Vision Statement and Story

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**Vision Statement**

I am the captain of a team of scholars. Our offense is promotion-by-achievement, and all players hold themselves accountable to meet or exceed these high expectations. As a team, we play together, win together, lose together, and grow together. Just as there is no “I” in team, our team exemplifies collaboration at all levels of play. We focus on the whole person – intellectually, physically, socially, and emotionally – to ensure that all members of our team can perform at their personal best and have fun doing it. Now quickly, *TEAM* on 3: the game clock is ticking.

**Vision Story**

**Why the Metaphor of a Team?**

My life has revolved around sports since I was four years old, when I first stepped up to a tee and hit the ball. In high school, I stared at the clock in English class, counting down the minutes until it was time to hit the field for a softball game; I wanted a home run so badly that I could taste it. During basketball games, my adrenaline surged when I would steal a ball from my opponent, race down the court, and bank in a layup that could fire up my teammates scoring and Mom and Dad cheering in the stands. Throughout my years of sports, I earned enough MVP trophies to be called a superstar, but none of it would have been possible if I had not been part of a team that practiced, learned, and performed together.

In my twenty-some years of sports, I have been a player, a fan, a coach, and an official, and all along, I believe I knew that John Donne was right: “No man is an island.” As a coach designing basketball plays, it was easy to see that it is far better to have an entire team of mediocre players who work well together than it is to have a team that depends solely on one superstar. Why? One superstar can easily be stopped, and if others cannot step up, the team will certainly lose.

Looking back at my first years of teaching, it seems both sad and funny that I did not realize that teaching and learning is as much of a team effort as basketball or softball. But back then, I mistakenly thought that if I learned as much as I could, shut my door and lectured to my students, I was doing a fine job. Of course, I was not. Knowing how to analyze literature really well did not mean my students did… I could not learn material and just pass it to my students because that did not teach them. I could not be the one superstar in the classroom, or my students would certainly wind up losing. No matter how hard I tried, I could not make the goals for them – instead I needed to learn how to teach them to make the goals themselves. And to do that I had to figure out how to do that, I had to become part of a team of teachers who knew how to do it and who knew how to share with other teachers.

When teachers remain isolated individuals as I did in the beginning, they have to discover everything on their own. Unfortunately, often we don’t know what we don’t know. I thought about how many basketball games I would have won if I had played on a team of one. It was an easy answer – zero – also approximately the same number of students who were truly learning from the way that I was teaching.

I experienced a paradigm shift. To be a successful teacher, I had to be part of a team of effective teachers. When I thought about my basketball team, I realized that I actually was not a superstar, but I was a spark plug. To be a spark plug is to create a reaction in other parts of the team. I needed to be a spark plug for my students, and I needed to create that same team feeling among my fellow teachers. For some, PLCs is almost a four-letter word, but regardless of whether teachers “want” to share, the successful future of students depends on it. If teachers are not a team – horizontally and vertically – schools will certainly not succeed. We are playing together whether we want to or not and whether we realize it or not. If we embrace this fact and begin to grow together, then our power to enhance the success of all students will be unlimited.