

# Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle

Lancaster County School District

ADVANCING RESEARCH



IMPROVING EDUCATION

SEDL's Research and Evaluation staff conducted an evaluation of the extent to which the PTLC process was changing teaching and learning in the Lancaster County School District. This report summarizes recent evaluation findings regarding the achievement of expected outcomes associated with the process.



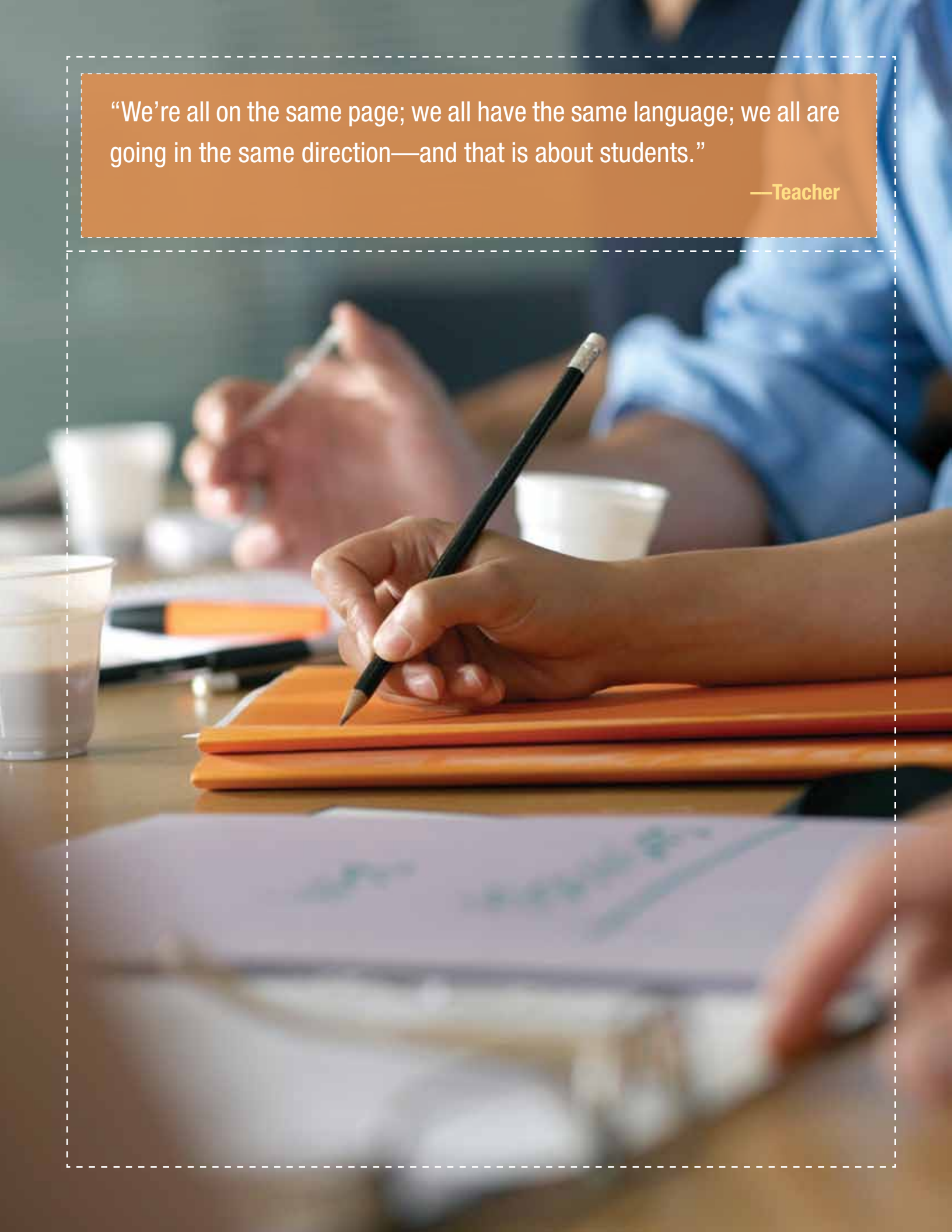
Lancaster County

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“We’re all on the same page; we all have the same language; we all are going in the same direction—and that is about students.”

—Teacher



# Executive Summary

In 2009, SEDL entered into a 2-year contract with the Lancaster County School District to provide professional development and technical assistance to the district and schools to establish, implement, and sustain a systemic improvement process.

A primary component of the professional development and technical assistance was SEDL's Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle (PTLC). The PTLC is an ongoing cyclic process wherein teachers meet in teams and collaboratively plan, implement, and monitor classroom lessons aligned to state standards. Technical assistance also focused on developing the capacity of both district and school leaders to support the PTLC process. In their work with Lancaster County School District, staff from SEDL conducted site visits to the district and each of three schools (partner schools) designated for targeted support in using the PTLC process. During those visits, SEDL staff provided ongoing technical assistance, professional development sessions, feedback based on their observations of professional learning team (PLT) meetings, and discussions about their observations when accompanying principals and facilitators on classroom walkthroughs.

## Outcomes Achieved

### **District and school leaders support teachers in the PTLC process.**

Leaders have provided teachers with resources, feedback, professional development opportunities, and tools designed to increase the alignment of the curriculum, instruction, and assessment with state standards. Instructional facilitators have worked closely with teachers in PLTs and the classroom to promote teachers' use of data to drive instructional decisions.

### **Teachers collaboratively plan lessons that align with the state standards and student learning expectations.**

The PTLC process has given teachers a framework for in-depth collaborative planning that emphasizes the use of standards throughout the cycle. Within their PLT meetings, teachers have been sharing instructional strategies and experiences with each other more than they did in the past.

### **Teachers analyze student work to determine evidence of student learning.**

In addition to benchmark tests and standardized test scores, teachers reviewed projects, activities, and class assignments such as writing samples and math problems.

### **Teachers have increased their instructional knowledge and skills.**

Teachers have gained new knowledge about teaching and learning from the PLT work and grown more reflective about their practice.

Teachers have also held themselves more accountable for student learning and become more aware of their students' learning needs.

### **Changes in school culture have occurred since teachers began meeting in PLTs.**

Teachers have developed more trusting relationships with one another, increasingly viewing the school as a community where they all share responsibility for student learning. Teachers have also felt more comfortable discussing student difficulties and asking their colleagues and leaders for assistance. Administrators have begun working more as instructional leaders than as school managers, participating in PLTs and assisting teachers in making connections between PLT meetings and the classroom.

The above outcomes have been more prevalent in the partner schools, where SEDL staff provided intensive support to leaders and instructional facilitators. However, because SEDL staff worked with most of the principals and instructional facilitators across the district on a fairly regular basis, non-partner schools





have also benefited to a certain extent from SEDL's assistance.

## Future Directions

### **Maintain the PTLC process as the structure for PLT meetings and expand the use of PLTs throughout the district.**

To sustain the work, administrators and instructional facilitators need to ensure they have a strong understanding of the PTLC process and continue to provide the necessary supports (e.g., time and research-based resources and strategies) to assist teachers with their instructional practices.

### **Increase teachers' comfort level for taking on PLT facilitation.**

Although some teachers are gaining confidence in facilitating PLTs, to support the continuation of the work, all staff should become knowledgeable in the PTLC process so that

“The teachers [are] excited about [student learning]. They see the growth . . . the small celebrations.”  
—Teacher

facilitating PLTs becomes a natural part of the meetings for all teachers.

### **Provide support for teachers in differentiating instruction based on individual student needs.**

Teachers may need additional support in learning and implementing strategies for adjusting their instruction according to individual student's learning needs. Methods for increasing knowledge and skills in this area include professional development (both external and ongoing, job-embedded), modeling, observations, and feedback.



# Overview of the PTLC

## History and Background



### Background

In 2009, SEDL entered into a 2-year contract with the Lancaster County School District to provide professional development and technical assistance to the district and schools to establish, implement, and sustain a systemic improvement process. A primary component of the professional development and technical assistance was SEDL's Professional Teaching and Learning Cycle (PTLC).

The PTLC is a job-embedded process based on research reflecting best practices in the areas of professional development and school improvement. It is an ongoing cyclic process designed to work systemically to improve the quality of professional development (e.g., ongoing, job-embedded, results-driven); professional collaboration among staff; the use of data to inform instructional and programmatic decisions; the alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to the state standards; the monitoring of student learning; and leadership support systems for continuous school improvement.

The PTLC is a job-embedded process based on research reflecting best practices in the areas of professional development and school improvement.



*Adapted by SEDL with permission from the professional teaching model of the Charles A. Dana Center at The University of Texas at Austin. [www.utdanacenter.org](http://www.utdanacenter.org)*



## Evaluation Questions

1. What support has been provided for establishing and implementing the PTLC process in Lancaster County District and its schools?
  - by SEDL
  - by the Lancaster County District Central Office
  - by the school leadership
2. To what degree has the PTLC process been implemented in each of the schools?
3. To what extent has participation in the PTLC process facilitated changes in teachers' instructional practices and in the schools' environment/culture?

# Methods





## Interviews and Focus Groups

During January and February 2011, SEDL evaluators interviewed the district leader in charge of the initiative, and principals and assistant principals at each of the three partner schools that were receiving targeted assistance from SEDL staff. In addition, evaluators conducted teacher focus groups at each of these partner schools as well as a focus group of instructional facilitators from all of the district's schools.

## Surveys

Surveys were administered to all 750 teachers in Lancaster County School District in March 2011. In addition, the district's 22 instructional facilitators and 48 school administrators were asked to complete parallel versions of the survey. Several of the school administrators, who also served as instructional facilitators, completed a facilitator survey rather than an administrator survey. Therefore, response rates for these two groups have been combined to show the groups' total response rate. The response rates appear on the next page.

SEDL evaluators interviewed and/or conducted focus groups with the district leader in charge of the initiative, administrators, instructional facilitators, and teachers at each of the three partner schools.

	Total Number	Number Responding to Survey	Response Rate
 <b>Teachers</b>	<b>750</b>	<b>562</b>	<b>75%</b>
 <b>Administrators/ Instructional Facilitators</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>91%</b>

## Site Visit Summaries

Two SEDL program staff conducted monthly site visits from September 2009 through February 2011. For each visit, each program staff member completed a site visit summary describing the assistance provided during the visit or by e-mail and phone during the month, the extent to which the staff had accomplished what they intended during their site visit, the extent of progress with respect to project goals, and next steps for future site visits. After reviewing site visit summaries, SEDL evaluators interviewed SEDL program staff in April 2011 about their reflections of the work over the course of the entire school year. Areas discussed included the extent of support by the district and school administrators for the PLTs; the progress of PLT meetings with respect to implementing the PTLC and continuity from

week to week; and changes in the practices of administrators, instructional facilitators, and teachers that may be attributed to the PTLC process and the collaborative work of the PLTs.

## Meeting Logs

Logs were completed weekly for each PLT meeting. The logs provided a summary of the meeting focus, major actions taken based on the meeting, next steps, and questions or assistance needed.

The above data sources were used to generate the findings. The survey data and the interviews served as the primary sources of evaluation information, with the site visit summaries and meeting logs providing supporting information in the summary of findings presented in the next section.

# Outcomes

## What We Learned



### OUTCOME 1

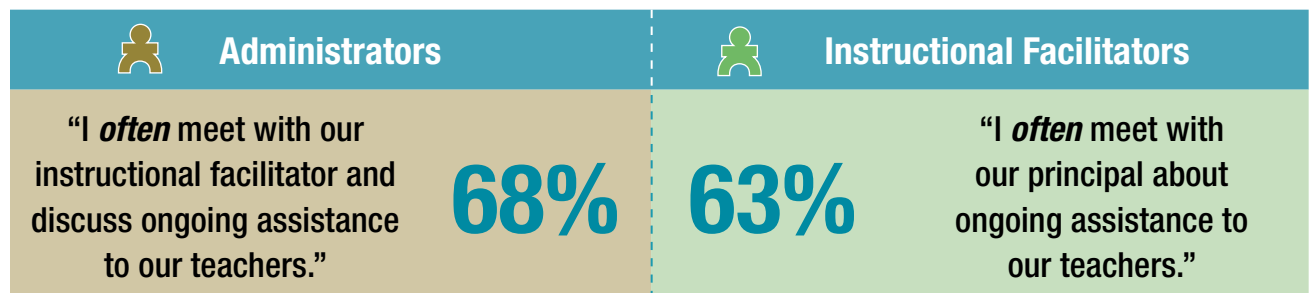
#### District and school leaders support teachers in the PTLC process.

##### Ongoing communication about PLTs occurs among district staff, administrators, instructional facilitators, and teachers.


This exchange has supported relationships that promoted strong collaborative efforts in addressing student performance and school improvement goals. School administrators and instructional facilitators have communicated regularly about the PLTs and the types of


assistance teachers need, as indicated by the survey responses shown below. District leaders have also supported PLTs by communicating the importance of the work.

District staff, administrators, and instructional facilitators have all observed teachers in PLTs and in their classrooms, and have provided feedback based on these observations. Feedback was also provided to teachers based on reviews of lesson plans and PLT meeting notes.



Scale: Never = 0, Rarely = 1, Sometimes = 2, Often = 3.

 Never = 3%, Rarely = 5%, Sometimes = 25%, Often = 68%.

 Never = 8%, Rarely = 13%, Sometimes = 17%, Often = 63%.

\* Throughout the report, percentages reported from survey responses may not total 100% due to rounding.

“Any time we’ve had a problem, the next time we [meet] . . . [the principal and instructional facilitator] have a solution. You can tell they’ve discussed what we’ve discussed.”

—Teacher

Teachers reported receiving both formal feedback in scheduled meetings and informal feedback in brief hall conversations. As one teacher explained, “We get feedback every time we meet with our instructional facilitators.” Teachers also indicated in interviews that they felt comfortable asking for feedback and leader support. An instructional facilitator stated, “If [teachers] run into any issues or problems in their classroom, I feel like we have a wonderful rapport, so I feel like they feel comfortable in coming to me and asking me if I’ll come in and demo a lesson or if I can provide support to them.”

### **Teachers receive a variety of support from school and district leaders.**

Instructional facilitators have provided much of the support for teachers during the PLT meetings by sharing strategies and resources, such as professional development opportunities, Web sites, and books. At the district level, leaders have allocated time and resources for ongoing PLT meetings and related professional development. SEDL staff noted that instructional facilitators were “driving a lot” of the support teachers received in PLTs. Similarly, the district leader in charge of the initiative felt that the most progress with the PLTs occurred in schools with instructional facilitators because of the support they provided to teachers.

## What Teachers Say About Support From Leaders



“They’re also there for moral support.”

“Kind of like a pep talk—‘What can we do to help you and help them?’”

“She values us and values what we’re doing and our children.”

“They have been very, very lenient with anything we suggest.”

Instructional facilitators also have assisted teachers with using student data. As one principal noted, “Providing data for [teachers], that’s a big piece that instructional facilitators do.” In the survey, over two-thirds of teachers in partner schools indicated that the instructional facilitator often assisted them with collecting, analyzing, and interpreting student data. Fewer of the teachers at non-partner schools responded similarly, as shown in the chart on the next page. The PTLC has a strong focus on using data, and these results suggest that teachers at the schools that received more intensive support from SEDL staff received more support on working with data from instructional facilitators. One example of such assistance involved an instructional facilitator helping teachers align multiple sources of data (i.e., PASS, MAP, DIBELS, and report card data).

Although school leaders (principals, assistant principals, instructional facilitators) initially facilitated the PLT meetings, the intent has been to scaffold teachers’ understanding of the PTLC

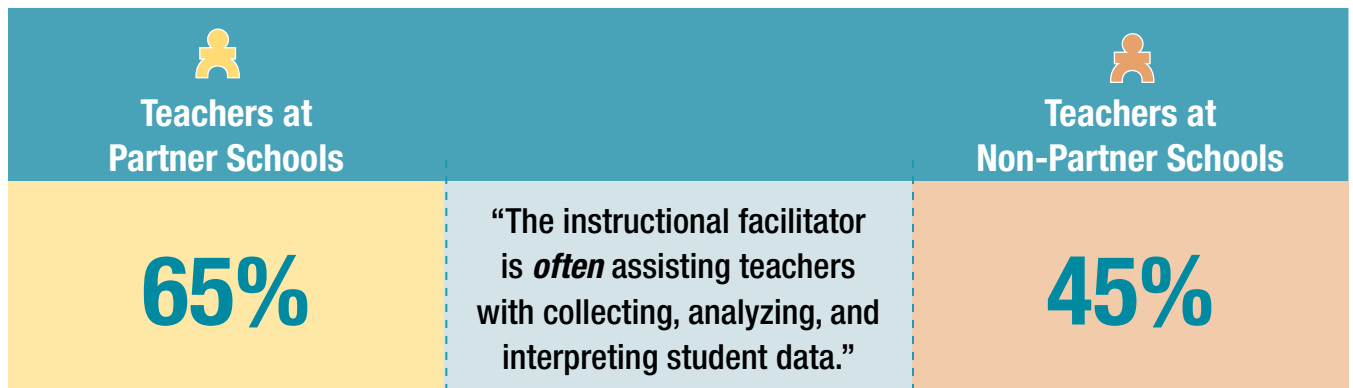
## Examples of Support Teachers Receive From Leaders

Feedback Encouragement  
*Peer Observations* Professional Development  
*Standards* *Instructional Strategies*  
 Web Sites Time Books

process so they could begin to share the responsibility for leading the meetings. In this way, teachers would gain ownership of the meetings, thereby ensuring their continuation. According to SEDL staff, “some of the teams [are] moving in the direction of having teachers take over team facilitation.”

“ [The principal and instructional facilitator] are really good about resources. **If we’re looking for something** or . . . they’ve got an idea that could help us, . . . **they are on top of it.** ”

—Teacher



Scale: Never = 0, Rarely = 1, Sometimes = 2, Often = 3.

 Never = 6%, Rarely = 9%, Sometimes = 20%, Often = 65%.  Never = 10%, Rarely = 15%, Sometimes = 30%, Often = 45%.

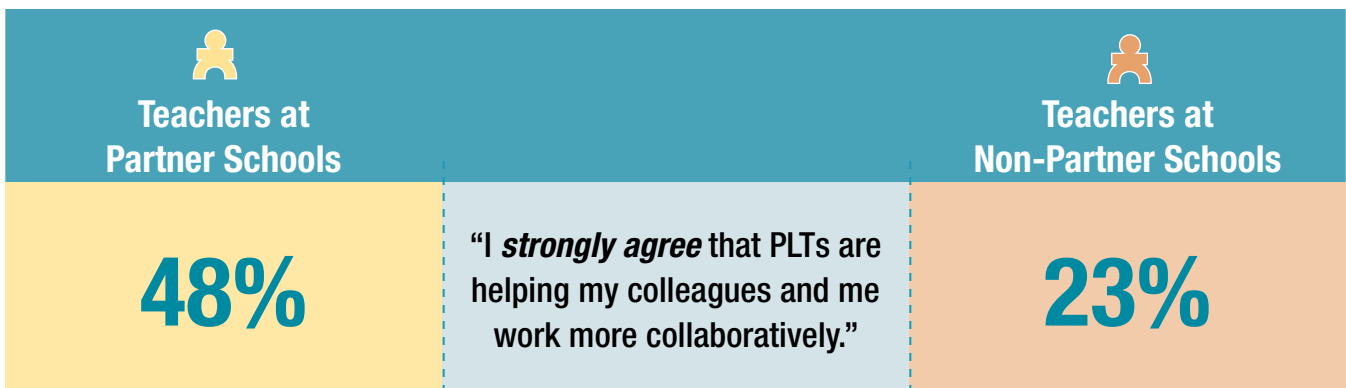
## OUTCOME 2

### Teachers collaboratively plan lessons that align with the state standards and student learning expectations.

#### Teachers use their planning time more effectively.

According to interviews, many teachers, particularly in the elementary and middle schools, reported that they had participated in common planning time in the past. However, those meetings had lacked the rich conversations about standards, learning expectations, and analysis of student work that define the PTLC process. A number of teachers stated that they were working more collaboratively since they had begun meeting in PLTs. Schedules had to be adjusted for teachers who had not already been participating in common planning meetings to attend PLTs. Administrators, facilitators, and

teachers all noted in interviews that although some of these teachers had initially been resistant to changing their planning schedules, they came to appreciate the opportunity to work with their colleagues in the PLT meetings. SEDL staff confirmed that the collaborative work in PLTs had become more of a “norm” for teachers. One teacher said that although the PLTs were “time consuming,” they were also “much more relevant and helpful this year.” In response to a survey question about teacher collaboration, many of the teachers at partner schools indicated that PLTs were helping to strengthen collaboration; fewer of their colleagues at non-partner schools selected this response.



**Scale:** Strongly Disagree = 0, Disagree = 1, Agree = 2, Strongly Agree = 3.

Strongly Disagree = 2%, Disagree = 6%, Agree = 44%, Strongly Agree = 48%.

Strongly Disagree = 3%, Disagree = 13%, Agree = 62%, Strongly Agree = 23%.

“ I think that [the PLTs] are a very useful time to help plan and guide our instruction. Prior to this we did not have time set aside for our teams to come together and study our standards. Now, with this time set aside, it has . . . helped us to plan [lessons that] meet what our students need. ”

—Teacher

**The PTLC process provided teachers with a framework for in-depth collaborative planning that emphasizes the use of standards throughout the cycle.**

Administrators, instructional facilitators, and teachers all agreed that instruction had not been well aligned to the standards before the district’s partnership with SEDL. One administrator explained that in previous years teachers would plan together, but there was “hardly any alignment of standards to assessments.” Now, as one teacher noted, working together in the PLTs “[helps] us look at our standards to know exactly at what level . . . we need to be teaching.” SEDL staff also observed that during the second year it became common practice for teachers to use the standards in planning lessons. SEDL staff went on to say that “there is no more parking lot [last-minute] planning,” as teachers now possess a “clear picture of what they are going to teach.”

The PLTs have provided teachers with the opportunity to look more closely at the standards in the planning process and determine how they can design lessons around



“ This was an eye-opener at the beginning of last year. . . . We thought teachers knew their standards. . . . I feel confident now that teachers do know their standards from this process. ”

—Instructional Facilitator

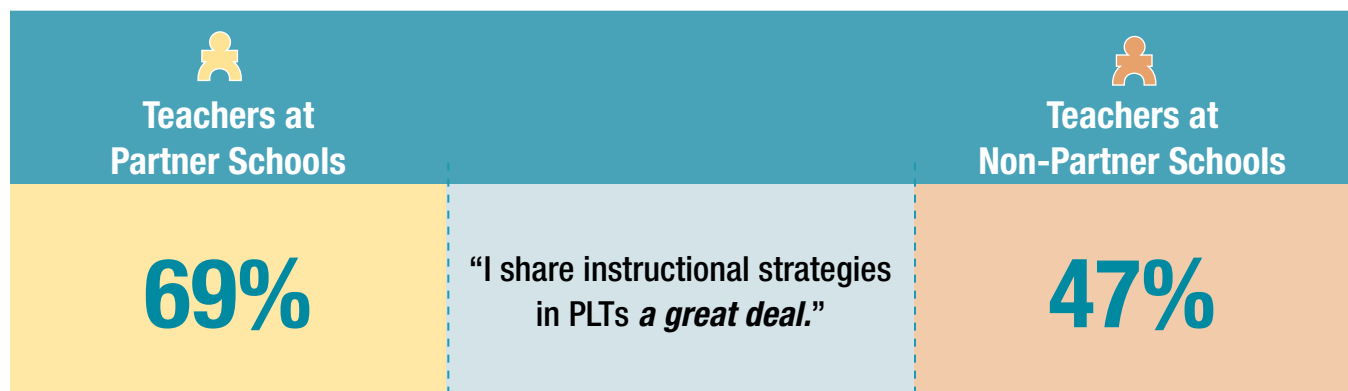
them. The district leader stated that teachers were now “looking at what the standards are really saying rather than just reading them.” During a teacher focus group, a teacher commented, “We really have learned . . . our standards and learned to develop our curriculum around our standards to be on target more of the time.” An administrator also noted that teachers had become “okay with saying that ‘I don’t understand what this standard is saying’ . . . Now they’ll tell you in a heartbeat.” PLT meeting logs confirm that teachers have been identifying the standards they are addressing as they plan lessons during the PLTs.

**As part of the PLT planning process, teachers share instructional strategies with each other.**

Examples of instructional strategies shared during the meetings, as noted in the PLT meeting logs, include note-taking strategies, graphic organizers, manipulatives, interactive whiteboard activities, Thinking Maps, and multiplication Web sites. Prior to the PLT initiative, teachers were more hesitant to share with one another. One administrator stated that before PLTs, “we were trying to get [teachers] to share, but it was [going] nowhere . . . it was just surface talk.” A survey question asked teachers about the extent to which they shared instructional strategies. A significantly higher percentage of teachers from partner schools than non-partner schools indicated that they shared instructional strategies, as shown below. The data gathered suggest that the extent of sharing among teachers



increased with opportunities for strong teacher collaboration. PLT meetings have been encouraging teacher collaboration and, as the district leader stated, “You can create the time, but you’ve got to have the trust.”



**Scale:** Not At All = 0, A Little = 1, Somewhat = 2, A Great Deal = 3  
👤 Not At All = 0%, A Little = 6%, Somewhat = 25%, A Great Deal = 69%.  
👥 Not At All = 4%, A Little = 9%, Somewhat = 40%, A Great Deal = 47%.

## OUTCOME 3

### Teachers analyze student work to determine evidence of student learning and refine their lessons based on student needs.

#### Teachers focus more on examining evidence of student learning in PLTs.

A central piece of the PTLC process involves maintaining an awareness of the extent to which students understand instructional concepts and topics. Examining various types of student learning tasks provides that awareness so that teachers can make instructional refinements to address individual student learning needs. More than 90% of administrators, instructional facilitators, and teachers reported in surveys that the PLT meetings had focused on evidence of learning. According to teacher interviews, examples of student work examined in PLT meetings included projects or activities, classroom work (e.g., math problems, writing samples), student observations, classroom tests, and standardized assessments. Meeting logs also confirm that teachers have discussed student work in the PLTs.

Teachers have been using student work to understand student progress and struggles. One teacher explained that she/he first looked at student data to ascertain the individual student challenges and then reviewed the standards to determine what to focus on in the

next lesson. Teachers also have found it helpful to look at student work with their colleagues. As instructional facilitators observed in focus group interviews, teachers no longer brought student work to PLT meetings because it was “their turn,” but instead were volunteering to bring student work and requesting feedback from their colleagues.

“ I now see [teachers] bringing student work to the table when there’s truly an issue with something that’s taken place in their classroom. So they’re really bringing it for input and for dialogue among their team. ”

—Instructional Facilitator

SEDL staff reported observing teacher “aha” moments during site visits, noting that teachers had made new discoveries about student learning while examining their work. According to the district leader, teachers have been looking at student performance and asking questions such as “Where are our students?” “Where do we want them to be?” and “How do we get them there?” Teachers have been seeking to understand the extent to

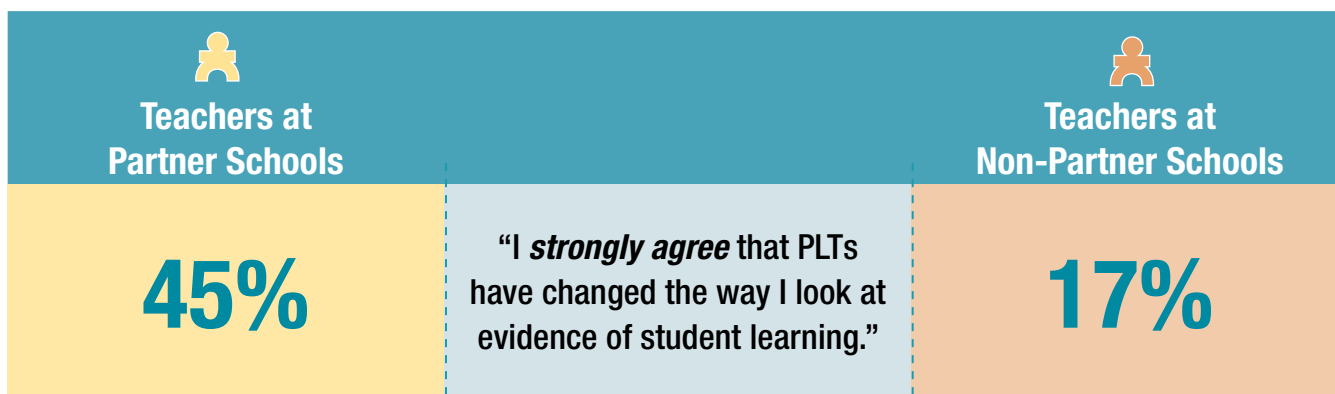


which their students are learning the concepts and topics they are teaching.


While a number of teachers agreed that PLTs had changed the way they looked at evidence of student learning, teachers at partner schools were more likely to strongly agree with this statement than teachers at non-partner schools, as shown below.


**Teachers are still working on adjusting and differentiating instruction.**

Administrators and instructional facilitators agreed that teachers had made progress in using standards to guide lesson planning, develop common assessments aligned with the standards, and analyze evidence of student learning; however, they indicated in surveys and interviews that teachers still



**Scale:** Strongly Disagree = 0, Disagree = 1, Agree = 2, Strongly Agree = 3.

 Strongly Disagree = 1%, Disagree = 11%, Agree = 44%, Strongly Agree = 45%.

 Strongly Disagree = 3%, Disagree = 27%, Agree = 53%, Strongly Agree = 17%.

“ I don't know that they would say that they're proficient at differentiating [instruction], but **they are working mighty hard at it.** ”

—Administrator

needed additional support in adjusting and differentiating instruction. Observations by SEDL staff also indicated that teachers were struggling to refine lessons in response to student needs. SEDL staff noted that teachers were trying different strategies to reteach content, but were still working on truly differentiating instruction. In addition, while PLT meeting logs show examples of teachers' plans for adjusting instruction, it is unclear to what extent the plans were implemented. Administrators and instructional facilitators at partner schools were more likely to report in the survey that teachers were making progress on discussing adjustments to instruction (80% of administrators at partner schools versus 43% at non-partner schools and 100% versus 32% for instructional facilitators). Discussing instructional adjustments is only the first step, however. Implementing those adjustments and differentiating the instruction based upon individual student needs must occur before teachers can accurately address the challenges around student learning.



### Teachers' Objectives When Reviewing Student Work

- Understand why students didn't master a concept.
- Have conversations across grade levels to see if students struggled with a similar concept in the previous grade.
- Discover the cause of discrepancies between high grades and low state assessment scores.
- Plan instruction according to students' strengths and weaknesses.
- Ensure instruction is aligned with the standards.

## OUTCOME 4

### Teachers have increased their instructional knowledge and skills.



#### Teachers have increased content knowledge and have explored ways to improve classroom instruction.

As noted above, participation in PLTs has given teachers ongoing learning opportunities around content knowledge, instructional strategies, and new concepts on the use of data and assessments. In discussing the benefits of PLTs during a focus group, one teacher acknowledged that even “when you’ve taught as long as I have, you still need to learn things.” For a new teacher at one of the partner schools, the benefit of attending

“It’s a good way for us to **bounce ideas** off of each other and to hear what other grade levels are doing.”


—Teacher


weekly PLT meetings has been “the guidance, having the support coming out of my first year, . . . people helping you.” As teachers have studied the standards in relation to lesson planning and examining student work, their instruction has become more focused. As one instructional facilitator noted, “teachers have a better idea of what rigor and rigorous


 Teachers at Partner Schools		 Teachers at Non-Partner Schools
51%	“I have gained <i>a great deal</i> of new knowledge about teaching and learning by participating in PLTs.”	22%
35%	“PLTs have <i>significantly changed</i> the way I teach.”	12%


Scale for Item 1: Not Much = 0, A Little = 1, Somewhat = 2, A Great Deal = 3.

Scale for Item 2: Not At All = 0, A Little = 1, Somewhat = 2, A Great Deal = 3.

Item 1  Not Much = 4%, A Little = 11%, Somewhat = 35%, A Great Deal = 51%.

 Not Much = 12%, A Little = 16%, Somewhat = 50%, A Great Deal = 22%.

Item 2  Not Much = 9%, A Little = 25%, Somewhat = 31%, A Great Deal = 35%.

 Not Much = 21%, A Little = 28%, Somewhat = 39%, A Great Deal = 12%.

“ We’ve learned in our conversations to talk more [about] what these children are learning or what they need help with **instead of making excuses** [about] why they’re not doing it. ”  
—Teacher

looks like.” Further, data walls have become a common sight in PLT meeting rooms, with teachers using the data to inform their assessments of student progress. SEDL staff described teachers in one of the schools they visited as “becoming research-based [and] literacy focused in almost all that they do.”

Survey questions asked teachers in the district about the extent to which they had gained knowledge about teaching and learning and whether they had changed their teaching practices as a result of participating in PLTs. As shown on the previous page, teachers from partner schools responded more positively than those from non-partner schools.

**As teachers engage fully in the planning and analysis work integral to PLTs, they are also reflecting on their instruction and their students’ learning outcomes.** In the teacher focus groups, teachers talked about appreciating the “opportunity to come together [in the PLTs]” and having the time to “[discuss] how this worked for me.” This sharing and reflection has facilitated teacher learning about new strategies for approaching their instruction. Teachers have been taking more responsibility for student learning and identifying student challenges in understanding concepts as well as posing solutions to address

## How Teachers Are Reflecting on Their Instruction



“[We’re] not just saying okay it was their fault, they weren’t listening or they didn’t read.”

“You had to go back and look at yourself or why the students were off topic when they were on the writing prompt.”

“It’s turning that finger around.”

those challenges. According to one teacher, “[PLTs have] made me look differently at myself and what I do.” By taking more responsibility for student learning, teachers have gained a more accurate sense of how their students are progressing. An instructional facilitator commented, “I think our teachers know where our students are now. . . . They know their students much better than they did before.”

“ [The PLT meetings] also provided the opportunity for us to grow one another. A lot of times, we think that only that new teacher or that struggling teacher is the person who needs to grow, that this person always has high test scores, this person is the master teacher, this person’s professional. **Well, everybody’s growing, and we’re growing one another.** ”  
—Instructional Facilitator

## OUTCOME 5





### Changes in school culture have occurred since teachers began meeting in PLTs.

**Teachers have developed more trusting relationships with their colleagues, and many have attributed this to working together in PLTs.**



Teachers reported feeling more comfortable discussing student difficulties with colleagues and asking for assistance. As one teacher commented, “Just being able to talk to everybody, and the support we get when we come in here—I never feel like anything I say is wrong.” Similarly, SEDL staff noted that teachers talked about how they could rely on their teams and, at one school in particular, teachers reported feeling a strong sense of trust with their colleagues. Instructional facilitators and administrators also observed that teachers were more willing to admit



to each other when they didn’t understand something. The district leader reported that administrators “have done very well with building a culture of trust among the teachers and helping the teachers see that ... there are only certain things within a teacher’s control.”



More than 80% of administrators, instructional facilitators, and teachers indicated in the survey that the PLTs had facilitated trusting and respectful relationships that enhance teaching and learning. Administrators and teachers from partner schools were more likely than teachers from non-partner schools to report in the survey that the PLTs had facilitated a stronger sense of connection or support among teachers.



“I <i>strongly agree</i> that PLTs have facilitated a stronger sense of connection or support among teachers.”	 Partner Schools	 Non-Partner Schools
	 <b>Administrators</b>	<b>100%</b>
 <b>Teachers</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>34%</b>

**Scale:** Strongly Disagree = 0, Disagree = 1, Agree = 2, Strongly Agree = 3.

  Strongly Disagree = 0%, Disagree = 0%, Agree = 0%, Strongly Agree = 100%.

  Strongly Disagree = 6%, Disagree = 3%, Agree = 34%, Strongly Agree = 57%.

  Strongly Disagree = 2%, Disagree = 8%, Agree = 33%, Strongly Agree = 57%.

  Strongly Disagree = 9%, Disagree = 12%, Agree = 45%, Strongly Agree = 34%.

“ [There is] trust among the teachers. They now will say what they do and don't understand. ”

—Administrator

### **Teachers' sense of responsibility for students at their school has expanded beyond their own classrooms.**

Teachers' instructional concerns have expanded to include students in the entire content area or grade level, and sometimes all students in the school. An instructional facilitator explained, "It used to be 'Here I am behind my closed door.' Now our content partners are planning together." SEDL staff also noted that many of the teachers taught "all kids now" and were dividing up various responsibilities based on individual teacher strengths. Some Lancaster teachers attributed this to the sense of community that had developed during the PLTs.

### **Administrators work more as instructional leaders rather than school managers.**

Both the district leader and SEDL staff observed changes in the administrators' role in the schools. For example, SEDL staff shared how the principal at one school was attending every PLT meeting and participating as a contributor rather than as a leader. She/he was sharing and celebrating PLT progress with the whole faculty and working with teachers on making connections between PLT meetings and the classroom. When asked to describe changes since working with SEDL, the district leader



## **How School Culture Has Changed**



“I think it's more of a school-wide collaboration, where it used to be maybe grade level.”

“We're not just individual classrooms; we are a community that works and lives and thrives together.”

“We're all on the same page; we all have the same language; we all are going in the same direction—and that is about students.”

“It is all student driven. All of it.”

“We're all for all children. I am not here for my individual classroom anymore.”



noted that administrators from partner schools had “truly embraced the intent of the professional teaching and learning cycle.” Specifically, administrators have taken steps to implement a framework that focuses instructional activities around student learning and individual needs. Professional conversations have focused on instructional practices and strategies. SEDL staff also observed that in the partner schools, principals were making stronger connections between the PLTs and classroom walkthroughs.

“ [At **partner schools**] in particular, . . . their principals have just made sure . . . that teachers understand where they need to go with these processes. They have structures in place in all three schools that support the cycle. **They have expectations in place that support the conversation about student work, and they have people bringing student work to the table to look at.** So they have worked to try to create . . . the trust, the climate, all of those pieces . . . that need to be in place for teachers to be able to discuss student work and see what to do next. ”

—District Leader

## OUTCOME 6

### Teachers' work in the PLTs has benefitted students.

While it is too early to determine whether student changes in performance on yearly tests have resulted from the work of teachers in PLTs, there are preliminary indications of some changes in student engagement and learning found in responses to surveys, focus group interviews, and in feedback from SEDL staff. For instance, 87% of instructional facilitators indicated in the survey that they *agreed or strongly agreed* that students were more engaged in their lessons during the second year. Although the rates are not as high, 65% of teachers and 73% of administrators also *agreed or strongly agreed* with this statement. Teachers in partner schools were more likely than teachers from non-partner schools to *agree or strongly agree* in their responses that changes in student engagement had occurred (80% versus 62%).

SEDL staff shared an example of a fourth-grade student who asked a teacher if the information presented during a lesson “was in the standards.” They suggested that this example represented the “way that students are understanding why they are learning what they are learning.” The quotes in the sidebar from focus groups and interviews also indicate that students possibly have been becoming more aware of the state standards, growing as learners, and improving on standardized tests.

#### Voices From the Field



##### Increased Awareness of Learning Standards

“What we would like to see our students be able to do is not only understand the standard as well as the teacher, but [also] ask the teacher, ‘What standard are we covering ... today?’ I think that’s occurring at the elementary level because I’ve heard some students [ask questions about the standards they are working on].”

—**Instructional Facilitator**

##### Improved Performance on Standardized Tests

“Last year we worked a lot on background knowledge, and ... on our PASS we did the best on background knowledge than any of the other categories.”

—**Principal**

##### Growth as Learners

“The teachers [are] excited about [student learning]. They see the growth...the small celebrations.”

—**Principal**







# Support for Sustaining the PTLC

## Looking Ahead







### SEDL Support



During this second year of the work, SEDL staff tailored their support toward assisting the district and schools in efforts to sustain the PTLC/PLT initiative. More than 78% of administrators and instructional facilitators indicated in the survey that SEDL has assisted them somewhat or a great deal in sustaining the PTLC process by providing a clear understanding of their respective roles in sustaining the initiative, providing information and tools related to sustainability, and providing tools and strategies for monitoring effectiveness. As shown here and on the next page,



“SEDL has assisted <i>a great deal</i> in providing information and tools related to sustaining.”	 Partner Schools	 Non-Partner Schools
 <b>Administrators</b>	80%	49%
 <b>Instructional Facilitators</b>	60%	32%

**Scale:** Not At All = 0, A Little = 1, Somewhat = 2, A Great Deal = 3.

  Not At All = 0%, A Little = 0%, Somewhat = 20%, A Great Deal = 80%.

  Not At All = 3%, A Little = 17%, Somewhat = 31%, A Great Deal = 49%.

  Not At All = 20%, A Little = 20%, Somewhat = 0%, A Great Deal = 60%.

  Not At All = 0%, A Little = 5%, Somewhat = 63%, A Great Deal = 32%.





administrators and instructional facilitators from partner schools were more likely than those from non-partner schools to indicate that SEDL had assisted them a great deal by providing information and tools related to sustainability and tools and strategies for monitoring effectiveness. This difference is likely because partner schools, by definition, received more intensive support from SEDL over the past 2 years. However, because SEDL staff worked with most of the principals and instructional facilitators on a fairly regular basis, non-partner schools have also benefitted from their assistance to a certain extent.

The district leader, administrators, and instructional facilitators agreed that SEDL supported them in looking at student work. For example, an administrator shared, “Once we started with SEDL, it’s all been about student work. . . . That was the piece we were missing,



examining student work.” On the same topic, one of the instructional facilitators said, “We were meeting and we were planning and we were beginning to have lots of conversations and dialogue, and that was where we wanted to go. SEDL just gave us the framework to figure out how to put that piece [examining student work] in there.” The district leader expressed the desire to continue relying on SEDL as a resource in the future.



## Sustaining the PLTs



The plan for sustaining the PLTs in the upcoming year, according to the district leader, is to first clearly put forth the expectation that “we’ll move forward with this.” She talked in her interview about an upcoming planning session with the schools to discuss strategies for the fall. She also relayed the importance of the superintendent’s support, explaining “this



“SEDL has assisted <i>a great deal</i> in providing tools and strategies for monitoring effectiveness.”	 Partner Schools	 Non-Partner Schools
 Administrators	80%	43%
 Instructional Facilitators	60%	32%

**Scale:** Not At All = 0, A Little = 1, Somewhat = 2, A Great Deal = 3.

  Not At All = 0%, A Little = 0%, Somewhat = 20%, A Great Deal = 80%.

  Not At All = 3%, A Little = 23%, Somewhat = 31%, A Great Deal = 43%.

  Not At All = 20%, A Little = 20%, Somewhat = 0%, A Great Deal = 60%.

  Not At All = 5%, A Little = 5%, Somewhat = 58%, A Great Deal = 32%.

could not have been ... a districtwide effort without his putting it at the forefront of his instructional agenda for the district.”

Administrators and instructional facilitators also discussed their plans for continuing the PLTs next year. One administrator hoped to meet with other elementary principals once a month and talk about the PLT process. Administrators discussed having conversations with SEDL staff about sustainability, which included assisting with resources, tools, and how to take the PLTs to “the next level” so teachers are facilitating more of the meetings. Two major themes emerged when instructional facilitators were asked what they believed their role would be in sustaining the PTLC process: (1) to facilitate and/or scaffold teachers in facilitating the PLTs and (2) to serve as a resource and support person for teachers. Examples included the following:

- Facilitate meetings with grade levels but also encourage teachers to take on more of these responsibilities.
- Continue facilitating meetings with gradual release, preparing teacher leaders for the facilitator role.
- Attend PLT meetings but let teachers facilitate since they are already comfortable with that role.
- Support classroom instruction and facilitate professional development.
- Help teachers plan and assess, and aid them in any way possible to better assist students in mastering content.



- Continue to provide feedback to teachers and help them gain new ideas and strategies to use to address students’ needs.

District and school leaders planned to continue assessing the progress of the PLTs. For example, the district leader explained, “The beauty of the process is it’s almost a plumb line for doing some program evaluation .... It’s a beautiful piece for needs assessment, for progress evaluation.” Similarly, an administrator hoped to have the teachers “evaluate themselves and individually reflect.” With the support of district and school leaders, there is a strong likelihood that PLT meetings structured around the PTLC will be sustained in the upcoming school years.



# Summary



## Key Findings

Based on the information presented, the strong lines of communication from the district down to the school staff in promoting the importance of the PLT initiative has brought about gains in teacher buy-in for the PLTs. Although many of the schools had common planning time prior to the introduction of the PLTs, using the PTLC framework to structure the PLTs helped focus teacher collaborations on students' learning needs. In addition, the instructional facilitators have been serving a prominent role in providing assistance to teachers both in and outside of PLT meetings, addressing needs around content knowledge, instructional strategies and resources, and data use and interpretation.

As teachers continued to meet weekly in PLTs, sharing of planning, instructional strategies, and experiences became more common. Meetings centered around aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment with standards as well as examining the extent to which students understood the concepts and topics presented in class. Administrators, instructional facilitators, and teachers alike noted a change

“ [The PTLC process is] the vehicle for change and implementation. ”

—District Leader

in the way teachers assessed student learning. Teachers focused more on discovering where students went off track and adjusting instruction based on the causes of students' difficulties. However, many acknowledged that there was a continuing need for gaining knowledge and skills around implementing instructional adjustments to address the identified learning needs of individual students.

The changes in the areas noted above have affected the culture of many of the schools involved in the PLT initiative. Increased trust among school staff and a stronger sense of responsibility for all students at their schools have emerged. As one administrator stated, “we knew that lots of times we were spinning our wheels, and we knew that we were working harder not smarter. . . . We constantly looked for things to help make us better administrators,

but when PLTs came, [and] PTLC came . . . honestly it was like a magic bullet because it was the system that we needed.” Administrators have taken a stronger role as instructional leaders, working more closely with teachers and instructional facilitators to promote student performance increases. While many of these changes have been apparent throughout the district’s schools, they have been more prevalent in the partner schools that received intensive SEDL support over the past 2 years.

## Limitations

Since the majority of data was obtained from self-report instruments (e.g., surveys, interviews, site visit summaries, meeting logs), the data were based on perceptions. Perceptions may differ from actual behaviors for many reasons, such as the desire to provide socially acceptable responses or information. Most people like to present themselves in a favorable light, so some respondents may be reluctant to admit that they are not fulfilling their roles, implementing the process as expected, or receiving support needed for implementation. This type of behavior occurs more frequently when respondents believe that survey results may not be confidential and, thus, respond in ways they believe are more socially acceptable.

The SEDL staff’s site visit summaries and the time spent on site for school visits present further limitations. During the second year, SEDL staff spent more time with district and school leaders and less time in classrooms and PLT meetings. Therefore, documentation on the extent to which teachers engaged in the

PTLC process during meetings and the extent to which teachers were implementing planned strategies in the classroom from PLT meetings came primarily from survey and interview data.

## Future Directions

### **Maintain the PTLC process as the structure for PLT meetings and expand the PLTs throughout the district.**

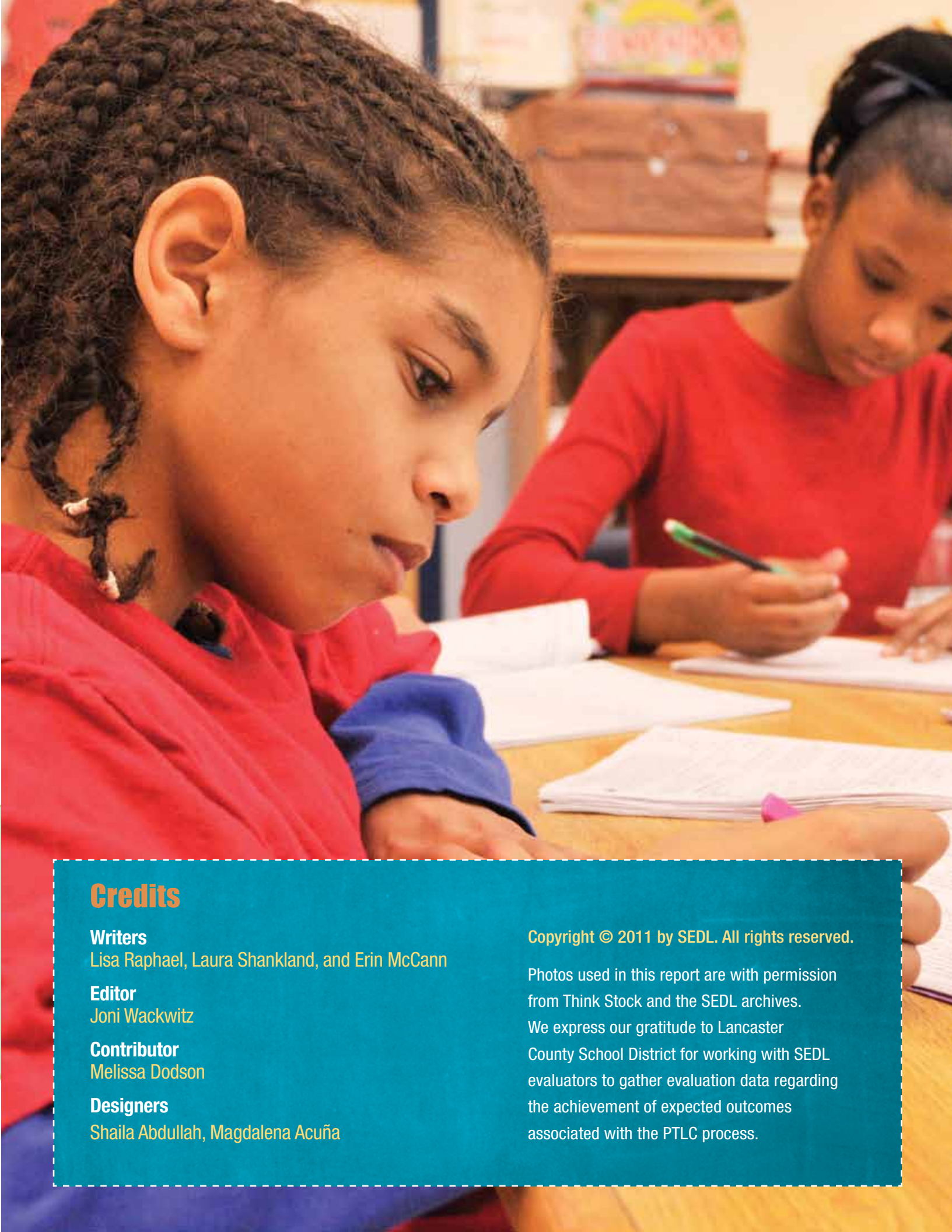
The work may be sustained by ensuring that administrators and instructional facilitators have a strong understanding of the PTLC process and by continuing to provide the necessary supports (e.g., time and research-based resources and strategies) to assist teachers with their instructional practices.

### **Increase teachers’ comfort level for taking on PLT facilitation.**

While this is occurring for some teachers in PLTs, to support the continuation of the work, all staff should become knowledgeable in the PTLC process so that facilitating PLTs becomes a natural part of the meetings for all teachers.

### **Provide support for teachers in differentiating instruction based on individual student needs.**

In addressing students’ individual learning needs, teachers may need additional support in learning and implementing strategies for adjusting their instruction according to individual student needs. Sources for increasing knowledge and skills in this area include professional development (both external and ongoing, job-embedded), modeling, observations, and feedback.



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We express our gratitude to Lancaster County School District for working with SEDL evaluators to gather evaluation data regarding the achievement of expected outcomes associated with the PTLC process.

