

Scheduling Practices for Professional Learning Communities

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In the following report, Hanover Research explores how schools adapt their schedules to allow time for teachers to participate in professional learning communities (PLCs). We examine relevant secondary literature and example schedules from elementary, middle, and high schools in the United States, and additionally discuss scheduling for professional development in an international context.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In 2004 Richard DuFour, the leading proponent of professional learning communities (PLCs), wrote that the “model has now reached a critical juncture” between idealism and reality. “In this all-too-familiar cycle,” he wrote for the journal *Educational Leadership*,

initial enthusiasm gives way to confusion about the fundamental concepts driving the initiative, followed by **inevitable implementation problems**, the conclusion that the reform has failed to bring about the desired results, abandonment of the reform, and the launch of a new search for the next promising initiative.¹

A consistently-noted “implementation problem” is that of making the time for PLCs amid the many other demands on teachers’ schedules, not the least of which is student seat time. Studies of PLCs – whether comparing case studies, testing effectiveness of different types of professional development, or simply reviewing the literature – inevitably note that **time is the most consistent and pressing problem for schools trying to implement this model of professional development.**² And while some warn that “supportive structural conditions,” such as time, space, or autonomy, are insufficient by themselves to make PLCs effective,³ they are nonetheless important considerations to ensure that teachers and students can benefit.

This report examines various practices in scheduling for PLCs. **Section I** establishes a theoretical and observational basis through secondary literature. Because that literature remains generally vague, however, the report supplements it with profiles of districts and schools that have in some way effectively made time for PLCs that produce positive results for teachers and students alike. And while much of the literature addresses PLC scheduling at the elementary school level, this report attempts to address concerns at the secondary level as well. **Section II** seeks to provide an international context for this model by examining professional development structures and teacher expectations in Finland, the world exemplar for public education.

¹ DuFour, R. “What Is a Professional Learning Community?” *Educational Leadership* 61: 8 (May 2004): pp. 6-11.

Republished on the website of ASCD at <http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/may04/vol61/num08/What-Is-a-Professional-Learning-Community%2%A2.aspx>

² [1] Wells, C., and Feun, L. “What Has Changed? A Study of Three Years of Professional Learning Community Work.” *Planning and Change* 39: 1/2 (Spring 2008): 42-66. Accessed via ProQuest.

[2] Bolam, R., et al. “Creating and Sustaining Effective Professional Learning Communities.” University of Bristol, General Teaching Council for England, National College for School Leadership, and Department for Education and Skills. Research Report RR637. 2005.

http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/images/Creating%20and%20Sustaining%20PLCs_tcm4-631034.pdf

[3] Hord, S.M. “Professional Learning Communities: Communities of Continuous Inquiry and Improvement.” Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. 1997. <http://www.sedl.org/pubs/change34/plc-cha34.pdf>

³ “Professional Learning Communities.” *Professional Development Strategies That Improve Instruction*. Annenberg Institute for School Reform. p. 6. <http://annenberginstitute.org/pdf/proflearning.pdf>

KEY FINDINGS

- **Scheduling for PLCs requires schools to provide a consistent, sufficient time for participants to meet that contributes to a culture of authentic collaboration without impinging on existing efforts or responsibilities.** PLCs must be specifically structured into a teacher’s work schedule, but flexible enough to allow authentic collaboration about what the teachers themselves feel they need to know to improve student learning.
- As PLC use is typically tied to academic or behavioral interventions, **scheduling for PLCs often involves common scheduling of non-core instructors** (such as interventionists or specialists) to take over a given class for a regular weekly period. **PLCs can also “borrow” time from other obligations**, such as faculty meetings or scheduled professional development, to ensure that participation is not a burden.
 - PLC scheduling at the **elementary school** level typically involves parallel scheduling of “specials” or “encore” subjects (e.g., art, music, physical education, library) to enable primary teachers to meet regularly during the academic week and within the regular academic day.
 - PLC scheduling at the **middle school** level seems to commonly truncate the schedule (e.g., early dismissal) on a bi-weekly or monthly basis, but in a way that provides several hours of time for collaboration.
 - PLC scheduling at the **high school** level involves consistent use of a truncated schedule (e.g., late arrival or early dismissal) to provide regular weekly meeting times for teachers outside of common teaching blocks, plus a system of “banking” minutes from faculty meetings or extended school days to provide extended PLC work periods on a regular but less-frequent basis.
- **International school systems require teachers to spend significantly less time in the classroom than the American school system**, which may affect how they schedule professional development for teachers. In Canada, for instance, it is possible for a district to schedule half-days every other Friday to allow teachers to spend the afternoon participating in PLCs, and in Finland, where teachers have one of the lowest teaching loads internationally, teachers typically spend about two hours per week developing lesson plans and collaborating with grade- and/or content-level colleagues.
- **International school systems’ models of collaborative professional development reflect principles similar to those of PLCs**, in that they respect the professionalism of educators by providing clear guidance as well as autonomy in decision-making and action.

SECTION I: SCHEDULING FOR PLCs

Professional learning communities (PLCs) provide structured space and time for authentic collaboration among colleagues in a workplace. According to a review article by the Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL, 1997) authentic PLCs include:

- Supportive and shared leadership
- Collective creativity
- Shared values and vision
- **Supportive conditions**
- Shared personal practice⁴

While there is a considerable body of evidence incorporating national and comparative perspectives on the content and effects of PLCs, discussions of the “conditions that facilitate the development of professional learning communities” fall short of describing and/or comparing the scheduling required to ensure that PLCs take root. Vieluf and colleagues (2012) mention only the content of the PLCs in the sample countries, not the administrative or organizational structures and context for the groups. And among the key findings, their only nod to scheduling is the following conclusion:

Longer working hours was associated with diverse and frequent use of teaching practices and with participation in co-operative practices, suggesting that **high-quality teaching and intensive forms of co-operative professional learning can be time-consuming.**⁵

A review by British researchers for the *Journal of Educational Change* identified four processes “used to create and develop” PLCs: “focusing on learning processes; making the best of human and social resources; managing structural resources; and interacting with and drawing on external agents.” Stoll and colleagues (2006) emphasize that “[a] PLC cannot be built solely through providing professional development opportunities for staff.”⁶ Indeed, much of the literature suggests that PLCs are distinct from other professional development opportunities like one-off workshops, lectures, seminars, or otherwise authority-led and mandated learning sessions. However, Stoll et al., in their discussion of managing time resources, suggest only that “the school needs to be organised to allow time for staff to

⁴ “Professional Learning Communities: What Are They and Why Are They Important?” *Issues...about Change*. Southwest Educational Development Laboratory. 6:1 (1997): 1-8.
<http://www.sedl.org/change/issues/issues61.html>

⁵ Vieluf, S., et al. “Teaching Practices and Pedagogical Innovation: Evidence from TALIS.” OECD. 2012. pp. 36, 112.
<http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/TalisCeri%202012%20%28tpi%29--Ebook.pdf>

⁶ Stoll, L., et al. “Professional Learning Communities: A Review of the Literature.” *Journal of Educational Change* 7 (2006): p. 232.
<http://schoolcontributions.cmswiki.wikispaces.net/file/view/PROFESSIONAL+LEARNING+COMMUNITIES+A+REVIEW+OF.pdf>

meet and talk regularly.”⁷ They do not offer any suggestions on how this time can be carved out from among the other daily demands on teachers.

More concrete examples of how to structure PLC time are found in a best practices review for the education sector of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) completed by researchers from the University of Auckland in cooperation with New Zealand’s Ministry of Education. Timperley and colleagues (2007) point to practices that represent a spectrum of extremes that should be avoided. “[I]t is generally accepted,” they write, “that listening to inspiring speakers or attending one-off workshops rarely changes teacher practice sufficiently to impact on student outcomes . . . Extended opportunities to learn, however, are not necessarily more effective than their one-off counterparts.” To elaborate:

Two extremes that are sometimes portrayed as effective have little evidence to support them. The first is that teachers should be treated as self-regulating professionals who, if given sufficient time and resources, are able to construct their own learning experiences and develop a more effective reality for their students through their collective expertise . . . The alternative extreme is where outside experts develop recipes for teaching (typically based on research about what works for students) then present prescribed practice to teachers with an underpinning rationale and monitor their implementation carefully to ensure integrity.⁸

This suggests that PLCs must be **specifically structured** into a teacher’s work schedule, but **flexible enough to allow authentic collaboration** about what the teachers themselves feel they need to know to improve student learning. A “reproducible” offered by the website *All Things PLC* identifies some specific strategies developed to create this time:

- Common preparation periods
- Parallel scheduling of specialists
- Adjusted start and end times
- Shared classes by grade level or course content
- Group activities, events, and testing
- Banked time to create space for early dismissals or teacher work days
- Extended time for collaboration in in-service and faculty meeting schedules⁹

No source claims to be a comprehensive list of practices, nor is there a source that claims to have tested the effectiveness of any one strategy over another. A recent comprehensive case study of two schools produced only the conclusion that “scheduling dilemmas

⁷ Ibid., p. 240.

⁸ Timperley, H., et al. “Teacher Professional Learning and Development: Best Evidence Synthesis Iteration [BES].” Ministry of Education (New Zealand) and Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. 2007. pp. xxv-xxvi. <http://www.oecd.org/edu/school/48727127.pdf>

⁹ [1] “Making Time for Collaboration.” 2010. <http://www.allthingsplc.info/pdf/tools/makingtimeforcollaboration.pdf>
See also [2] “What Supports Are Necessary to Develop and Sustain a PLC?” *Professional Learning Communities*. The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement. <http://www.centerforcsri.org/plc/supports.html>

remained” even after PLCs took root. The authors recounted, “When asked to give advice to other schools looking to start PLCs, many teachers went straight to the issue. Comments such as ‘Our plates are full. What will be taken away?’ were common.”¹⁰ Thus **there is no “best practice” in scheduling PLCs.** However, there are numerous examples of what schools and/or districts have done to support the growth, development, and sustenance of PLCs, and the remainder of this section examines some of these. The profiles are organized by level of schooling: elementary, middle/intermediate, and high school.

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SCHEDULES

An article in *Leadership Compass*, a publication of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), identified five features of elementary school schedules to support PLC:

- Common planning time;
- Common teaching time;
- Common time for intervention and enrichment;
- Special service personnel scheduled in tandem with general education colleagues; and
- Extended planning time provided for teams on an occasional basis, [to include:]
 - Create a second encore rotation
 - Create a ninth period for professional development time.¹¹

Rettig (2007) emphasizes that common planning time – the first supportive structure – is not enough on its own to support effective PLCs. Rather, there need to be many structures that signal a holistic and pervasive sense of community and a culture of collegial engagement.

According to Rettig, one of the most important structures may be the parallel scheduling of special, or encore, subjects (e.g., art, music, P.E.) to give all of the primary teachers in a grade common free time. Thus, “the number of encore teachers . . . must at least match the number of teachers on the team for whom common planning time is desired,” so that a schedule can be devised that approximates the model shown in Figure 1.¹²

Figure 1: Parallel Scheduling of Special/Encore Subjects

	DAY 1	DAY 2	DAY 3	DAY 4
TEACHER A	Music	P.E.	Art	Library
TEACHER B	Library	Music	P.E.	Art
TEACHER C	Art	Library	Music	P.E.
TEACHER D	P.E.	Art	Library	Music

Source: Rettig, “Designing Schedules”

¹⁰ Mindich, D., and Lieberman, A. “Building a Learning Community: A tale of two schools.” Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education and Learning Forward. 2012. p. 34.

<http://learningforward.org/docs/publicationssection/2012phase4report.pdf>

¹¹ Rettig, M.D. “Designing Schedules to Support Professional Learning Communities.” *Leadership Compass* 5: 2 (Winter 2007). http://www.naesp.org/resources/2/Leadership_Compass/2007/LC2007v5n2a1.pdf

¹² Ibid.

This sort of parallel scheduling appears to be in use to support PLCs in all three of the elementary schools profiled below, which also show other characteristics of PLC scheduling, such as the expected frequency of meetings. The schools profiled include:

- Highland Elementary School, *Maryland*
- Thornton Elementary School, *North Carolina*
- Wiley Elementary School, *North Carolina*

HIGHLAND ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (MARYLAND)

Highland Elementary School serves more than 530 students in Silver Spring, Maryland.¹³ As a participant in Montgomery County Public Schools district-wide PLC initiative, Highland has been using PLCs since 2005. When PLCs were first implemented, the principal and assistant principal committed to “1) engaging staff in the decisions regarding the implementation of the school’s new direction, and 2) providing staff with the training, resources, and support to help them succeed.”¹⁴ Part of the change involved creating a space and culture for teacher collaboration:

The staff began the school’s transformation by adopting a **common parallel schedule** as the school’s new master schedule. The school established large blocks of uninterrupted time for math and language arts instruction at every grade level each day. The new schedule also assigned all the students of a particular grade level to art, music, physical education, library, and writing classes at the same time so that the grade-level team could have **common planning for fifty minutes, four days each week**. [...]

Principal Myrtle also supported the work of the teams by providing time for them to collaborate beyond their common planning period each week. **Once each quarter he hired substitute teachers to give an entire grade-level team a full day of uninterrupted collaborative time** to plan their work for the coming quarter.¹⁵

This PLC structure provides more than three hours of weekly common planning time, plus an additional day per quarter to collaborate. The master schedule that provides for weekly collaboration (during “specials” times) is shown in Figure 2.¹⁶

¹³ “About Our School.” Highland Elementary School (Maryland).
<http://www.montgomeryschoolsmd.org/schools/highlandes/aboutus/index.aspx>

¹⁴ “Highland Elementary School.” All Things PLC.
<http://www.allthingsplc.info/evidence/highlandelementary/index.php>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ [1] Ibid. See also [2] “We Need More Time 2011 Handouts.” All Things PLC. 2011.
http://allthingsplc.info/pdf/links/schedule_examples_elementary.pdf

Figure 2: Highland Elementary School Master Schedule (2010-2011)

Kindergarten	First Grade	Second Grade	Third Grade	Fourth Grade	Fifth Grade
Reading/Writing 8:50 – 9:50 60 minutes	Reading/Writing 8:50 – 11:25 155 minutes	Math 8:50 – 10:15 85 minutes	Specials 8:55 – 9:40 Music, Art, P.E., Library, Writing 45 minutes	Reading/Writing 8:50 – 11:15 154 minutes	Math 8:50 – 10:30 100 minutes
Specials 9:55 – 10:40 Music, Art, P.E., Library, Writing 45 Minutes			Reading/Writing 9:40 - 12:00 140 minutes	Intervention Team 9:40 – 10:20	Intervention Team 9:00 – 9:30
Reading/Writing 10:40 – 12:25 105 minutes	Intervention Team 10:20 – 11:00	Specials 11:00 – 11:45 Music, Art, P.E., Library, Writing 45 minutes	Intervention Team 11:15 – 12:00	Lunch/Recess 11:15– 12:05 50 inutes	Lunch/Recess 11:00– 11:50 50 minutes
Intervention Team 11:25 – 12:25	Lunch/Recess 11:25 – 12:15 50 minutes	Lunch/Recess 11:50 – 12:40 50 minutes		Math 12:05 – 1:45 100 minutes	Specials 11:50 – 12:45 Music, Art, P.E., Library, Writing 55 minutes
Lunch/Recess 12:15 – 1:15 60 minutes	Math 12:15 – 1:25 70 minutes	Reading 12:40 – 2:30 110 minutes	Lunch/Recess 12:00 – 12:50 50 minutes	Intervention Team 12:45 – 1:45	Reading/Writing 12:45 – 3:00 135 minutes
Math 1:15 – 2:30 75 minutes	Specials 1:25 – 2:10 Music, Art, P.E., Library, Writing 45 minutes	Intervention Team 1:00 – 1:40	Math 12:50 – 2:30 100 minutes		
Science/Social Studies 2:30 – 3:00 30 minutes	Science/Social Studies 2:10 – 3:00 50 minutes	Science/Social Studies 2:30 – 3:00 30 minutes	Science/Social Studies 2:30 – 3:00 30 minutes	Specials 2:15 – 3:00 Music, Art, P.E., Library, Writing 45 minutes	Intervention Team 1:40 – 2:20

Source: All Things PLC

THORNTON ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (NORTH CAROLINA)

Thornton Elementary School serves 449 students in suburban Newton, North Carolina.¹⁷ Based on the faculty/staff directory, these students are served by 49 teachers, teacher assistants, guidance counselors, administrators, and other employees.¹⁸

PLCs at Thornton are facilitated by the school’s instructional coach and managed through a distinct WikiSpace for “Thornton’s Collaborative Teams.” Teams meet “every Thursday,”¹⁹ following the schedule shown in Figure 3.²⁰

Figure 3: Thornton Elementary School PLC Schedule, 2012-2013

TIME	GRADE LEVEL
9:00-9:45	K
10:15-11:00	1 st
11:00-11:45	2 nd
12:15-1:00	4 th
12:30-1:15	EC, ESL, Speech
1:00-1:45	3 rd
1:45-2:30	5 th

Source: Thornton Collaborative Teams WikiSpace

Thornton also provides for key support staff to meet with the PLCs on a regular basis; the school guidance counselor “meet[s] with K-2 every other week and 3-5 every other week,” while the school librarian is schedule to “meet with K-2 and 3-5 once a month.”²¹

Based on cross-referencing with individual class schedules, it seems that the PLC schedule coincides with the time of day that the participating teachers’ students are engaged in “specials.”²²

¹⁷ “Thornton Elementary School Profile 2012-2013.” Thornton Elementary School (North Carolina). <http://newton.tes.schoolfusion.us/modules/cms/pages.phtml?pageid=67892&sessionid=3b3046e10e4c84519ff4d9af5684fc4b&sessionid=3b3046e10e4c84519ff4d9af5684fc4b>

¹⁸ “Thornton Elementary School Faculty & Staff.” Thornton Elementary School (North Carolina). <http://newton.tes.schoolfusion.us/modules/tt/staffList/staffListSimplified.phtml?sessionid=3b3046e10e4c84519ff4d9af5684fc4b>

¹⁹ “home.” Thornton Collaborative Teams. <http://thorntoncollaborativeteams.wikispaces.com/>

²⁰ “PLC Schedule 2012-2013.” Thornton Collaborative Teams. <http://thorntoncollaborativeteams.wikispaces.com/PLC+Schedule>

²¹ Ibid.

²² See, e.g., [1] “Mrs. Cobb’s Fifth Grade.” Thornton Elementary School (North Carolina). http://mandycobb.newton.tes.schoolfusion.us/modules/groups/integrated_home.phtml?gid=786745&sessionid=7cb1cae05ce0049cf38bf1e1c7bb570b

[2] “Mr. T’s Terrific Thinkers.” Thornton Elementary School (North Carolina). http://jonathantharpe.newton.tes.schoolfusion.us/modules/groups/integrated_home.phtml?gid=786763&sessionid=7cb1cae05ce0049cf38bf1e1c7bb570b

[3] “Peace, love, 2nd grade with Miss Jarvis.” Thornton Elementary School (North Carolina). http://kellyjarvis.newton.tes.schoolfusion.us/modules/groups/integrated_home.phtml?gid=786754&sessionid=7cb1cae05ce0049cf38bf1e1c7bb570b

WILEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL (NORTH CAROLINA)

Wiley Elementary School serves 277 students with 48 staff members in Greensboro, North Carolina. Of the 48 staff members, 15 are classroom teachers, 4 are assistants, and 23 provide support.²³

PLC at Thornton follows a regular weekly schedule, but not all PLC teams meet on the same day. Instead, meetings are scheduled for Tuesday through Friday. The following figure shows the posted PLC schedule by grade level.²⁴

Figure 4: Wiley Elementary School PLC Schedule

GRADE LEVEL	DATE & TIME
Pre-K	Wednesday, 1:00pm
Kindergarten	Wednesday, 9:55-11:25
First	Wednesday, 12:40-1:40
Second	Tuesday, 9:55-11:25
Third	Tuesday, 12:55-2:25
Fourth	Thursday, 1:40-3:05
Fifth	Wednesday, 1:40-3:05
Specialist	Wednesday, 11:25-12:10
Support Staff (counselor, social worker, parent liaison)	Friday, 1:00-(unspecified)

Source: Wiley Elementary School

Again, cross-referencing of individual class schedules indicates that, as at Highland and Thornton, PLC times at Wiley are scheduled to coincide with “specials” instruction. Because a typical “specials” period is 45 minutes, and PLC meetings are scheduled for 85 to 90 minutes, students tend to be scheduled for “double specials” on the day their teachers have PLC meetings, which is offset by having no “specials” class on some other day of the week.²⁵

²³ “About Wiley.” Wiley Elementary School (North Carolina).

<http://www.gcsnc.com/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectiondetailid=339305>

²⁴ “Schedule of Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).” Wiley Elementary School (North Carolina).

<http://www.gcsnc.com/education/components/scrapbook/default.php?sectiondetailid=354893>

²⁵ See, e.g., [1] “Mrs. Coley’s Daily Schedule” (Kindergarten). Wiley Elementary School (North Carolina).

<http://schoolcenter.gcsnc.com/education/components/sectionlist/default.php?sectiondetailid=329920&>

[2] “Mrs. Gifford’s Daily Schedule” (Second Grade). Wiley Elementary School (North Carolina).

<http://schoolcenter.gcsnc.com/education/components/layout/default.php?sectiondetailid=329931&>

MIDDLE SCHOOL SCHEDULES

This subsection includes profiles of two middle schools that have implemented PLCs with clear and verifiable schedules to provide teachers time to participate:

- Irving Middle School, *Nebraska*
- Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate School, *California*

IRVING MIDDLE SCHOOL (NEBRASKA)

Irving Middle School, in Lincoln, Nebraska, serves 821 students in grades six through eight, with 74 teachers and 52 support staff, including three counselors, a media specialist, a psychologist, a part-time registered nurse, a part-time social worker, and numerous other support staff and parent volunteers.²⁶

PLCs are incorporated into the school calendar through a monthly PLC slot on the last Tuesday of every month, which involves a 1.5-hour early student dismissal.²⁷ On that day, each regular period is reduced by 10-15 minutes to create time at the end of the day to accommodate teacher participation in PLC. The following figure compares the bell schedule for regular²⁸ and PLC²⁹ days:

Figure 5: Irving Middle School Bell Schedules, 2012-2013

TIME	REGULAR DAY	TIME	PLC DAY
8:00-8:52	Per. 1	8:00-8:38	Per. 1
8:56-9:47	Per. 2	8:42-9:20	Per. 2
9:51-10:43	Per. 3	9:24-10:02	Per. 3
10:47-11:38	Per. 4	10:06-10:44	Per. 4
11:42-1:08*	Per. 5	10:48-11:26*	Per. 5
1:12-2:03	Per. 6	11:26-12:56	Per. 6
2:07-2:58	Per. 7	1:00-1:38	Per. 7
<i>Implied PLC</i>			

Source: Irving Middle School

NB: Asterisk (*) indicates assumption of lunch included in the period.

In the 2012-2013 academic year, nine PLC days were scheduled: one for each month from August 2012 through April 2013. No PLC was scheduled for May 2013.³⁰

²⁶ "School Snapshot: Irving Middle School." Lincoln Public Schools (Nebraska). April 2013. p. 2.
<http://www.lps.org/about/profiles/2013/irving.pdf>

²⁷ "Welcome to Irving Middle School." Irving Middle School (Nebraska). <http://wp.lps.org/irving/>

²⁸ "Regular Schedule." Irving Middle School (Nebraska). <http://wp.lps.org/irving/regular-schedule/>

²⁹ "PLC Schedule/Dates." Irving Middle School (Nebraska). <http://wp.lps.org/irving/plc-schedule/>

³⁰ "PLC Schedule/Dates." Op. cit.

RANCHO SANTA MARGARITA INTERMEDIATE SCHOOL (CALIFORNIA)

Rancho Santa Margarita (RSM) Intermediate School, in Rancho Santa Margarita, California, serves 1,251 students.³¹ Approximately every two weeks, RSM students are dismissed early in a schedule called “PLC Days – Minimum Day.” As at Irving Middle School, this model entails cutting around 15 minutes from each class period on the day for which PLCs are scheduled so that students can be dismissed early, leaving teachers free to participate in their PLCs. The following figure compares the different bell schedules used, including a one-lunch bell schedule, two-lunch bell schedule, and PLC/Minimum Day bell schedule.³²

Figure 6: Rancho Santa Maria Intermediate School Bell Schedules, 2012-2013

TIME	ONE-LUNCH BELL	TIME	TWO-LUNCH BELL	TIME	PLC/MINIMUM DAY
7:15-8:07	O per.	7:15-8:07	O per.	7:15-8:07	O per.
8:15-8:27	Homeroom	8:15-8:27	Homeroom	8:15-8:26	Homeroom
8:31-9:22	Mod 1	8:31-9:22	Mod 1	8:30-9:05	Mod 1
9:26-10:18	Mod 2	9:26-10:18	Mod 2	9:09-9:44	Mod 2
10:18-10:33	Snack	10:18-10:33	Snack	9:48-10:23	Mod 3
10:37-11:28	Mod 3	10:37-11:28	Mod 3	10:23-10:38	Snack
11:32-12:24	Mod 4	11:28-1:04	Mod 4 + lunch (2 services)	10:42-11:17	Mod 4
12:24-1:04	Lunch	1:08-1:59	Mod 5	11:21-11:56	Mod 5
1:08-1:59	Mod 5	2:03-2:55	Mod 6	12:00-12:35	Mod 6
2:03-2:55	Mod 6	<i>Implied PLC</i>			

Source: RSM Intermediate School

Seventeen of these days were scheduled for the 2012-2013 academic year, providing nearly 40 hours of collaboration time for teachers over the course of the year, or 2 hours and 20 minutes per Minimum Day. The scheduled PLC Days for 2012-2013 include the following dates:³³

- September 11
- September 25
- October 9
- October 23
- November 6
- December 4
- December 11
- January 15
- January 29
- February 5
- February 26
- March 12
- March 26
- April 16
- April 30
- May 14
- June 4

Note that all of these dates fall on a Tuesday.

³¹ “2012 Growth API School Report – Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate.” California Department of Education. 2013. <http://api.cde.ca.gov/Acnt/2012/2012GrowthSch.aspx?allcids=30736356111561>

³² “Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate School Bell Schedule.” Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate School (California). <http://www.svusd.k12.ca.us/schools/rsm/rsm2010/pdf/bellschedule201213.pdf>

³³ “PLC Days – Minimum Day – 12:35 Dismissal.” Rancho Santa Margarita Intermediate School (California). <http://www.svusd.k12.ca.us/schools/rsm/rsm2010/plc201213.asp>

HIGH SCHOOL SCHEDULES

This subsection profiles three high schools that have clearly incorporated PLCs into the school schedule, including:

- Otay Ranch High School, *California*
- Stevenson High School, *Illinois*
- Walpole High School, *Massachusetts*

OTAY RANCH HIGH SCHOOL (CALIFORNIA)

Otay Ranch High School was built in 2003 and serves 2,750 students in the Sweetwater Union High School District located near the U.S.-Mexico border in California. Staff include 114 teachers and 74 support staff.³⁴

Otay Ranch is “a **modified year-round school** with classes beginning in mid-July and ending in early June.” The school principally operates on a block schedule, in which periods are extended to just shy of two hours and students cycle through their classes over a two-day period. However, Mondays are reserved for a full cycle of classes. When this takes the form of a “full menu” schedule, all periods meet, for a length of 59 minutes each. Most often, however, Otay Ranch follows a “pro-hour” schedule on Mondays, in which each period is shortened by 10 minutes so that students can be dismissed an hour early, allowing teachers to “collaborate in Professional Learning Communities for one hour every week.” The school makes up the instructional time by “banking minutes” throughout the rest of the week.³⁵ In addition, a “minimum day” schedule is used for holiday half-days and the like. The figure below compares the four schedule schemes commonly used at Otay Ranch.³⁶

Figure 7: Otay Ranch High School Bell Schedules, 2012-2013

TIME	FULL MENU	TIME	PRO-HOUR	TIME	BLOCK DAY	TIME	MINIMUM DAY
7:30-8:29	Per. 1	7:30-8:18	Per. 1	7:30-9:16	Block A	7:30-8:10	Per. 1
8:36-9:35	Per. 2	8:25-9:13	Per. 2	9:16-9:26	Break	8:17-8:57	Per. 2
9:35-9:45	Break	9:13-9:23	Break	9:33-11:19	Block B	9:04-9:44	Per. 3
9:52-10:51	Per. 3	9:30-10:19	Per. 3	11:26-12:10	ELP	9:44-9:54	Break
10:58-11:58	Per. 4	10:26-11:14	Per. 4	12:17-12:47	Lunch	10:01-10:41	Per. 4
11:58-12:28	Lunch	11:14-11:44	Lunch	12:54-2:40	Block C	10:48-11:28	Per. 5
12:35-1:34	Per. 5	11:51-12:39	Per. 5			11:35-12:15	Per. 6
1:41-2:40	Per. 6	12:46-1:35	Per. 6			12:15-12:45	Lunch
		1:35-2:40	Pro-hour				

Source: Otay Ranch High School

³⁴ “About Us.” Otay Ranch High School (California). 2013. <http://orh.sweetwaterschools.org/about-us/>

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ “Bell Schedules.” Otay Ranch High School (California). 2013. <http://orh.sweetwaterschools.org/about-us/bell-schedules/>

The actual rotation of bell schedules across the school week varies based on different school needs, such as testing, special days, or exam periods. A sample of daily schedules used over several weeks in the latter part of the 2012-2013 academic year is reproduced in the following figure.³⁷

Figure 8: Otay Ranch High School Daily Schedule, April 22, 2013-May 17, 2013

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
April 22 Pro-hour	April 23 Block	April 24 Block	April 25 Block	April 26 Block
April 29 Pro-hour	April 30 Block	May 1 Block	May 2 Block	May 3 Block
May 6 Pro-hour	May 7 Block	May 8 Block	May 9 Block	May 10 Block
May 13 Pro-hour	May 14 Block	May 15 Block	May 16 Full menu	May 17 Minimum

Source: Otay Ranch High School

Additionally, the school offers a detailed PLC schedule that governs the use of pro-hours in the Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters. The calendar provides a glimpse at how the school mixes up departmental, administrative, and general PLC meetings across its 27 meeting times in these two semesters. A footnote on the document indicates that “[t]here will be additional PLC meeting opportunities during school assemblies.” Thus, the 27 hours represented in this schedule, reproduced in the figure below, are only a minimum timeframe for PLCs at Otay Ranch.³⁸

Figure 9: Otay Ranch High School PLC Schedule, Fall 2012-Spring 2013

DATE	TIME	PLC
Fall 2012		
Monday, July 30, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	Department/PLC
Monday, August 6, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	Admin PLC
Monday, August 13, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, August 20, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, August 27, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, September 10, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	Admin PLC
Monday, September 17, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, October 15, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	Admin PLC
Monday, October 22, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	Department/PLC
Monday, October 29, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, November 5, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	Admin PLC
Monday, November 26, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, December 3, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	Admin PLC
Monday, December 10, 2012	1:40 to 2:40	Department/PLC

³⁷ “Daily Schedule.” Otay Ranch High School (California). 2013. <http://orh.sweetwaterschools.org/about-us/daily-schedule/>

³⁸ “PLC Schedule Fall 2012, PLC Schedule SPRING 2013.” Otay Ranch High School (California). June 5, 2012. <http://orh.sweetwaterschools.org/files/2012/06/PLC-Schedule-2012-2013.pdf>

DATE	TIME	PLC
Spring 2013		
Monday, January 28, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	Admin PLC
Monday, February 4, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	Department/PLC
Monday, February 11, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, February 25, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, March 4, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	Admin PLC
Monday, March 11, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, April 1, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	Admin PLC
Monday, April 8, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	Department/PLC
Monday, April 22, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, April 29, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, May 6, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	Admin PLC
Monday, May 13, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	PLC
Monday, May 20, 2013	1:40 to 2:40	Department/PLC

Source: Otay Ranch High School

STEVENSON HIGH SCHOOL (ILLINOIS)

Adlai E. Stevenson High School serves 3,881 students in Lincolnshire, Illinois. The school is “the only public high school in Illinois to receive four Blue Ribbon Awards for Excellence in Education from the U.S. Department of Education. SHS won the award in 1987, 1991, 1997, and 2002.”³⁹ Richard DuFour, the leading expert on PLC, worked at Stevenson as a teacher and principal in the 1980s and early 1990s before serving as the district superintendent until 2002. “Led by DuFour,” one website writes, “Stevenson became one of the best schools in America and is repeatedly cited as a model of best practices in education.”⁴⁰

In its profile for *All Things PLC*, Stevenson indicates that it regularly schedules late starts to the school day to allow staff to participate in PLCs, including both a weekly late start which, combined with an early arrival by staff, provides about an hour for PLCs, and a monthly late start of three hours “to provide teachers with more extended time for collaboration.” For these meetings, staff are organized into “collaborative teams, typically by course although a few teams are interdisciplinary and others are departmental.”⁴¹

From current calendar and bell schedule information, it appears that the weekly delay is held on the “second day of the week,” typically but not always a Tuesday. Both the weekly and the monthly delays are scheduled on the school calendar. The following figure compares the three main schedules used at Stevenson.⁴²

³⁹ “About Stevenson High School.” Stevenson High School (Illinois). 2013. <http://www.d125.org/about/default.aspx>

⁴⁰ [1] “Richard P. DuFour.” School Improvement Network. 2013.

<http://www.schoolimprovement.com/experts/richard-dufour/>

[2] “Richard DuFour.” Solution Tree. www.solution-tree.com/Speakers/richard-dufour

⁴¹ “Adlai Stevenson High School District 125.” All Things PLC.

<http://www.allthingsplc.info/evidence/adlaistevensonhighschool/index.php>

⁴² [1] “Bell Schedules.” Stevenson High School (Illinois). http://www.d125.org/bell_schedules.aspx

[2] “Events Calendar: Month View.” Stevenson High School (Illinois). <http://www.d125.org/events/month.aspx?>

Figure 10: Stevenson High School Bell Schedules, 2012-2013

TIME	REGULAR DAY	TIME	PLC DAY [WEEKLY]	TIME	LATE ARRIVAL DAY [MONTHLY]
7:20-8:00	Detention	<i>Implied PLC</i>		<i>Implied PLC</i>	
8:05-9:00	Per. 1	7:45-8:25	Detention	9:45-10:25	Detention
9:05-9:55	Per. 2	8:35-9:24	Per. 1	10:30-11:05	Per. 1
10:00-10:50	Per. 3	9:29-10:13	Per. 2	11:10-11:40	Per. 2
10:55-11:45*	Per. 4	10:18-11:02	Per. 3	11:45-12:15	Per. 3
11:50-12:40*	Per. 5	11:07-11:57*	Per. 4	12:20-12:55	Per. 4
12:45-1:35*	Per. 6	12:02-12:52*	Per. 5	1:00-1:35	Per. 5
1:40-2:30	Per. 7	12:57-1:47*	Per. 6	1:40-2:15	Per. 6
2:35-3:25	Per. 8	1:52-2:36	Per. 7	2:20-2:50	Per. 7
3:35-4:15	Detention	2:41-3:25	Per. 8	2:55-3:25	Per. 8
		3:35-4:15	Detention	3:35-4:15	Detention

Source: Stevenson High School

NB: An asterisk (*) indicates that there are variants in the time slot to accommodate what is likely, but not specified, to be lunch or some other break time.

The actual rotation of bell schedules across the school week varies based on different school needs, such as testing, special days, or exam periods. A sample of the daily schedules for several weeks in the latter part of the 2012-2013 academic year is reproduced in the following figure.⁴³

Figure 11: Stevenson High School Events Calendar, April 8, 2013-May 3, 2013

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
April 8 Regular	April 9 PLC Day	April 10 Regular	April 11 Late Arrival Day	April 12 Regular
April 15 Regular	April 16 PLC Day	April 17 Regular	April 18 Regular	April 19 Regular
April 22 Regular	April 23 Regular	April 24 Regular	April 25 PLC Day	April 26 Regular
April 29 Regular	April 30 PLC Day	May 1 Regular	May 2 Regular	May 3 Regular

Source: Stevenson High School

The 2012-2013 Calendar identifies the planned Late Arrival days for the whole academic year, as well as other planned events, no-school days, and non-attendance days. Some Late Arrival days specify a use for the morning staff extended work period. The next figure reproduces this calendar, modified to highlight the Late Arrival days and uses only.⁴⁴

⁴³ "Events Calendar," Op. cit.

⁴⁴ "2012-2013 Calendar." Stevenson High School (Illinois). http://www.d125.org/academics/201213_calendar.aspx

Figure 12: Stevenson High School Late Arrival Days, 2012-2013

DAY	EVENT
August 22, 2012	First day of school – freshmen
August 23, 2012	First day of school – all students
August 30, 2012	Late Arrival
September 7, 2012	Late Arrival
September 13, 2012	Late Arrival – Teacher Planning
October 18, 2012	Late Arrival – Staff Development
November 8, 2012	Late Arrival – Teacher Planning
December 13, 2012	Late Arrival – Staff Development
January 31, 2013	Late Arrival – Teacher Planning
February 14, 2013	Late Arrival – Staff Development
March 14, 2013	Late Arrival – Teacher Planning
April 11, 2013	Late Arrival – Staff Development
June 6, 2013	Graduation

Source: Stevenson High School

WALPOLE HIGH SCHOOL (MASSACHUSETTS)

Walpole High School serves 1,165 students in the Walpole Public Schools district just south of Boston, and employs more than 100 faculty and professional staff.⁴⁵ This Massachusetts high school has experimented with different PLC schedules, but recent changes seem to have garnered the greatest support. A student newspaper (*The Rebellion*) noted that the new schedule featured the following changes:

- **Increased frequency:** Every Tuesday is a PLC day (rather than every other Tuesday)
- **Time slot shift:** PLC times are in the afternoon (rather than the morning)
- **Student PLC use:** certain groups are held for announcements or assemblies during PLC times, while others are free for early dismissal on a rotating schedule⁴⁶

The changes seem to have cleared up confusion and pressure around the previous PLC schedule. Students, for example, come to school at a consistent time every day, and are clearly allowed to be absent for most of the PLC sessions. Communicating such expectations to students and parents when PLCs were held in the morning was a significant challenge. Teachers, too, feel that the afternoon slot provides a clearer and freer space for discussing important topics, since they are able to extend beyond the explicit PLC time block into their after-school hours if more time is needed to talk.⁴⁷

Walpole’s current PLC-adapted bell schedule provides five 68-minute blocks per day on non-PLC days, and cuts only 7 minutes from these blocks on PLC days to provide a 38-minute PLC block for teachers and administrators each week. Over the course of the academic year,

⁴⁵ “Walpole High School Profile 2012-2013.” Walpole High School (Massachusetts). 2013. <http://walpole.k12.ma.us/whs/site/files/profile2012-2013finalrevi.pdf>

⁴⁶ Fuller, N. “New PLC schedule works for WHS.” *The Rebellion*. <http://whstherebellion.com/?p=29510>

⁴⁷ Ibid.

teachers thus have more than 21.5 hours available to engage in regular collaborative, constructive discussions.

In addition to 34 PLC days during the 2012-2013 academic year, the school scheduled eight early release days (approximately one per month) featuring 37-minute academic blocks to dismiss students roughly three hours earlier than normal. It is unclear how the school uses the time freed on early dismissal days. The following figure compares the three standard schedules for common days, PLC days, and early release days.⁴⁸

Figure 13: Walpole High School Block Schedule, 2012-2013

TIME	COMMON SCHEDULE	TIME	PLC DAY (TUESDAYS)	TIME	EARLY RELEASE
7:20-7:30	Homeroom	7:20-7:30	Homeroom	7:20-7:30	Homeroom
7:35-8:43	Block A	7:35-8:36	Block A	7:35-8:12	Block A
8:48-9:56	Block B	8:41-9:42	Block B	8:17-8:54	Block B
10:01-11:09	Block C	9:47-10:48	Block C	8:59-9:36	Block C
11:09-12:52*	Block D + lunch	10:48-12:31*	Block D + lunch	9:41-10:18	Block D
12:57-2:05	Block E	12:36-1:37	Block E	10:23-11:00	Block E
		1:42-2:20	PLC		

Source: Walpole High School

The actual rotation of bell schedules across the school week varies based on different school needs, such as testing, special days, or exam periods. A sample of daily schedules from several weeks towards the end of the 2012-2013 academic year is reproduced in the following figure.⁴⁹

Figure 14: Walpole High School Events Calendar, April 21, 2013-May 17, 2013

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
April 22 Common	April 23 PLC Day	April 24 Common	April 25 Common	April 26 Common
April 29 Common	April 30 Common	May 1 Common	May 2 Common	May 3 Common
May 6 Common	May 7 PLC Day	May 8 Common	May 9 Common	May 10 Common
May 13 Common	May 14 Common	May 15 Common	May 16 Common	May 17 Early Release

Source: Walpole High School

⁴⁸ "2012-2013 Bell Schedules." Walpole High School (Massachusetts). 2013. <http://www.walpole.k12.ma.us/whs/site/files/studentplanner20122013bel.pdf>

⁴⁹ "Walpole High School Calendar." Walpole High School (Massachusetts). 2013. <http://www.walpole.k12.ma.us/whs/cal/index.php>

SECTION II: INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT FOR PLCs

To provide a broader context, this section explores ways in which international school systems provide time and incentive for teacher professional development. A major comparative report by Pearson of more than 50 countries identified the following as among the key components of effective school systems:

- There is no substitute for good teachers: Successful school systems have a number of things in common: they find culturally effective ways to attract the best people to the profession; **they provide relevant, ongoing training**; they give teachers a status similar to that of other respected professions; and **the system sets clear goals and expectations but also lets teachers get on with meeting these.**⁵⁰

Specific recommendations on how to “get teachers who make a difference” reflect principles similar to those behind the PLC model in that they urge school systems to **respect the professionalism of educators by providing clear guidance but also autonomy**. Specifically, the report identified four essential factors for promoting teacher quality:

- *Attracting the best people to the profession*: Finland and South Korea – two perennially cited examples of education success and the top countries in our Index – obtain their annual teacher intake from the top 10% and 15% of graduating students respectively. The key to success is the status in which teaching is held culturally. Here money can have some effect, not just as the simple inducement but as a signal of status.
- *Providing the right training*: While graduate training is important, teacher training also needs to be ongoing. This has a very practical reason – that no teacher’s college course will maintain complete relevance across decades of work – but also a demonstrative one. Effective professional development needs to address not just upgrading the knowledge of teachers – providing, for example, a better understanding of new technology and teaching strategies – but also allow them to advance along their career path into more senior positions where relevant.
- *Treating teachers like professionals*: Consistent with the need to promote the status of teaching is its treatment as a profession. Things like continual professional development and professional autonomy can be powerful incentives for better learning outcomes. Teachers must be seen as professionals who exercise judgment, not just technicians.
- *Implementing clear goals and effective oversight, and then letting teachers get on with it*: This combination of accountability and independence is consistently correlated with improved outcomes.⁵¹

International commentators have identified many ways in which schools can develop collaborative learning spaces for their teachers that contribute to the mandates of ongoing

⁵⁰ “Executive Summary.” *The Learning Curve*. Pearson. 2012. <http://thelearningcurve.pearson.com/the-report/executive-summary>

⁵¹ Bullet points quoted verbatim from: “Getting teachers who make a difference.” *The Learning Curve*. Pearson. 2012. <http://thelearningcurve.pearson.com/the-report/getting-teachers-who-make-a-difference>

training and respect for teachers as professionals. Educator David Hamlett, for example, identified the following models in a review of school systems in Australia, Tasmania, and Canada:

- **Professional Learning Cycles – Ontario Model:** An ongoing process through which teachers and administrators work collaboratively to seek and share learning and to act on their learning, their goal being to enhance their effectiveness as professionals for students' benefit.
- **Co-operative learning:** A strategy to increase student achievement by creating a collaborative school culture focused on learning.
- **School planning teams:** Team members who regularly collaborate toward continued improvement in meeting learner needs through a shared curricular-focused vision.
- **Timperley cycle:** A group of people sharing and critically interrogating their practice in an ongoing, reflective, collaborative, inclusive learning-oriented and growth-promoting way.
- **DuFour [PLC Model]:** Educators committed to working collaboratively in ongoing processes of collective inquiry and action research to achieve better results for the students they serve.
- **Classroom Observation and Feedback:** An inclusive group of people, motivated by a shared learning vision, who support and work with each other to inquire on their practice and together learn new and better approaches to enhance student learning.⁵²

While Hamlett does not feel these accurately present the exact scope and intent of PLCs, the collection demonstrates that international school systems are concerned about ongoing professional development and building a collaborative, supportive culture for teachers.

This is evident, for instance, in Canada, where the PLC model appears to have gained some traction, perhaps unsurprisingly, given its proximity to and shared language with the United States, where the model originated. In Ontario, for instance, the Ministry of Education has published a guide to PLCs for educators,⁵³ and similar literature can be found in other provinces.⁵⁴

A scan of Canadian schools suggests that they use similar scheduling approaches to the U.S. schools profiled in Section I, namely through truncated schedules such as half-days. The Grande Prairie Public School District in Alberta, for instance, offers professional learning communities both through school-based teams, which meet 11 times per year, and through district-wide teams organized by subject (e.g., math teachers) or by grade level (e.g.,

⁵² Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Hamlett, D. "Professional Learning Communities[:] What they are and what they aren't!" Microsoft Partners in Learning, Professional Learning Communities blog post. <http://www.pil-network.com/HotTopics/professionallearningcommunities/PLC>

⁵³ "Professional Learning Communities: A Model for Ontario Schools." Ontario Ministry of Education. October 2007. <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/literacynumeracy/inspire/research/plc.pdf>

⁵⁴ E.g., "Professional Learning Communities: A Literature Synopsis." Alberta Ministry of Education. n.d. https://education.alberta.ca/apps/aisi/literature/pdfs/FINAL_Professional_Learning_Communities.pdf

kindergarten teachers).⁵⁵ The district's 2012-2013 calendar shows that students have half-days on every other Friday expressly to give teachers PLC time, in addition to various full-day teacher workdays, at least one of which is devoted to district-wide PLC meetings (i.e., by subject or grade level).⁵⁶ The half-days appear to entail dismissal at 11:30 a.m., with teachers conducting PLC meetings through 3:30 p.m.⁵⁷ Further, it appears that some schools in the district convert these half-day Fridays into a sort of "student workday" that complements the teachers' activities. At Alexander Forbes School, a school for grades 1-9, "PLC Learning Fridays" for junior high-level students include a 1.5 hour block of work time, as well as homeroom, a half-hour P.E. session, and an assembly, before dismissal at 11:30 a.m. Students are expected to come prepared with assignments from their core classes (e.g., math, language arts), which they work on in their homerooms during the 1.5 hour work block.⁵⁸

In other countries, and particularly non-Anglophone ones, there is less evidence that the PLC model proper has become widespread. However, there is evidence that schools in other countries are adopting collaborative professional development models similar to PLCs, and the following subsection profiles trends in Finland, a recognized world leader in public education.

FINLAND

Finland's education system has impressed world observers with the dramatic turnaround of its education system since the 1970s. Of particular note, some of the country's reforms have run counter to accepted best practices in other countries, including the United States. For instance, Finland does not use mandatory standardized tests until the formal exit exams at ages 17-19. Students (and teachers) spend fewer hours in the classroom than other international peers, yet consistently outscore them on major student achievement assessments such as the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA). Play and physical activity are encouraged. Meals, supplies, and transportation are provided free of charge from age seven (when students enter) through university studies. Put simply, as many have concluded, Finnish society places a strong and positive value on education, and therefore creates a satisfying environment for educators to work in.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ "Professional Learning Communities." Grande Prairie Public School District (Alberta).

<http://www.gppsd.ab.ca/DistrictOffice/JobOpportunities/Application%20Forms/PLC.pdf>

⁵⁶ "Calendar for the 2012-2013 School Year." Grande Prairie Public School District (Alberta).

<https://www.gppsd.ab.ca/Publications/2012-2013%20School%20Calendar.pdf>

⁵⁷ E.g., "School Calendar." I.V. Macklin Public School – Grande Prairie Public School District (Alberta).

<http://www.gppsd.ab.ca/school/ivmacklin/Calendar/calendar.aspx>

⁵⁸ "Schedule for PLC Learning Fridays." Alexander Forbes School – Grande Prairie Public School District (Alberta). September 15, 2011.

<http://www.gppsd.ab.ca/school/alexanderforbes/Publications/PLC%20learning%20Friday%20letter%20to%20parents.pdf>

⁵⁹ See, e.g., [1] Lopez, A. "How Finnish schools shine." *The Guardian* (UK). April 9, 2012.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/teacher-network/teacher-blog/2012/apr/09/finish-school-system>

[2] Hancock, L. "Why Are Finland's Schools Successful?" *Smithsonian.com*, from magazine (September 2011).

<http://www.smithsonianmag.com/people-places/Why-Are-Finlands-Schools-Successful.html?c=y&story=fullstory>

[3] Darling-Hammond, L. "What we can learn from Finland's successful school reform." National Education Association. Originally published as "Steady Work: Finland Builds a Strong Teaching and Learning System."

Teachers are recruited rigorously, with most candidates required to hold a master's degree, and the single path to licensure is through this university degree. Programs emphasize pedagogy and theory, and are "based on a combination of research, practice, and reflection, meaning that [teacher education] must be supported by scientific knowledge and focused on thinking processes and cognitive skills used in conducting research."⁶⁰ While outside evaluators of the Finnish system have suggested that teacher induction remains an area of improvement,⁶¹ the strength and seriousness of teacher preparation and ongoing engagement practices make this a minor detail in the broad scheme.

The literature does not specify that professional development in Finland takes the form of PLC, though terms like it ("professional communities," e.g.) have been suggested. Professional development is largely a local concern, not nationally managed. However, we identified a new, different approach becoming common in Finland: *osaava verme*.

The *Osaava Verme* network "connects Finnish teacher education institutions, including the vocational teacher education institutions and teacher education departments of universities . . . [and] disseminates the **Peer Group Mentoring [PGM] model**" in Finland.⁶² The *verme* (or peer mentoring) groups meet regularly throughout the school year, chaired by a head mentor who has been trained in how to manage the work via specific training sessions. In many ways, the *verme* are a solution to the noted weakness in teacher induction practices. "Those just starting their careers are most likely to benefit, but all teachers are welcome," reported one head mentor. Like PLCs, however, the *verme* seek to encourage constructive collaboration about real needs across all levels of experience and, as a consequence, encourage a culture of shared support and knowledge.⁶³

Specific scheduling of this practice is unclear. One report noted that Finnish teachers spend about "two hours a week planning schoolwork with colleagues,"⁶⁴ but did not suggest that this was structured via a formal model like PLC or PGM. Finnish teachers do spend significantly less time in the classroom than is typical for the OECD countries,⁶⁵ which may mean more time is available to them outside of the classroom. To contrast, American

Rethinking Schools 24: 4 (Summer 2010). <http://www.nea.org/home/40991.htm>

[4] Richards, E. "Finland puts bar high for teachers, kids' well-being." *JOnline (Milwaukee-Wisconsin Journal Sentinel)*. November 26, 2011. <http://www.jsonline.com/news/education/finland-puts-bar-high-for-teachers-kids-wellbeing-qa2tbfr-134546548.html>

⁶⁰ Sahlberg, P. "Lessons from Finland." *American Educator* (Summer 2011): p. 35. <http://www.aft.org/pdfs/americaneducator/summer2011/Sahlberg.pdf>

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶² Haapasalo, I., et al. "Peer Group Mentoring for Teacher Development: Lessons Learnt in Finland." Presentation prepared for Supporting New Teachers in Europe conference, Tallin, May 10, 2012. p. 3. https://ktl.jyu.fi/img/portal/22195/PGM_Tallin_Haapasalo.pdf

⁶³ [1] "Osaava Verme Peer Group Mentoring For Teachers (in English)." Osaava Verme on YouTube. Published May 8, 2012. <http://youtu.be/gIWVX7veux4>

[2] "Finnish education: Osaava Verme – Peer-Group mentoring." Osaava Verme on YouTube. Published August 27, 2012. <http://youtu.be/1n52F1bVuNA>

⁶⁴ Sahlberg, P. "Lessons from Finland." *Op. cit.*, p. 37.

⁶⁵ "Finland – Strong Performers and Successful Reformers in Education." EDUcontact OECD on YouTube. Published January 24, 2012. <http://youtu.be/ZwD1v73O4VI>

teachers spent nearly two-thirds more time in the classroom than Finnish peers, and were significantly above the OECD average for net teaching time in hours. The following table shows selected statistics from the OECD’s “Education at a Glance” report (2012).⁶⁶

Figure 15: Organization of Teachers’ Working Time, 2010

COUNTRY/REGION	NET TEACHING TIME IN HOURS		
	PRIMARY EDUCATION	LOWER SECONDARY EDUCATION	UPPER SECONDARY EDUCATION, GENERAL PROGRAMS
Finland	680	595	553
South Korea	807	627	616
England	684	703	703
OECD average*	782	704	658
Canada	799	740	744
Australia	868	819	803
United States	1,097	1,068	1,051

Source: OECD

*NB: Average inclusive of countries included in this table and those not reproduced here; total n=36

⁶⁶ “Organisation of teachers’ working time (2010): Number of teaching weeks, teaching days, net teaching hours, and teachers’ working time over the school year, in public institutions.” *Education at a Glance 2012: OECD Indicators*. OECD. December 9, 2012. http://www.keepeek.com/Digital-Asset-Management/oced/education/education-at-a-glance-2012/organisation-of-teachers-working-time-2010_eag-2012-table247-en

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