools and districts must allocate collaborative meeting time; schools and districts have found many creative ways to do so. You can check out many of these ideas on AllThingsPLC (www.allthingsplc.info) under the See the Evidence tab.