



Summary of Evaluation Responses— WMMP Professional Learning Communities, Spring 2015

Description of the Professional Learning Communities (PLCs)

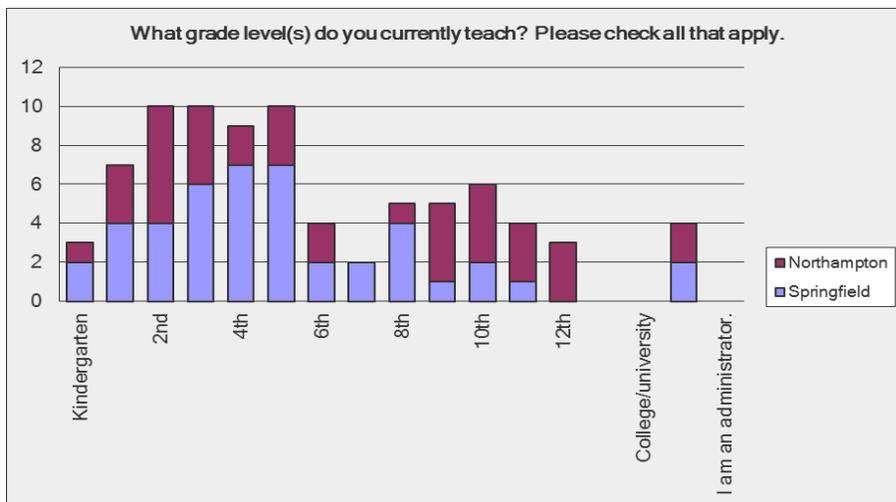
30 educators participated in a PLC located in Springfield and 21 in a Northampton-based PLC. The Northampton PLC was facilitated by an Amherst Regional Public Schools middle school math teacher and two math professors, one from the University of Massachusetts Amherst and one from Mount Holyoke College. In Springfield, a Springfield Public Schools math coach facilitated together with a Western New England University math professor.

Participants came from:

- Easthampton Public Schools—4
- Erving Union 28—1
- Hampden-Wilbraham Regional School District—8
- Mohawk Trail Regional School District—2
- Northampton Public Schools—3
- PVPA—1
- South Hadley Public Schools—7
- Springfield Public Schools—24
- Hampshire College—1

In the Springfield PLC, 26 out of 30 educators were new to WMMP PLCs. In the Northampton PLC, seven out of 21 were new, with the rest having participated in one or more of the 2014 PLCs.

The grade level spread varied by PLC, with generally somewhat more elementary teachers proportionally in the Springfield group.



For more information, please contact Marla Solomon, Director of Partnership Programs, Five Colleges Inc., msolomon@fivecolleges.edu or 413-542-4018.

Value of the PLC

98% of the 50 participants responding said that the activities of the PLC were very useful or useful to them as math educators.

75% of respondents rated the PLC as well above or above the quality of other math professional development they had participated in.

96% said that WMMP should run the PLCs again in fall 2015.

92% said they would encourage their colleagues to participate.

Deepened mathematical understanding and skills

Most important, the educators deepened their mathematical understanding and skills. The majority of respondents mentioned new understandings of:

- representations and their value for fostering mathematical thinking;
- different ways to solve the same problem, helping them differentiate learning for their students;
- the Standards of Mathematical Practice;
- the properties of the operations; and
- the value of letting students “really think through” problems.

Here are some of their comments:

I definitely gained new understanding of posing problems to students and letting them use whatever strategies work best for them to solve the problems. I think that it reaches more students and also differentiates learning in a way that allows students to work on their own level of understanding but also add to their knowledge by hearing the thoughts of others.

I learned that math is much, much more than an answer. It is a process that may entail different kinds of work that ultimately get you to a right answer, but [the answer] isn't nearly as fun as the process that took you there.

I learned about how to look at numbers differently using the basic properties taught to me long ago. Giving students the opportunity to really think through problems helps them grasp numerical understandings in ways they didn't before. Thank you for enlightening me!

Changes in teaching practices

We also asked teachers to report changes they had made or anticipated making in their teaching practices as part of or as a result of the PLC work. We highlight a few responses here that represent key types of change they mentioned:

Incorporating the Standards for Mathematical Practice (SMP) in my instruction is a new practice. I specifically remember a teaching moment when attention to precision became a useful tool for working with a small group of students.

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I've moved away from "telling" my students how to tackle a problem, and allow them to persevere through it with guidance and questioning.

I carefully consider which representations (drawings, charts, narratives) or manipulatives to use.

I have improved my questioning of students about their thinking, and have encouraged multiple representations for showing work.

I have learned some new ideas about how to prompt and challenge the students to go further in their understanding—beyond an answer.

I have definitely tried to provide more opportunities for students to do some talking and explaining about math.

It's made me take time out of every class to continue to help my students think more creatively with math. This PLC has provided me with tools I can use to informally assess my students' current math skills. I think this was particularly vital since I as well as many of the other participants received our own math instruction in such a different, more rigid fashion using only standard algorithms. I particularly feel like I have a much better understanding of what the common core is asking of students.

I will use the activities we did in class [the PLC] with my own students next year.

I am planning to go through the concepts learned and try to incorporate ideas into my units of study.

Other reported changes

We asked participants to report any other kinds of changes that resulted from the PLC. Some highlights included:

- new awareness of connections (or lack thereof) between their school's math program and the Standards of Mathematical Practice;
- strengthened appreciation of the value of working together vertically K-16—it helped them get a broader perspective on their work;
- enthusiasm for sharing their new understandings with colleagues in their districts—and some already had done so.

The comment of one participant seems to capture the value of the K-16 collegial PLC approach :

I found it very helpful to look at how math concepts are taught at other grade levels and schools. It gave me a better sense of where my teaching and students' understandings fit along a continuum. Seeing it demonstrated and discussing it with other teachers are more meaningful than reading about it in the common core standards. It also helps me to try and avoid teaching things in ways that can lead to misconceptions in the future.

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Additional data from the evaluation can be made available to school district personnel upon request.

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