

# **An ASCD Study Guide for Achievement Teams: How a Better Approach to PLCs Can Improve Student Outcomes and Teacher Efficacy**

This ASCD Study Guide is designed to enhance your understanding and application of the ideas and strategies presented in *Achievement Teams: How a Better Approach to PLCs Can Improve Student Outcomes and Teacher Efficacy*, an ASCD book by Steve Ventura and Michelle Ventura, published in May 2022.

You can use the study guide before or after you have read the book or as you finish each chapter. The study questions provided are not meant to cover all aspects of the book, but, rather, to address specific ideas that might warrant further reflection.

Most of the questions contained in this study guide are ones you can think about on your own, with a colleague, or in a study group with others who have read (or are reading) *Achievement Teams*.

## **Introduction: Welcome to Achievement Teams**

1. When teams in your school gather to collaborate, is there a specific structure they follow that encourages productive and robust dialogue?
2. Do opportunities exist to further develop collective efficacy, instructional strategies, and formative assessment?
3. Achievement Teams are based on forming a culture of

evidence. How do teams currently select instructional strategies that accurately reflect students needs?

4. How often do teams get an opportunity to truly work collectively to create common goals designed to increase student learning?

## **Chapter 1. Setting Up the Achievement Team**

1. What method or organizational structure is used to create teams that represent communities of practice?
2. How are specialists, elective teachers, or "singletons" encouraged to take part in collaboration with other members of their school or district?
3. Describe how teacher teams are formed and the responsibility they have toward each other.
4. Are there specific criteria that teams follow to maximize effective collaboration, an exchange of ideas, and an environment grounded in trust and interdependence?

## **Chapter 2. Teacher Clarity and Learning Progressions**

1. Do collaborative teams in your school understand the power of teacher clarity, the use of success criteria, and the selection of essential learning targets?

2. Why do you think learning progressions add value to targeted instruction and student success?
3. Referring to Figure 2.2, how familiar are teams with Webb's Depth of Knowledge and how it creates additional opportunities for rigor and complexity?
4. Why is it important to plan instruction around specific concepts and skills contained within learning targets?
5. Figure 2.4 features a learning progression based on a single learning target. What other steps would you include to create a "staircase to complexity"?
6. Success criteria clarify what students must learn in order to demonstrate proficiency. How do you help students understand what success looks like at the beginning of a unit or lesson?

## **Chapter 3. Clarity of Assessment**

1. Formative assessment is foundational for Achievement Teams. Do teams understand the difference between formative and summative assessment? How do you know?
2. Are teams currently using a pre-/post-assessment system to create credible evidence of instructional success between two assessments?
3. What type of feedback is most prevalent in your school or district? Is it accurate, fair, timely, and understandable? Is it

designed to improve student achievement? Refer to Figure 3.7 for additional information regarding the power of feedback.

4. If assessment drives the teaching and learning cycle, how often do teams interpret assessment results as an assessment of their instructional success?
5. If teams move to a pre-/post-assessment cycle, what is their understanding of the difference between mirrored and aligned assessment?

## **Chapter 4. Planning for Achievement Teams**

1. How clear are expectations from administrators and other decision makers around the process of collaboration?
2. How often do teachers get an opportunity to observe their colleagues teach, enabling them to compare their own instructional practices with those of the teachers they observe?
3. Instructional leaders can help bridge the gap between high- and low-impact teachers. How are leaders helping teams practice empathy and feedback and encouraging all team members to listen and talk?

## **Chapter 5. Step 1: Collect and Chart the Data**

1. Organizing assessment results is critical in determining next steps. Figures 5.4 and 5.5 suggest how data can be represented. Why do visual representations help teachers

- make valid inferences about their instructional impact?
2. If your school or district does not incorporate a pre-/post-assessment data gathering system, what are your next steps?
  3. Cut scores for each assessment help determine levels of proficiency. How does distorting a cut score or true score with a weighted score alter assessment results? Explain the difference between true scores and weighted scores.
  4. What other ways can assessment results be organized for optimal interpretation and decision making?

## **Chapter 6. Step 2: Set SMART Goals**

1. Goals motivate both teachers and students to exert extra effort when completing a specific task. What is the culture of goal setting in your school or district?
2. Achievement Teams consider both growth and mastery goal setting. Explain the difference between the two and when they would be most impactful.
3. How are students encouraged to create personal goals for themselves? Why would this process increase self-determination theory?
4. Goal setting for Achievement Teams occurs between pre- and post-assessment. How can assessment results be shared with students so they can increase their own levels of metacognition and their own ability to self-reflect?

5. Refer to Figure 6.5. Do you think this type of goal setting would encourage students to put forth additional effort? Why or why not?

## **Chapter 7. Step 3: Create Baseline Evidence Statements**

1. There are four Achievement Teams questions to ask after the results of the first assessment have been organized. What additional question would you consider adding to help create root cause analysis?
2. Baseline evidence statements are designed to create rigorous collaborative discourse among team members. Refer to Figure 7.2. Do your teams get to this level of analysis? If not, how can team members be encouraged to go deeper in determining root causes?
3. Quality conversations can be accelerated based on the level of trust in your school or district. On page 100, we have included five criteria from the Bryk and Schneider relational trust scale. Would your school or district consider administering this survey? What results would you expect?
4. Figure 7.3 illustrates how the fishbone diagram can help foster deeper levels of discussion and analysis. Are there situations in your school that would benefit from the use of this diagram? How so?
5. Explain your current level of team dialogue. What areas need to

improve in order to encourage deeper levels of teacher self-reflection?

## **Chapter 8. Step 4: Select High-Yield Instructional Strategies**

1. Strategy selection is a direct result of the evidence statements addressed in Chapter 7. During this step, teachers are encouraged to select instructional strategies that can accelerate student progress. How familiar is your school or district with contemporary research about what works best in terms of instruction? What practices need to be reevaluated?
2. We've introduced three phases of learning: surface, deep, and transfer. After studying these phases and the instructional strategies they represent, at what phase do you feel your instruction is most prevalent? How can schools and districts become more aware of accurate representation of rigor and complexity?
3. The learning progressions created and the results of the pre-assessment will provide a roadmap for differentiation. Explain how referring back to the learning progression for the learning target will help teams to determine which strategies to select.
4. Figure 8.6 describes the success criteria for instructional strategy selection. Do teams currently follow some or all of this criteria? Which ones require more attention? Explain.
5. If a strategy that was introduced to students did not yield the

expected results, would your team try that strategy again or search for an alternative? Would team members teach that strategy in the way it was originally taught?

## **Chapter 9. Achievement Teams in Action**

1. Achievement Teams focus on cause, not just effect, by using formative assessment results, and thus have the opportunity to improve instruction through collaboration. What opportunities for growth would enhance your school's collective efficacy and collaboration?
2. After looking at Chalone Peaks' action plan in Figure 9.1, what steps will you take to properly implement and monitor your Achievements Teams action plan?
3. How can developing an action plan provide a vision and a clear path to attain that vision?
4. Achievement Teams are about practice, not programs. How can the framework become part of the culture of your school and district to improve student learning?
5. What role does a principal and system-level leader have in developing a strategic plan for Achievement Teams implementation?
6. How can teachers and leaders determine whether teams are truly successful? Besides assessment results, what other indicators can communicate if our practice is making a difference? Refer to Figure 9.2. Do you think the results of this

survey could provide additional insights?

*Achievement Teams: How a Better Approach to PLCs Can Improve Student Outcomes and Teacher Efficacy* was written by Steve Ventura and Michelle Ventura. This 150-page, 8" × 10" book (Stock #122034; ISBN-13: 978-1-4166-3119-4) is available from ASCD. Copyright © 2022 by ASCD. To order a copy, call ASCD at 1-800-933-2723 (in Virginia 1-703-578-9600). Or buy the book from [ASCD's Online Store](#).

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