

# PLCs: Successes & Challenges

## Tracey Nance

Tracey Nance is an elementary educator and the 2020-2021 Georgia Teacher of the Year. Fiercely committed to improving students' life chances, Tracey has excelled as a teacher leader and instructional coach in grades 2-5, and has 14 years of professional learning community (PLC) "wins" and reflection. Tracey is currently training educators in policy and advocating for all children in her role as a Voices for Honest Education Fellow with the National Network of State Teachers of the Year.

## PLC Success Stories

It's not uncommon for a new strategy such as PLCs to gain momentum and over time, gradually lose their intentionality as schools work to meet the daily and urgent demands of teaching and learning, new district initiatives, and staff turnover. My team reimaged PLCs by making them a priority in scheduling and attendance, centering our educators' needs, and leading PLCs the exact same way we want our teachers to teach. This "split vision" way of leading means we must build relationships, focus on growth, teach for equity, and bring a little magic to our PLCs with engaging and teacher-centered learning.

PLC time must be worth educators' time. The most effective PLCs are led by a facilitator or teammate who models timeliness, community-building, respect, and self-reflection, and who leans into teachers' experiences with trust and care. The best professional development is often right there in your building. By encouraging teachers to share their best strategies and their most beautiful mistakes in community, you're not only improving student outcomes and growing future school leaders, you're building a culture that communicates it trusts and respects teachers' expertise.

## PLC Challenges

A common PLC challenge is scheduling and our messaging—both verbal and nonverbal. A lack of importance is communicated when PLC leaders do not consistently show up, enforce school policies unevenly, and over-schedule teachers' planning time. My most successful PLC incorporated block scheduling where grade levels attended back-to-back specials at least twice a week so that teachers had one extended block for PLC learning and one extended block for grade level planning. We were careful to not schedule IEP meetings and conferences on teachers' PLC day, and a consistent structure and purpose allowed teachers to bring their best selves.