

Preface

GETTING THE BIG PICTURE

The goal of this book is to define a professional learning network (PLN), detail each of its components, and demonstrate how your school can increase its focus on technology, communication, achievement, and professional development with the successful design and implementation of its own PLN. Our conception of a PLN expands the current notion of a professional learning *community* while simultaneously addressing and providing solutions to some of the oft-stated weaknesses of professional learning communities, including lack of time, resources, and space.

HOW THE CONCEPT OF A PLN CAME INTO FOCUS

The impetus for our school's establishment of a PLN came from a district curricular mandate. Our county had recently adopted a core curriculum in which content teachers were required to teach the same content at the same pace while administering the same assessments. We knew that implementation of this new core curriculum was going to be a challenge for most and a paradigm shift for some, so we began to look for a platform that would ensure teacher success, offer a space for collaboration, supply necessary resources while differentiating diverse levels of need, and provide a nonthreatening environment in which teachers could learn at their own pace.

Regardless of whether you agree or disagree with the implementation of specific directives and mandates, a PLN can be useful in addressing the complexities that coincide with a new initiative and scaffold both teachers and students toward success by providing ample opportunities to access and share resources, acquire expertise, and engage in professional conversations. The sustainability of a PLN appealed to us because, as all educators have experienced, there are frequent mandates, initiatives, and changes in education. A PLN is able to communicate these changes, incorporate them into its existing structure, and provide additional resources and information about them. A PLN can grow with its members and accommodate needs in school communities with a few simple clicks.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THIS BOOK

We have designed our chapters to address each of the elements that contribute to *our* PLN and to provide explicit details and sequential steps in order for *your* school community to successfully design a PLN that addresses your specific needs, ultimately leading to increased student achievement.

At the beginning of each chapter, we explain the *why* behind our reasons for choosing to include that particular component on ManateeLearn, the designated website for our PLN. We then provide a “snapshot” of the process we used in designing how that component would look in our PLN. Next, a “bird’s-eye view” is given in the form of a list of factors for you to consider as you begin planning the blueprints for your own PLN. Each chapter ends with a quick review and all of the resources, graphic organizers, and planning guides mentioned in the chapter.

Chapter 1, “Focus on a Professional Learning Network,” defines a PLN. It explains why a PLN is a wise choice for a school community. The chapter also provides some straightforward recommendations that a school at any level (elementary,

middle, or high school) can put into place to begin the process of designing its own PLN to meet the needs of its school community.

Chapter 2, “Zooming in on Leadership,” introduces a tiered leadership structure that enabled our school administration to share the roles and responsibilities in designing, building, and implementing our PLN. Empowering additional leaders in our school community gave people a voice in the planning stages and produced more ownership in a variety of aspects of our PLN.

Chapter 3, “Going Digital: Infusing Technology Into a PLN,” provides a review of how we built our PLN and lists steps to guide you through the process of building your own PLN.

Chapter 4, “Landscape for Communication of Information,” gives a broad overview of how we’ve used our PLN as a platform for increased communication among members of our school community. We detail how we set up our PLN to communicate to all faculty members simultaneously regarding curricular mandates, school initiatives, and professional development opportunities. We are able to convey information, provide feedback, post data and plans, and offer resources on a platform that all members of our school community can access.

Chapter 5, “Framing Curriculum and Instruction,” provides explanations for the curricular pieces found in our PLN, including each of the facets of our common instructional framework that supports curriculum standards across all contents. As a result of our common instructional model, we have a schoolwide focus on best practices in our instructional strategies, daily targeted instruction aimed at areas of weakness, and daily informal assessments to monitor progress and achievement of students.

Chapter 6, “Exposures to Learning,” discusses with specificity the learning processes and opportunities made possible by our PLN, focusing on both the face-to-face and the online components of the professional development offered. Our PLN addresses diverse levels of need by providing online

differentiated professional development resources that can be used at any time and according to need while still enabling us to address the teachers face to face for explicit instruction in the uses of the online components and for deep discussions of student and teacher growth and needs.

Chapter 7, “Begin Your Focus with Eight Steps,” includes a review of all the steps necessary to build your own PLN. There is a short description of each of the eight steps along with a detailed worksheet to help you get started.

Chapter 8, “Adding Perspective: Viewing a PLN with a New Lens,” discusses various achievements we accomplished during the first year of implementation of our PLN and considers next steps.

WHY WE WROTE THIS BOOK

Our network provides a space for our schoolwide goals to be shared, discussed, supported, and amended. As a result of a needs assessment, current data, and curriculum mandates, our school community chose to focus on some specific goals in the belief that doing so would increase student achievement. At the conclusion of this book, it will be evident that our network frames and supports our school community while providing a space for collegiality and communication among and within our departments; thus serving to unify our school community with common goals, learning, and a network designed around the needs of its members.

Our goal in writing this book is to provide school communities with a general framework from which they can design a PLN that will meet their particular needs, along with some practical steps to take in order to ensure the success of their PLN. Our own school community’s establishment and use of a PLN will serve as the model from which we will share experiences, show examples, and give advice.

Our PLN can be found at www.ManateeLearn.com, but because it is a secure site you will not be able to access much

of what we discuss in this book. In order for you to be able to access the information and documents found in this book and to see examples of how we have arranged our PLN, we have set up a sample PLN at www.yourprofessionallearningnetwork.com. You will find all the resources plus sample pages at this site.

Our hope is that each PLN resulting from this book becomes a viable and practical tool with which to meet the specific and diverse needs of your school community.