

5 Methods for Structuring PLCs for Singletons and Small Schools



Solution Tree

DEVELOPING PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES FOR SINGLETONS

“How does all of this professional learning community (PLC) stuff work when I’m the only one in my school who does what I do?” If you are thinking this, you are a singleton! Band, choir, special education, art, auto mechanics, welding, physics, consumer science, reading, technology, psychology, speech, business, drama, dance, media, K–5 in a small school . . . The list goes on and on. Whatever your unique craft, I’m here to tell you that there is a place for you in the PLC process.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ▶ Understand the challenges of grade-level teachers or subject teachers who are singletons.
- ▶ Identify ways that teams can be organized for singletons.
- ▶ Learn the steps for implementing a singleton collaborative team.
- ▶ Discover resources for further study.



FRAMING THE PROBLEM

Traditionally, principals and teachers attend a PLC at Work® Institute, listen to a PLC turnaround story, or read one of the many books about this topic and immediately see the potential power that the PLC process offers. They get it; working together achieves so much more than working alone. So, they jump in with both feet. They begin tearing down the walls of isolationism with the promise of a new day built on a collective vision that all students can learn at high levels. They start by organizing collaborative teams. Mathematics teachers with mathematics teachers, science teachers with science teachers, language arts with language arts, the band teacher with . . . uh, well, hmm. Wait a minute! What about that band teacher?

A similar problem occurs in many small schools, which are full of singletons. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2013), 25.4 percent of schools in the United States are rural schools. Not all rural schools are small; however, many of them are. In many of these small schools, grade-level teachers or subject teachers are singletons. For example, in a small elementary school, it isn't uncommon to have one teacher per grade level or even one teacher for multiple grade levels. In a small secondary school, there may be only one biology teacher, one algebra teacher, one English 9 teacher, and one world history teacher—singletons!

Small schools hear the PLC message, agree with it, and then stumble on the inevitable singleton questions: How do you build common assessments when you're the only one who teaches your subject or grade level? Can this really work for you? Yes, it can and does!

5 *Ways That*

TEAMS CAN BE

Organized

FOR SINGLETONS

VERTICAL TEAMS

Think "common denominator." A vertical team is a team of teachers who all teach the same subject but at different grade levels. They form a team and focus on the common skills that they are teaching.



INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAMS

Interdisciplinary teams are groups of teachers who all teach different content but work together to develop common assessments around universal essential skills. By focusing on the *skills* that they are teaching, teachers can build common assessments despite the vast differences in their content disciplines.



SINGLETONS WHO SUPPORT

Sometimes being part of a team means having to put the needs of others ahead of your own. When singletons support, they join a traditional team and support team goals, even when those goals have nothing to do with singleton content.



VIRTUAL TEAMS

Virtual teams provide a way for singleton teachers to no longer be singletons. By using technology readily accessible to almost anyone, singleton teachers can find others who do exactly what they do and meet virtually to do the work of a collaborative team, regardless of where they live.



STRUCTURAL CHANGE

Structures, or the ways schools are set up, create a context that promotes certain behaviors. Sometimes, schools have traditional structures that promote isolation. If we examine some of those traditional structures, we often can change the context to encourage the human behaviors we desire, like collaboration.





IMPLEMENTING A SINGLETON COLLABORATIVE TEAM

As you form your team, use the following continuum as a guide to think through some of the steps you'll need to take. The goal is to achieve the level of collaboration at the bottom of the continuum.

- ▶ Establish a team (vertical, interdisciplinary, or virtual), or change structures so that you are no longer a singleton.
- ▶ Establish a time to meet.
- ▶ Identify target skills or content worthy of your attention. If improved, these skills will make an important difference for students.
- ▶ Develop a means for assessment (often through the use of a common rubric).
- ▶ Establish inter-rater reliability and develop an assessment schedule.
- ▶ Establish SMART goals.
- ▶ Determine some best-practice strategies for initial instruction.
- ▶ Administer common assessments with an agreed method for grading and reporting the data.
- ▶ Disaggregate data gathered from common formative assessments.
- ▶ Decide on individual and collective responses to fundamental questions 3 and 4 of the PLC process.



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Learn more about Aaron Hansen at SolutionTree.com/Aaron-Hansen



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RESOURCES FOR FURTHER STUDY



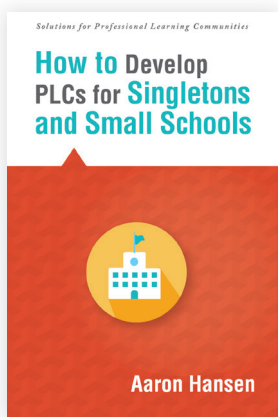
How to Develop PLCs for Singletons and Small Schools Mini-Course

Global PD Teams, our innovative team learning hub, now has a mini-course devoted to singletons! Journey with Aaron Hansen as he shares how he transformed his small school using the PLC process. Access eBook chapters, short videos, and quizzes to help you put knowledge into action.



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How to Develop PLCs for Singletons and Small Schools

Ensure singleton teachers feel integrally involved in the PLC process. With this user-friendly guide, you'll discover how small schools, full of singleton teachers who are the only ones in their schools teaching their subject areas, can build successful PLCs.



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