

# OFFICE of SCHOOL TURNAROUND

OKLAHOMA STATE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



AUGUST • 2015

## WHAT'S NEW

### Moving Forward:

As August arrives, it is time to begin finalizing your School Improvement Plan for the 2015-2016 school year. Unfortunately, the FY16 Project 515 Plan has not been released nor have the SY15 report cards or new designations. However, that should not stop us from developing plans to meet the needs of our low achieving students. Each campus has received SY15 Preliminary Student Data and this data is a great place to start. Now is the time to look at our students who scored "Unsatisfactory" or "Limited Knowledge" and ask "What are we doing for our students who struggle?" For those schools practicing the Professional Learning Community philosophy, the question is "What do we do when our students don't learn?" As you develop your School Improvement Plan, there are a few questions you might find helpful.

- Is learning "invitational" or a "requirement" on campus?  
What do our actions support?
- Other than grades, how do we monitor the learning/progress of students?
- When do we look at the data and what does the data tell us?
- Based on the data, do we have interventions in place to meet the needs of all students?
- Are these interventions or accommodations?
- What are our next steps? Are we taking those steps?  
If not, why? What are our barriers?

In reflecting over the list of low achieving students, were you able to identify the students before the state assessment? If the answer is yes, now is the time to create a School Improvement Plan that supports the implementation of systematic school wide strategies that will meet the needs of your students. If you need assistance with the development of this plan, please give us a call. The Office of School Turnaround is here to provide you support and resources. The best thing...we are free!!!

Special thanks to everyone who attended EngageOK and stopped by the Federal Programs Resource Room and attended the various Office of School Turnaround Sessions. It was a pleasure meeting each of you.

*Desarae Witmer*  
Executive Director

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## MAKING THE GRADE: Western Heights Middle School

### What's in a Name? Redefining "PLC"

**Edward N. Smith**

*Western Heights Middle School PLC*

"You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means," utters the orphan-turned-swordsman Inigo Montoya to his lexically-challenged compatriot in Rob Reiner's 1987 adventure tale, *The Princess Bride*. My wife, a professional educator-turned-team leader, made the same statement—with the same look of puzzled surprise—when I described to her the Western Heights Middle School model of PLC. What's more, she is right, but not because we misuse the term. On the contrary, we dismantled and reformed it as a new building leadership model, adapted to meet the needs of our site—it just sounds suspiciously like another one.

The acronym PLC often communicates something to the effect of "Professional Learning Community." It means something a little different at The Heights: Principal's Leadership Com-

mittee. "Why the change?" you ask. It is a little bit of a pedagogical discourse. In short, teachers have professional responsibilities to continue their own learning. Many of my colleagues were "that kid" in school—the one who read the chapter the week before and always asked for extra credit beyond 100%. These behaviors transferred to their tenure as teachers—the ones who read all of the teacher blogs, subscribe to the educator social media groups, and watch *Stand and Deliver* at least once a year for renewed inspiration. Having a special committee established to keep professionals professional and lifelong learners learning seemed unnecessary, redundant, superfluous, and excessive.

This model makes an important assumption about site culture: chiefly, that both teachers and administrators are keenly aware of and personally

invested in the shared success of the school. Notice the emphasis on "shared." It is one thing for a teacher to be successful, but that doesn't mean that she shares this with her peers. It is another thing for a principal to be successful, but he may be the only one in the building. Think of schools that operate under these conditions as hourglasses. When an hourglass is turned upside-down, perhaps by the introduction of a new set of state criteria, each grain of sand is in its own race to the bottom, but we must all bottleneck together at some point, and it is here where many groups fail.

The Principal's Leadership Committee, however, emphasizes that the only success in the building is the success of the building. It requires a cultural shift away from individual agendas and

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## SPOTLIGHT

### Closeout Procedures

We have GOOD NEWS! For the FY14-15 Project 515 Funds, the Office of School Turnaround (OST) will NOT require Districts/Sites to submit a Closeout Report in GMS.

We have worked with the GMS developers to utilize the "Carryover" option that was added to the application in the spring to assist us in moving the funds forward without having the Districts/Site take any additional steps. Please note that this condition only applies to FY14-15 Project 515 – School Improvement Funds.

When planning for the upcoming year, please know the FY16 Project 515 Application will not be available until after August 1, 2015. The OST will notify Districts/Sites when

FY16 application becomes available. If you have any questions about expenditures or providing services during this time, please contact your School Support Specialist.

Any remaining FY14-15 Project 515 Claims are due by Monday, August 3, 2015. If you do not feel you can make this deadline, please contact your School Support Specialist as soon as possible for assistance.

Just a friendly reminder, if you received Project 515 funds for FY14 in the amount of \$10,789.70, these funds will expire if not encumbered by September 30, 2015.

Please do not hesitate to give us a call for any questions, concerns or if you need assistance.

### School Improvement Status Report

The application will be available through Single Sign-On. It will be up and running on August 15. Please make sure you are looking for the application on your Single Sign-On.

#### REMINDER

In order to process your claims in a quick and efficient manner, please make sure your school district has updated its DUNS/SAMS number for this year.

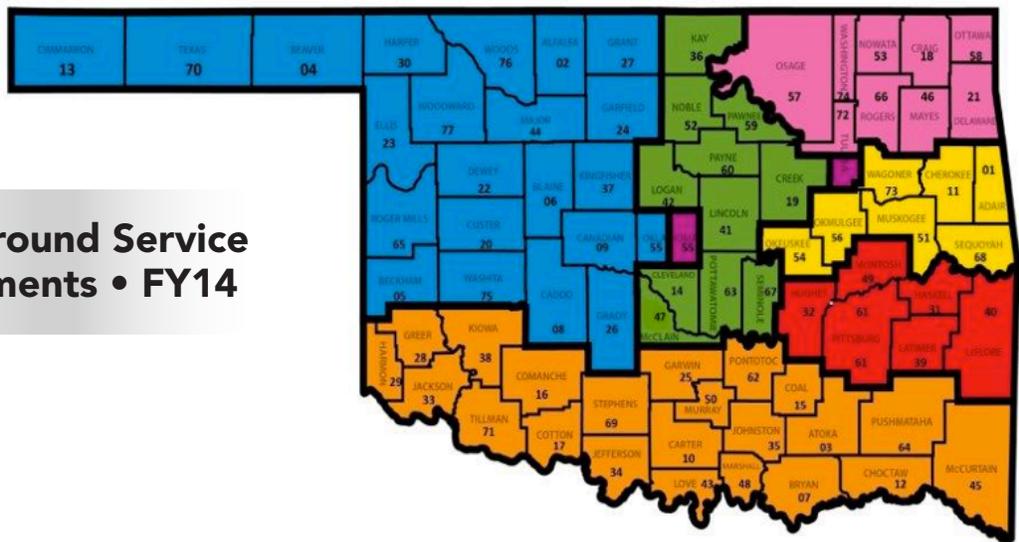
# SITE VISITS

As the school year is approaching, we look forward to visiting your school. On the next two pages, you can find a map of the state divided into school support regions. Your School Support Specialist is available to provide a variety of supports and resources for your school. From developing a site improvement plan to providing professional development, we are available to help meet the needs of your students and teachers. Please do not hesitate to contact the School Support Specialist assigned to your school.

One of the many goals for the OST is to visit each site with a priority designation by October 31, 2015. During our site visits, we will be using the questionnaire below which is designed to gather more information about your school and guide our discussion during the initial visit. This is a great opportunity for you to share your needs and how we can help you. We want to provide you the supports and resources needed to make a difference in the lives of your students and teachers. Your School Support Specialist will send you a full copy of the questionnaire that can be completed prior or during to the scheduled visit.

1. Please give details about the areas of strength at your school.
2. What are the two greatest challenges your school faces?
3. My school's greatest barrier(s) for increasing student achievement are (choose three):
  - Attendance
  - Safe/respectful learning environment
  - Classroom management
  - Positive relationships
  - Discipline/Suspensions
  - Parent/Community support
  - Professional development
  - Differentiated instruction
  - Special education instruction
  - Technology integrated instruction
  - Lesson planning
  - Remediation/extension instruction
  - Standard-based instruction
  - Regular data reviews
  - Data reviews that impact instruction
  - Using SMART goals
  - Using formative assessments to impact instruction
  - Lesson plan design
4. What are the goals for your school?
5. What are the action steps necessary to achieve these goals?
6. What questions do you have for the Office of School Turnaround?

## Wrap Around Service Assignments • FY14



<span style="color: blue;">■</span> SCHUTT 2-1493	<span style="color: green;">■</span> OWENS-HOPKINS 2-8299	<span style="color: pink;">■</span> CLAYTON 2-1476	<span style="color: yellow;">■</span> VACANT SCHUTT 2-1493	<span style="color: red;">■</span> NEW FOREMAN	<span style="color: orange;">■</span> FOREMAN 580-618-1000	<span style="color: purple;">■</span> OKCPS/TPS CLAYTON,OWENS- HOPKINS, SCHUTT
02,04,05,08,09,13,20,22,24 26,27,30,37,44,55,70,76,77	14,19,36,41,42,47, 52,59,60,63,67	18,21,46,53,57, 58,66,72,74,	01,11,51,54 56,68,73	31,32,39,40,49,61	03,07,10,12,15,16, 17,25,29,33,34,35,38, 43,45,48,50,62,64 69,71	55,72

## Redefining “PLC”

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principal-centric directives to a decentralized, shared responsibility model. This school operates like a clock. Each cog, spring, and lever in the clock has a job—some larger or more time consuming than others, but each play an essential role. Without each piece, it is impossible for the clock to function. This cultural reconfiguration is essential to the success of this model. Each teacher and administrator, much like a watch repairman, must be mindful and appreciative of the role each part plays in the workings of the whole.

In this re-branding, building leaders—be they administrators, faculty, staff, or tenuous references to Tenacious D lyrics—collectively evaluate the needs of all interested parties. From these observations, the team establishes specific, measurable, attainable, reasonable, and time-constrained objectives (otherwise known as SMART goals—no, there is no change to this acronym or charge for this bonus information).

It is essential in making these assessments to identify in a brutally honest evaluation what the team can change and what they cannot. What’s more, the team must be open and receptive to criticism. A key pedagogical turning point in this model is that correction does not equate to a value judgement. Instead, these points are more like mile-markers on a map. In other words, when the team is not meeting an objective on

time, recommendations of correction show where the team is in its progress and nothing else. Arguably, the success of this model at The Heights comes largely from the transfer of this shift of interpretation from the leadership of the building into the hallways and classrooms.

With the goals established, each is placed under the responsibility and direction of a specially qualified member of the team. Our team, for example, has leaders for special education needs, gifted and talented students, building climate and safety, academic acceleration and remediation, and department heads, to name a few. Each of these leaders bears the responsibility for leading initiatives in these areas and collaborating throughout the building to meet their objectives. Only the most qualified leaders are selected for their respective positions, and tenure in the building is not considered; it is very much a meritocracy.

While some sites may have reclusive, exclusionary leadership communities, this take on PLC does not limit meetings and decisions to these few leaders. Instead, the meetings are regularly scheduled on a weekly-basis and widely advertised to everyone in the building. In essence, the idea is to allow as much participation from the site as possible. This serves several purposes, including increasing the chances of insightful, diverse responses to redefine and re-interpret school needs, keeping everyone abreast of evolving situations, and increasing the personal investment of

the majority of the school in leadership decisions. This last element is essential in ensuring the bearing of shared responsibility of the success of the school in addition to improving building morale through the direct participation of faculty and staff in their own leadership.

This model is not perfect. In fact, it is very much a work-in-progress, and that is its last, greatest strength—adaptability. The Heights will continue to develop and use this model so long as it proves valuable. When it fails to meet our needs, we will scrap it and move on to another model. Each site, administrator, teacher, student, test score, and legislator is different. When these factors combine and recombine, what was a useful solution once may no longer be. This is when we reevaluate ourselves, make adjustments, and move forward doing the best we can with what we have—following the unspoken motto of teachers everywhere.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*By day, Edward N. Smith is the Academic Acceleration Coordinator on the Western Heights Middle School PLC (PLC, as defined in the article afore) and classroom teacher for gifted students. By night, he is an adjunct professor of World History with the University of Central Oklahoma. His publication credits include scholarly articles, popular history, and science fiction. He has not yet mastered telepathy, but continues to work on it regardless of what “modern” science says.*



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