

Improving School Discipline with
Professional Learning Communities

A Special Project

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Improving School Discipline with
Professional Learning Communities

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities at the high school level. This project included a sample group of 253 high school students from the 2004-2005 school year and a second sample group of 237 students from the 2006-2007 school year. Both groups attended PACE Alternative High School in Wapato, Washington. The data was collected from the school's annual weapons report. When data was analyzed, teachers that worked in a Professional Learning Community had less classroom disruptions, higher student participation, lower numbers of behavior referrals and higher attendance than teachers that were not working in a Professional Learning Community.

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Background for the Project

People's Alternate for Continuing Education (PACE) High School is an alternative high school located in Wapato, Washington. In 2004, the staff from the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) met with school administration with regards to the school not meeting Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) as defined by the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL). After reviewing the data, the School Improvement Facilitator (SIF) created a roadmap for PACE to follow. One of key elements of the plan was the implementation of Professional Learning Communities (PLC).

Most recently, Professional Learning Communities strategies have emerged from the work of Richard and Rebecca DuFour. While the term learning community had become commonplace in education, DuFour, DuFour and Eaker (2005) defined a PLC as a way "to focus on learning rather than teaching, work collaboratively, and hold yourself accountable for the results"(p. 42).

The staff at PACE were asked to attend a DuFour Professional Learning Communities Conference. At this conference, participants learned about PLCs and how the implementation of PLCs could change the direction of PACE.

One of the greatest challenges at alternative high schools was school discipline. According to De La Ossa (2005), historically, "public alternative high

schools have addressed disruptive and school-avoidance behaviors with the goal of reducing the drop out rate” (p. 25). The staff realized that with the implementation of PLCs a by-product could be the reduction of discipline problems.

Statement of the Problem

Alternative schools have had problems with classroom disruptions and students that misbehaved. Teachers faced many different obstacles while teaching in the classroom. Obstacles included low attendance, a high number of behavior referrals, and high numbers of classroom fights. There was a strong need for teachers to find ways to overcome the barriers that were effecting student performance. New classroom strategies were needed so that teacher’s instructional time was spent on educating the students instead of disciplining them. Every moment the teacher spent on disciplining one of the students was a moment lost in educating the other students in the classroom.

Purpose of the Project

During the 2004 - 2005 school year the staff at PACE did not participate in PLCs. The purpose of this study was to determine if the collaboration that started during the 2005-2006 school year in the form of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) improved classroom management. Specifically the study was to determine if there was a significant change in the amount of behavior

referrals, attendance, and classroom disruptions during the 2006-2007 school year when compared to previous school years.

Delimitations

This project included a sample group of 253 high school students from the 2004-2005 school year and a second sample group of 237 students from the 2006-2007 school year. Both groups attended PACE Alternative High School in Wapato, Washington. According to the OSPI Washington State Report Card (2005), the demographics of the 2004-2005 students consisted of 55 percent Hispanic, 40 percent Native American, four percent Caucasian, and one percent Asian. The demographics for the 2006-2007 students consisted of 51 percent Hispanic, 42 percent Native American, seven percent Caucasian (OSPI Washington State Report Card, 2007).

Assumptions

The group of colleagues that implemented the Professional Learning Communities (PLC) consisted of 12 certified teachers. The colleagues taught students in sixth through twelfth grade. All colleagues had training on PLC strategies.

The researcher assumed all colleagues were taking part in PACE's PLC teams in a consistent manner and all members interacted with the students at the school. The researcher assumed the students from each sample were in similar learning environments and taught by the same colleagues.

The researcher assumed instruction was given in a consistent manner and that all students had a similar motivation to learn the content. The researcher also assumed the learning environment was constant and all students were taught under comparable circumstances. Assumptions were made that all students were willing to try their best. Additionally, it was assumed that all students had similar abilities.

Hypothesis

Using PLCs should have a positive impact on overcoming the obstacles of classroom management difficulties that teachers face at PACE Alternative High School. More specifically, teachers that worked in a PLC had less classroom disruptions, lower numbers of behavior referrals and higher attendance than teachers that were not working in a PLC.

Significance of the Project

The purpose of this project was to provide a factual base of data regarding the use of Professional Learning Communities in an alternative high school setting. The research was focused on how the collaboration that was done in the PLC teams helped improve classroom management. If the results are favorable then it supports the continued need for Professional Learning communities. If the results are not favorable then the staff would need to re-examine the changes that were implemented at the high school.

Procedure

During the 2005-2006 school year, all the staff began reading research on Professional Learning Communities. A decision was made by the administration to implement PLCs at PACE. The staff members collected classroom data regarding number of behavior referrals written by each teacher. At school improvement meetings in January and February 2006, the staff began to develop three Professional Learning Communities and Network Norms. During the 4th quarter of the 2005-2006 school year, the staff began to implement PLCs.

Throughout the summer of 2006, each staff member attended additional workshops and in-services on Professional Learning Communities. In August of 2006, the staff changed from three groups of four members in a Professional Learning Communities to two groups of six members in each PLC. Beginning with the 2006-2007 school year, the staff fully implemented Professional Learning Communities.

All the staff met monthly to discuss teaching strategies with reading and math coaches. Monthly meetings also included time for PLC members to discuss accomplishments within the classroom and identify areas that still needed improvement.

Definition of Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress. The state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100 percent of students achieving the state academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math.

Classroom disruptions. Any action by one student that distracts that student or another student from learning.

Coaches. Teachers that were trained to support coaches in the classroom.

Coachees. Teachers that were being coached on effective teaching strategies.

Collaboration. A sharing of collective intelligence amongst PLC members.

Network Norms. Agreements among teachers that guide the work within the PLC meetings.

Obstacles. This included low attendance, a high number of behavior referrals, and high numbers of classroom fights.

Professional Learning Community. A team of teachers that worked together to increase the level of instruction and improve the student performance.

School Improvement Facilitator. A person from outside the school district, appointed by the OSPI to facilitate the school staff members as the school went through the school improvement process.

Acronyms

AYP. Adequate Yearly Progress

BERC. Baker Evaluation Research Consulting

ESEA. Elementary and Secondary Education Act

NCLB. No Child Left Behind

OSPI. Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

PACE. People's Alternate for Continuing Education

PLC. Professional Learning Community

SIF. School Improvement Facilitator

STAR. Skills and Knowledge, Thinking, Application, and Relationships

WASL. Washington Assessment of Student Learning

CHAPTER 2

Review of Selected Literature

Introduction

There were five main areas of focus. This chapter was organized around the following topics, (a) No Child Left Behind; (b) Motivation in Alternative Schools; (c) Professional Learning Communities; (d) Teacher Collaboration; and (e) Summary.

No Child Left Behind

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The ESEA was the main federal law affecting education from kindergarten through high school. Proposed by President Bush shortly after his inauguration, NCLB was signed into law on January 8th, 2002. According to the U.S. Department of Education (2007), NCLB was built on four principles: accountability for results, more choices for parents, greater local control and flexibility, and an emphasis on doing what worked based on scientific research.

In school districts throughout the United States, initiatives were launched to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP). Under No Child Left Behind, each state developed and implemented measurements for determining whether its schools and local educational agencies were making adequate yearly progress. AYP was an individual state's measure of progress toward the goal of 100 percent of

students achieving state academic standards in at least reading/language arts and math. Adequate yearly progress set the minimum level of proficiency that the state, its school districts, and schools must achieve each year on annual tests and related academic indicators.

According to the OSPI Graduation Requirements website:

Beginning with the graduating Class of 2008, all public high school students will be expected to meet new statewide requirements in order to earn a diploma. The goal: More students better prepared to become responsible citizens, to contribute to their own economic well-being and to that of their families and communities, and to enjoy productive and satisfying lives. (para. 1)

Since the enactment of No Child Left Behind Act in 2002, Washington State has used the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) to gauge student progress. The WASL scores were used to determine if a school meet AYP. Schools that received federal Title I funds that did not make AYP for two consecutive school years were identified as needing school improvement before the beginning of the next school year. Immediately after a school was found to be in need of improvement, school officials received help and technical assistance. These schools developed a two-year plan to improve performance.

People's Alternate for Continuing Education High School did not meet AYP for two consecutive years, which led to OSPI sending representatives to the

school. The OSPI officials gave recommendations to the school. One of the recommendations was the implementation of Professional Learning Communities.

Professional Learning Communities

Richard and Rebecca DuFour, Robert Eaker, and Gayle Karhanek were four of the key researchers and supporters of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). They defined a PLC as a group of teachers who meet regularly as a team to identify essential valued student learning. Once the learning had been identified these teacher developed common assessments, analyzed levels of achievement, set goals, shared strategies and then created lessons to improve on those levels (DuFour, DuFour, Eaker & Karhanek 2004). The teachers had to continue monitoring and adjusting their instruction continuously.

According to DuFour et al., there were three big ideas that guided PLCs. The first was to ensure that students learned. According to English (1999), “all students have the ability to learn. The challenge for educators was ensuring that all students succeeded”(p. 27). When educators made this paradigm shift profound changes began to take place.

The second big idea was to create a culture of collaboration. When building a PLC all teachers needed to work together in order to achieve high levels of success. According to DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker, (2005), “teachers have to work together to analyze and improve their classroom practice”(p. 36). What this meant was that conversations that were once private had to become open for

public discussion. Teachers needed to become comfortable with their practices being questioned by their colleagues. In order for teachers to grow individually and collectively, the teachers continued to ask, “Are students learning what they need to learn?” and “who needs additional time and support to learn?” (DuFour, DuFour, & Eaker, 2005, p. 38).

The final focus area that supported PLCs was that effectiveness was based on results. The focus of working to improve student achievement was the focal point of the school. When teachers are participating in PLCs the levels of student achievement became the evidence of progress. Many schools were capable of creating a wealth of data. In a PLC school, this data became useful information for the staff. The data became the catalyst for improved teaching.

At PACE, the PLC groups followed the Skills and Knowledge, Thinking, Application, and Relationships (STAR) Protocol developed by Baker (2007) to gather data and analyze it. Professional Learning Community members would observe classroom lessons of their fellow PLC members; record data based on student involvement and rated the focal point based on the STAR Protocol. The PLC teams then had meetings every two weeks to debrief the observations. Another section of the PLC meeting was open discussion about students of concern and how teachers could collaborate together and help reach those particular students.

Teacher Collaboration

Collaboration is a key component in successful schools. According to Inger (1993), teacher collaboration produces significant benefits--for students, for the teachers, and for the school. When teachers collaborated with each other and continued seeking skills to increase their effectiveness for students, schools became places where students wanted to be. Bloom, Castagna, Moir and Warren (2005) reiterated this idea with “Coaches and Coachees” (p. 7).

Coaches worked together with teachers to set goals, act upon those goals, and reflect. A necessity in coaching was building relationships with the Coachees (teachers). A dependable relationship was dependant on trust. According to Echeverria and Olalla (as cited in Bloom et al., 2005) “. . . trust is not static; it is established over time and it must be consciously and consistently nurtured”(p. 3). The nurturing required sincerity, reliability, and competence.

Listening and speaking with the Coachee was not enough to show sincerity. Being aware of the body language was necessary. Coachees sensed when the Coaches mind appeared somewhere else during a conversation. Reliability came from keeping commitments. According to Bloom et al (2005), “don’t make promises you can’t keep and follow through on what you say you will do” (p. 27). Competence came from letting the Coachees know the coach had the knowledge and skill to do the job. Coaches had to provide evidence.

When the Coach began to lag in any of these areas the trust quickly faded away and the coaching position became far more difficult.

Schools benefit from teacher collaboration in several ways. Teachers and administrators get the opportunity to work together through formal and informal training sessions, study groups, and conversations about teaching. Teachers were better prepared to support one another's strengths and accommodate weaknesses. As teacher worked together, they reduced their individual planning time. A benefit of this is that the available pool of ideas and materials greatly increased. Furthermore, schools became better prepared and organized to examine new ideas, methods, and materials. As a result of collaboration, the faculty becomes adaptable and self-reliant. Therefore, teachers become organized which eases the strain of the staff turnover, both by providing systematic professional assistance to beginners and by explicitly socializing all newcomers, including veteran teachers, to staff values, traditions, and resources (Inger, 1993).

Motivation in Alternative Schools

The researcher found that the way an educator interacted had a direct influence on the students. Being respectful and positive was proper. Students followed the examples set by the teacher. According to Jones (2002), a method of motivating was “praise, prompt and leave” (p. 11). To praise, an educator described what the student had done correctly so far. Prompting described what the student should have done next and leaving allowed the student to move on to that next step

without being dependant on the teacher. Jonathon Saphier (2005) in his chapter “Masters of Motivation” in *On Common Ground* examines the importance for teachers and other school staff to believe in “effort-based ability” which is “the belief that all students can do rigorous academic work at high standards, even if they are far behind academically and need a significant amount of time to catch up” (p. 86). Most students that attended alternative high schools were in need of a considerable amount of time to catch up. Students in these settings felt that they did not have the ability to do rigorous work and meet high standards. Larsen (2003) stated, “academic engagement and school discipline are significantly related to the prevalence of school violence” (p. 5).

In Wapato, a growing number of students did not find success in the traditional high school program. These students had a range of learning styles, abilities, and motivation for learning. Their learning was often negatively affected by a sense of isolation in large and impersonal public schools.

Summary

In summary, since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, schools and teachers had to change the way that they teach. With schools not meeting AYP, districts were forced to look at ways to improve. At PACE, not meeting AYP led to the implementation of Professional Learning Communities. Teachers collaborated with each other in positive ways. Through workshops teachers learned ways to motivate students.

CHAPTER 3

Methodology and Treatment of the Data

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities at the high school level. This project included a sample group of high school students from the 2004-2005 school year and a second sample group from the 2006-2007 school year. Both groups attended PACE Alternative High School in Wapato, Washington. The researcher wanted to determine if the collaboration that started during the 2005-2006 school year in the form of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) decreased the number of behavior referrals, increased attendance, and lowered the number of classroom disruptions.

This chapter is organized around seven topics. The seven topics include the following: (a) Methodology, (b) Participants, (c) Instruments, (d) Design, (e) Procedure, (f) Treatment of Data, and (g) Summary.

Methodology

The study addressed the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities through an experimental design. Teachers involved with Professional Learning Communities gave students instruction during the 4th quarter of the 2005-2006 school year. The staff fully implemented PLCs during the 2006-2007 school year. Data gathered from the 2005, 2006, and 2007 PACE High School weapons report

compiled by Principal Cathy Hammerberg was used to determine effectiveness of the PLCs. This data included attendance information, number of written behavior referrals, and number of classroom disruptions.

Participants

This study was conducted in rural Washington at an alternative high school. The participants of this project included high school students attending PACE Alternative High School in Wapato, Washington. This project included a sample group of 253 high school students from the 2004-2005 school year and a second sample group of 237 students from the 2006-2007 school year. The demographics of the 2004-2005 students consisted of 55 percent Hispanic, 40 percent Native American, four percent Caucasian, and one percent Asian. The demographics for the 2006-2007 students consisted of 51 percent Hispanic, 42 percent Native American, seven percent Caucasian.

Instruments

The researcher gathered data from the 2005, 2006 and 2007 annual school weapons report. The weapons report was chosen because it lists all of the referrals and number of fights at PACE high school. The weapons report was considered a valid instrument for gathering information because the school was required to report referrals, attendance, fights, and weapon related occurrences each year to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Possible threats affecting the internal validity included differences due to maturation, selection, and selection interaction. Mortality was also a potential problem, because with the static group comparison method there was no pretest information. Consequently, the static group comparison design controlled for history. So it was assumed that the number of referrals had remained constant in the years prior to the study. The issue of reliability was minor because reporting was mandatory for PACE due to state law.

Design

The static group comparison was used for this study. The researcher used data from prior years and compared them with data gathered after the Professional Learning Communities were implemented. The participants were not randomly assigned to groups. The independent variable was implementation of the PLCs.

Procedure

During the 2005-2006 school year, all the staff began reading research on Professional Learning Communities by Richard and Rebecca DuFour at the urging of the principal Cathy Hammerburg. At the same time, the School Improvement Facilitator (SIF) required all the staff to collect classroom data regarding the number of behavior referrals written by each teacher, number of classroom disruptions, and number of fights in each classroom. The staff members at a data carousel then analyzed this information in December of 2005.

The high rate of referrals and students low attendance were two key issues that were identified at this meeting.

At school improvement meetings in January and February of 2006, the staff began to develop three Professional Learning Communities and Network Norms. The staff identified that they worked well with and came to an agreement of who was on each team. Each team then came up with statements or norms that the group would follow while working within the PLC.

During the 4th quarter of the 2005-2006 school year, the staff began to implement PLCs. The staff started to meet monthly to discuss what was happening in the classroom and continued to meet at school improvement meetings and share with the whole staff what was happening within each team.

Throughout the summer of 2006, each staff member attended additional workshops and in-services on Professional Learning Communities. The DuFour workshop was offered in Portland, Oregon. All staff members were required to attend this workshop. In August of 2006, the staff changed from three groups of four members in a Professional Learning Community to two groups of six members in each PLC. The reason for this change was because the groups of four were too small for a functional PLC.

Beginning with the 2006-2007 school year, the staff fully implemented Professional Learning Communities. The staff continued to meet monthly for both school improvement and PLC meetings. At the meetings, members shared

ideas that worked with individual students. Members observed one another and discovered ideas that might work in their classroom. Minutes were kept from each meeting, which served as evidence that was turned into the School Improvement Facilitator. The PLC members referenced the minutes at subsequent meetings to acknowledge whether goals were met and strategies were implemented.

Treatment of Data

During the 2004-2005 school year, the staff at PACE did not participate in Professional Learning Communities. Throughout the 2005-2006 school year, the staff at PACE began implementing strategies of Professional Learning Communities. Full implementation of Professional Learning Communities began with the 2006-2007 school year. The nature of the study focused on the frequency or number of behaviors. Data regarding student attendance, number of behavior referrals, and number of classroom disruptions was collected from the 2005, 2006, and 2007 PACE High School weapons reports for these school years. Therefore only descriptive statistics were used.

Summary

This chapter was designed to review the methodology and treatment of data related to Professional Learning Communities. The staff at PACE High School implemented Professional Learning Communities strategies starting in the Spring

of 2006. Full implementation began with the 2006-2007 school year. Data was gathered from PACE High School's school weapons report.

CHAPTER 4

Analysis of the Data

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities at the high school level. This project included a sample group of 253 high school students from the 2004-2005 school year and a second sample group of 237 students from the 2006-2007 school year. Both groups attended PACE Alternative High School in Wapato, Washington. The researcher wanted to determine if the collaboration that started during the 2005-2006 school year in the form of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) improved classroom management. Specifically the study was to determine if there was a significant change in the amount of behavior referrals, number of classroom disruption and higher attendance during the 2006-2007 school year.

Description of the Environment

The alternative high school in this study opened for enrollment in 1977. During the time of this research, sixth through twelfth grade students attended the school. The maximum student capacity was 300. Many students divided their time between academic courses, vocational training, and work experience. The school was an accredited high school.

The school consisted of the old middle school with 4 rooms inside the main building and 8 portables. There were no playing fields. All classrooms appeared typical, with desks, chairs and white boards.

At the time the study was conducted, the principal had been in an administrative position at the school for eleven years. Prior to that she had taught in the classroom for seventeen years. Two secretaries provided administrative support. There were twelve certified teachers employed at the school. The staff's commitment to developing interpersonal relationships with the students was demonstrated by such things as: an attitude of acceptance of their students' diversity; informal counseling between teachers and students; two full-time staffed counseling positions; and teachers' and the principal's awareness of individual students' life circumstances and challenges.

When a student transferred to the alternative high school, the principal scheduled an individual orientation. This was done to acquaint the student with procedures at the school. Parents and students were required to read and sign a school contract, which detailed expectations for students. Students were to attend school regularly, respect the teachers, follow instructions, complete assignments, not distract other students from learning, not vandalize school property, and refrain from illegal activities such as using or selling alcohol and drugs at school. The consequences for violation of the contract, discipline options and procedures,

interventions, student rights, attendance/tardy policy, and work experience opportunities were outlined in the contract.

Hypothesis

Using PLCs should have a positive impact on overcoming the obstacles of classroom management difficulties that teachers faced at PACE Alternative High School. More specifically, teachers that worked in a PLC had less classroom disruptions, lower numbers of behavior referrals and higher attendance than teachers that were not working in a PLC.

Results and Discussion

At PACE students were considered absent if they were not present for more than three periods a day. During the 2004-2005 school year, there were no PLCs in place at PACE. During the 2005-2006 school year, the staff began implementing strategies from Professional Learning Communities. During this school year there was an increase in number of absences, as can be seen in figure 1. One explanation for the increase in absences is due to the fact that the classroom structure had changed due to new teaching strategies implemented by the staff. Prior to the implementation of the PLCs, teachers worked individually in their own classrooms. An example of a change was that teachers collaborated towards a common goal and integrated different subject areas. The PLCs were in full effect during the 2006-2007 school year and the number of absences returned to a level of prior years. The rate of absenteeism between the 2005-2006 school

year and the 2006-2007 school year decreased by 14%. The rate of absenteeism between the 2004-2005 compared to the 2006-2007 school year did not support the hypothesis.

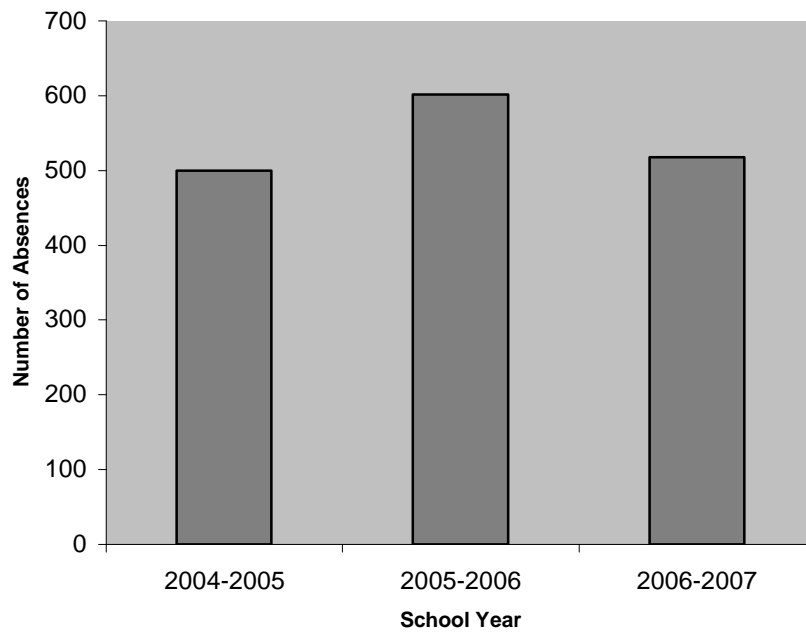


Figure 1. Total number of Absences per Year

Behavior referrals were a common problem at PACE High School. Referrals included possession or use of drugs and/or alcohol, possession of weapons on school grounds, defiant behavior, disrespect, profanity, graffiti or fighting. Additionally, suspensions and expulsions were included in this category. In comparing the data from 2004-2005 through the 2006-2007 school year, the incidence of behavior related referrals decreased by 71%. This decline was due to teachers collaborating; increase communication among staff and working together. Additionally, through sharing ideas on how to work with specific students, there was a decrease in behavior related incidences. These results supported the hypothesis.

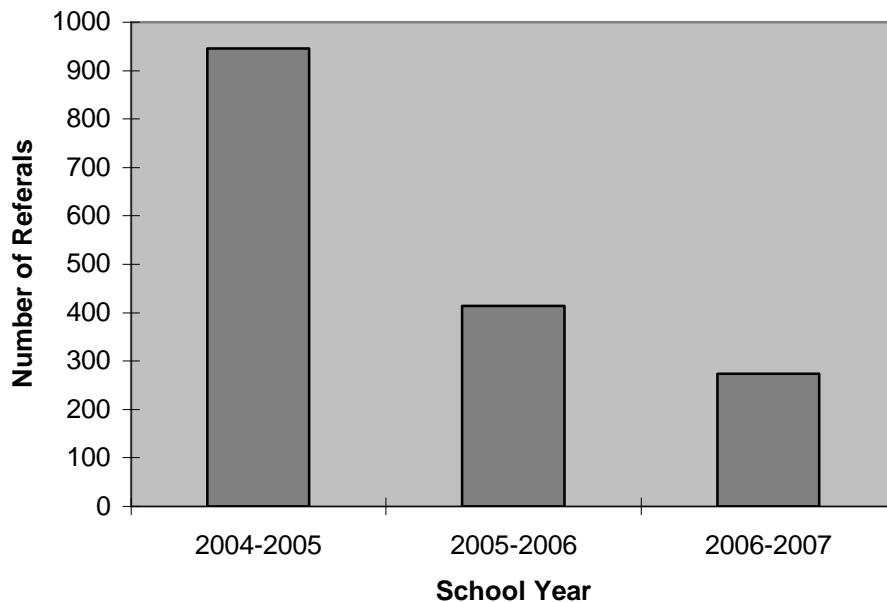


Figure 2. Total Number of Referrals per Year

The occurrence of classroom disruptions in one classroom sample resulted in the most significant amount of change. Classroom disruptions included talking out of turn, failing to follow instructions, interrupting a class lesson and lack of participation. Additionally, disrupting other students from learning was considered a classroom disruption. In the researcher's classroom, the rate of disruptions decreased by 88 % over the three year period. The researcher's classroom included students that were similar to other classrooms. This sample was not better or worse than any other classroom at school and was considered to be representative of all the classrooms.

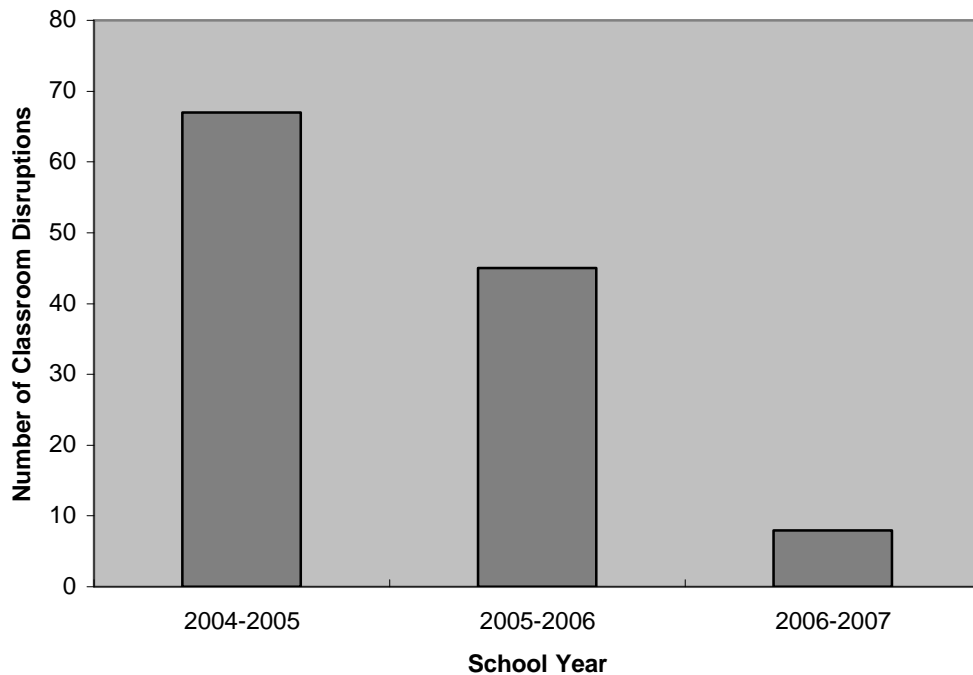


Figure 3. Total Number of Sample Classroom Disruptions per Year

School wide, classroom disruptions also had a significant decrease. With the implementation of Professional Learning Communities, classroom disruptions decreased by 86% over the three years. The PLCs members shared teaching strategies and classroom management strategies during monthly collaboration meetings. This is one possible reason for the decline in classroom disruptions. In addition, PLC members were constantly observing one another. Students tend to behave better when there are additional staff members in the classroom.

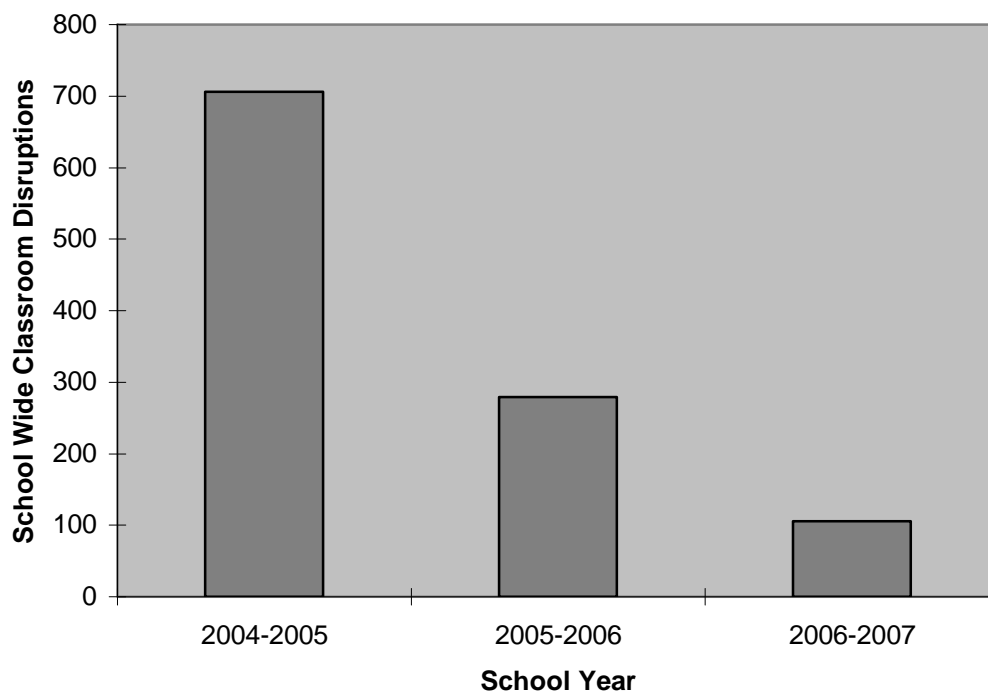


Figure 4. Total Number of School Wide Classroom Disruptions per Year

The data was analyzed and interpreted. The researcher found significant declines in the number of classroom disruptions and behavior referrals as measured by the School Weapons Reports. Additionally, the researcher found an increase in student absences. The hypothesis that teachers that worked in Professional Learning Communities had fewer classroom disruptions, lower numbers of behavior referrals and higher attendance than teachers that were not working in a PLC was partially supported. The PLC did not improve student attendance.

Summary

The study was conducted to determine if Professional Learning Communities could decrease the number of classroom disruptions, behavior referrals and increase student attendance. Benefits of the PLCs were measured by comparing the number of occurrences as reported on the School Weapons Report. The results of the study were positive and were shown to have significance. The effects of teachers working in Professional Learning Communities were positive. The collaboration among teachers brings the strengths of all of the PLC members together. Teachers were able to discover additional teaching strategies through classroom observations.

The students that were part of this study were attending class at an alternative high school. The data for the project was based on three years of data collected about student behaviors.

The students that received instruction from teachers participating in Professional Learning Communities did not have a significant change in attendance. However, these students did have a significant decrease in behavior referrals and fewer classroom disruptions. From the data, the hypothesis was partially supported.

CHAPTER 5

Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

Introduction

The purpose of this project was to determine the effectiveness of Professional Learning Communities at the high school level. This project included a sample group of 253 high school students from the 2004-2005 school year and a second sample group of 237 students from the 2006-2007 school year. Both groups attended PACE Alternative High School in Wapato, Washington. The researcher wanted to determine if the collaboration that started during the 2005-2006 school year in the form of Professional Learning Communities (PLC) improved classroom management. Specifically the study was to determine if there was a significant change in the amount of behavior referrals, number of classroom disruption, and higher attendance during the 2006-2007 school year.

Summary

The study was conducted to determine if Professional Learning Communities could decrease the number of classroom disruptions and behavior referral, while increasing student attendance. Benefits of the PLCs were measured by comparing the number of occurrences as reported on the School Weapons Report.

The results of the study were positive and were shown to have significance for the educational community. The effects of teachers working in Professional Learning Communities were positive. The collaboration among teachers brings

the strengths of all of the PLC members together. Teachers were able to discover additional teaching strategies through classroom observations.

Conclusions

The researcher found significant declines in the number of classroom disruptions and behavior referrals. Professional Learning Communities had a significant effect on behavior referrals decreasing by 71%, as can be seen by figure 2. Additionally, the PLCs had a significant effect on classroom disruptions decreasing by 86%, as displayed in figure 4. The results came from the help of collaboration among staff members and shared ideas from classroom observations. However, the researcher did not show an increase in student attendance. The PLCs did not have a significant effect on attendance.

The hypothesis that teachers that worked in Professional Learning Communities had fewer classroom disruptions, lower numbers of behavior referrals and higher attendance than teachers that were not working in a PLC was partially supported. The PLC did not improve student attendance.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, a limited set of recommendations are made by the researcher. The members of the PLCs need to set a goal and target school attendance. With the results found in the other two areas, PLCs could possibly have a significant effect on attendance if the PLC members all focused on that one obstacle. During this experiment, the PLC members were strictly focused on

teaching strategies. The effect on behavior referrals and classroom disruptions support the recommendation that focusing on one area will result in favorable changes.

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