

# all things PLC

M A G A Z I N E

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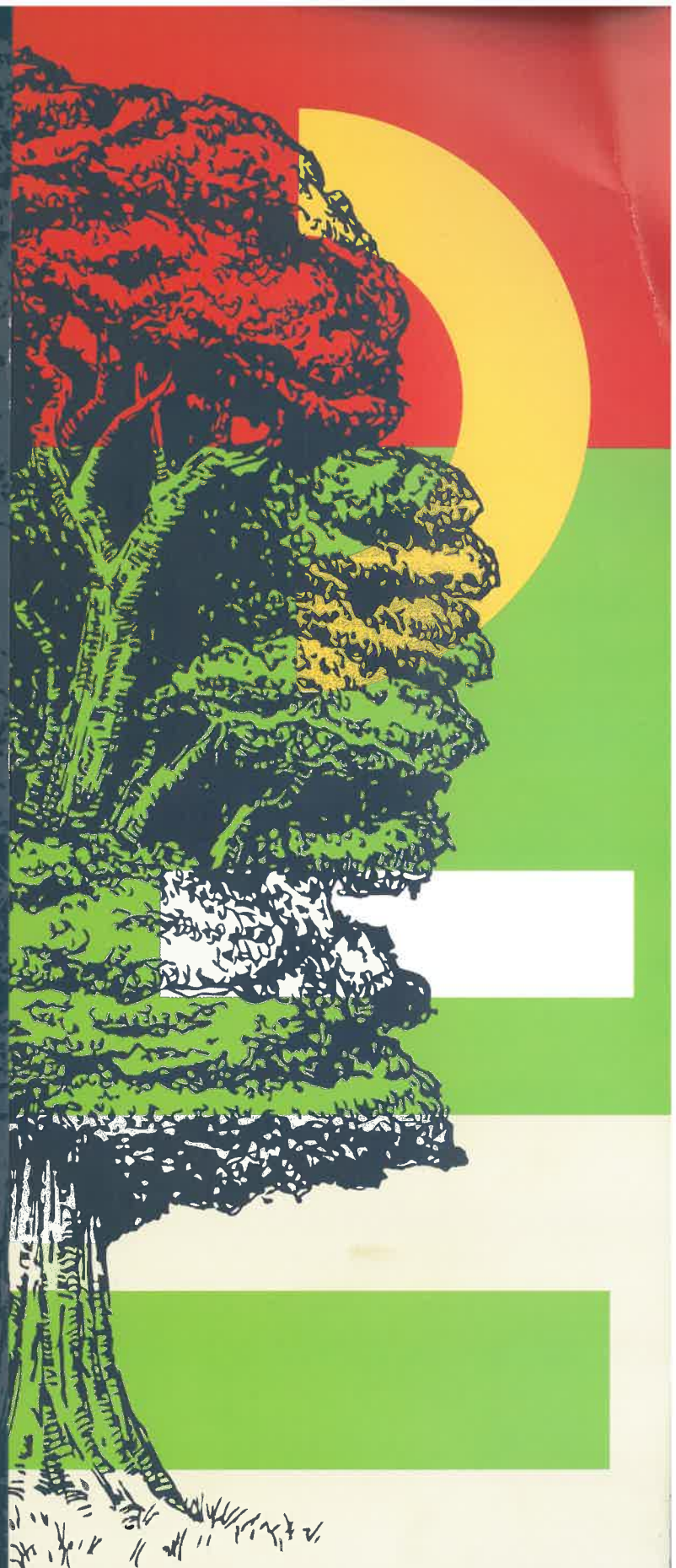
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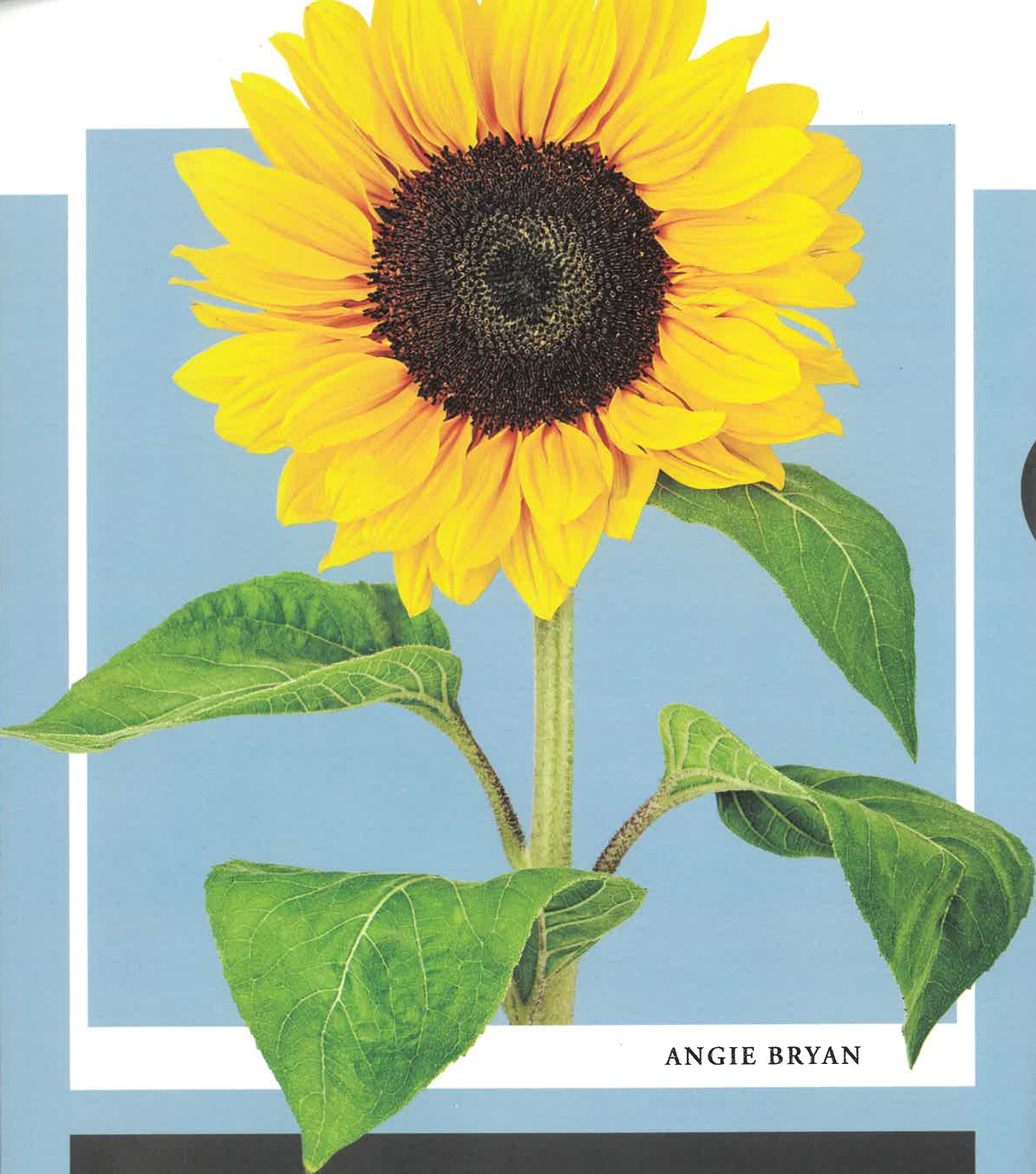
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**Seeing the things  
in a new way**






ANGIE BRYAN

**BROWN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL** is located in Reno, Nevada, in Washoe County School District, the 59th largest school district in the United States, which includes over 60 elementary schools. When we began our PLC journey, we were not only the largest elementary school in the district, but we were also on a multitrack year-round calendar, where 25 percent of staff and students were off every four weeks.



# BROWN ELEMENTARY'S *Journey of* *Hope*



As the assistant principal of this large school in 2012–13, I began our PLC journey realizing our data demonstrated that we were high proficiency, low growth. We had an amazing staff of 82, and after I shared this data with them, we all became hungry and wanted more for our students. We wanted to be the best elementary school in the area and wanted our data to show that we were not only high proficiency but also high growth. We started with implementing SMART goals (and associated common formative assessments) for both reading and math once per trimester for each grade level. This gave all the teachers in the grade level, no matter which track they were on, the time they needed to teach the content and assess how the students were doing. At the end of each trimester, the grade-level teams were able to look at their common formative assessments and answer the four PLC questions.

In 2013–14, I became the principal of Brown Elementary and the district had decided that all schools should be on the same balanced (regular) calendar. This was a huge step in beginning our journey of collaboration. We gained three mobile units and six classrooms (two more the following year to make ten), and all staff members were finally able to collaborate. This was a major shift in how our teachers did business. For the previous six years, they had been working in isolation and

focusing on the students in their classrooms, not on all our students as a whole.

This offered us a great opportunity to utilize the first two days of professional development time to begin laying the groundwork and create a foundation for our professional learning community environment. This very large staff needed to come together to create a common vision, mission, collective commitments, and goals to help us focus on the right work for our students to start improving our data to demonstrate high growth, not just high proficiency.

I used a guiding question to encourage collaboration and sharing and to create buy-in from all staff members: “What does excellent teaching look like?” Staff began sharing out words and phrases, which I wrote down on a chart. When it was full of words, I asked a follow-up question: “Can we categorize any of this?” Collaboratively, with all staff participating, we began creating a new chart with common themes. As we were working through this, a staff member excitedly stated, “Hey, that spells *hope*!” The excitement in the room was evident; we had just created an educational acronym that meant something to all of us.

This HOPE acronym solidified our collective commitments, and throughout those two days of professional learning, we



also reached a consensus on our vision and mission. Our mission actually came from an article we were reading about social and emotional learning, and it has been our mantra ever since.

**Vision:** We are committed to learning through perseverance!

**Mission:** Got grit!

**Collective commitments:**

High, clear expectations

Organized implementation

Positive community

Engagement

**Goal:** Ensure our students are achieving high proficiency and high growth.

Our staff agreed that our HOPE collective commitments should be visible at all times in the classrooms. The first year, we put the commitments on a walk-through form and teachers would respond via email within 24 hours to reflect on how we were implementing our new HOPE. Each year, we have added, updated, and improved our HOPE expectations to ensure all staff, including new members, know the expectations each year. After utilizing the walk-through form and giving feedback, we realized it needed to be more specific if we wanted our quality commitments to align throughout all our classrooms. Collaborating as a staff, we created a checklist of items that fall into each of the four categories. The new detailed HOPE gave us the tools we needed to continue to align our instruction throughout all grade levels.

# HOPE

## Our Staff Collective Commitments

### HIGH, CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Students and teachers know the why! Expectations (objectives) are posted.

Standards-based lessons.

Classroom rules/expectations (HALLS).

Quality work is visible. Explain why (ex: self-reflection evaluations and rubrics).

Modeling behavior / examples

### ORGANIZED IMPLEMENTATION

Organized environment, including supplies and materials.

Schedule and objective posted and referred to throughout the lesson.

Established routines and procedures, which include smooth transitions.

Directions posted and verbally repeated.

Appropriate pacing and time management.

### POSITIVE COMMUNITY

Cooperative learning and teamwork (participation).

PBIS (Bear Claws / 5:1).

Welcoming environment and rapport.

Accountable talk.

Celebrate effort / cheers.

### ENGAGEMENT

On-task behavior is evident.

Knowing the "why" is evident.

On-topic discussion / accountable talk.

Check for understanding.

Whole body listening.

As we continued to build our professional learning community throughout the years, we added on to our collective commitments and created expectations for our team meetings and for our students. All three sets of HOPE collective commitments have helped us transform into a true PLC by setting high standards for all meetings, instruction, student learning and growth, and our positive, student-centered culture.







## "WE ARE COMMITTED TO LEARNING THROUGH PERSEVERANCE!"

### HOPE

#### Our Student Collective Commitments

##### HIGH, CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

- Students demonstrate grit and perseverance.
- Students know how to access grade-level materials.
- Students set high personal goals.
- Students show visible, quality work.

##### ORGANIZED IMPLEMENTATION

- Students know the "what" and "why."
- Students understand and follow rules and procedures.
- Students actively participate in smooth transitions.
- Students know and use tools, resources, and time appropriately.

##### POSITIVE COMMUNITY

- Students celebrate, support, and express differences, including mistakes.
- Students contribute to building a safe space for risk taking.
- Students demonstrate growth mindset and positive talk.
- Students express leadership, talents, culture, and individuality.

##### ENGAGEMENT

- Students utilize whole body and mind learning.
- Students utilize accountable talk.
- Students are mindful and active participants.
- Students ask questions to make meaningful connections.
- Got Grit!

### HOPE

#### Our Team Meeting Collective Commitments

##### HIGH, CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

- Agenda is prepared and distributed to entire team by Monday evening each week.
- Team is aware of norms (visible, posted, and utilized).
- Student data.
- SMART goals.
- Set timelines, put in Outlook calendars.
- Stay on task/topic.
- Collaborate.
- Be on time.
- Accountability.

##### ORGANIZED IMPLEMENTATION

- Come prepared with all data and materials to meetings.
- Agenda items are appropriately paced and prioritized.
- Team members refer to agenda throughout grade team meetings.
- Committee leaders are prepared and ready to share new information.

##### POSITIVE COMMUNITY

- "Yes, and . . ."
- Safe space.
- Active listeners.
- Open-minded.
- Positive rapport.
- Be solution-oriented.
- Share data and strategies for success.
- Accountable talk.
- Follow norms.
- Celebrate strengths, differences, and success!

##### ENGAGEMENT

- Data-driven.
- Defined roles.
- Knowing and the "why."
- Take notes.
- Actively involved and on task.





Utilizing the three big ideas throughout the years has helped us focus on the *right* work—a focus on learning, a collaborative culture and collective responsibility, and a focus on results. These three big ideas truly have been the driving force of our work. Collaborative teamwork has helped us create:

- A master schedule that includes uninterrupted core instructional time and intervention time carved out for all students;
- A leadership team that focuses on instruction first;
- A MTSS (multitiered system of support) team and process that expects all teachers to be working collaboratively to make data-based decisions for all students;
- Grade-level team meetings that focus on common formative assessments and SMART goals;
- Yearly curriculum plans that focus on the five essential standards in each subject that students must master before moving on to the next grade level; and
- A community of collaboration that includes families as part of the learning team for our students.

A vision and mission may seem easy to create and look good on paper; however, the real work is constantly staying focused on the question “What is best for our students?” instead of asking, “What is best for ourselves?” There were many rocky mountains to climb throughout our journey. We went through a year of deliberation and faced the possibility of being forced back into the year-round multitrack schedule. We had a plan and a collaborative team of staff and parents who utilized our data and went to our school board to demonstrate how we could stay on the same calendar (for two years) until new schools were built. We had two new schools built and lost staff and students twice to reduce overcrowding. Our demographics changed considerably, and we had a few years that were impacted by COVID-19.

During our first years, our school performance plan goals focused on our state testing data; we used the adequate growth percentile as our focus, and we demonstrated growth for our students. The next three years showed an increase in student growth in both reading and math. However, that is a data point

that occurs once a year and did not give us quality information to ensure we were meeting our students’ needs. We were honored to receive the Model PLC School recognition for four years in a row starting in 2018–19.

In 2020–21, we changed our school performance plan goals to correspond with our quarterly SMART goals, so we could vertically align how we looked at our data and decide next steps. This gave us immediate data and helped us move our students vertically. However, throughout this time, the pandemic hit. Due to the restrictions of COVID, 75 percent of our students were in the building wearing masks and staying six feet apart, while the other 25 percent (one teacher per grade level) were doing virtual learning from home. Our state guidelines also stated that students were excluded from school for ten days when exposed to the virus, while staff was excluded for five to ten days. This exclusion mandate went on throughout our 2021–22 school year when all students and staff returned in person. Having to instruct with limited use of materials, restrictions of small groups, mandated exclusions for students, and the loss of instructional time caused our data to drop. We lost our Model PLC status for the 2022–23 school year and became a Promising Practice School. See our SMART goal schoolwide data.

#### SPP SMART GOAL DATA: 2021-2022

SPP: CFA Data Based on SMART Goal				Goal is 85% or Higher ELA, 90% for Math				
Grade Level	1st Quarter		2nd Quarter		3rd Quarter		4th Quarter	
	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math	ELA	Math
K	100%	90%	78%	86%	79%	84%	69%	94%
1	92%	92%	86%	93%	91%	91%	85%	85%
2	90%	89%	85%	87%	88%	91%	90%	93%
3	82%	94%	71%	86%	41%	43%	76%	74%
4	64%	63%	84%	86%	83%	82%	85%	73%
5	44%	85%	84%	77%	40%	85%	78%	79%

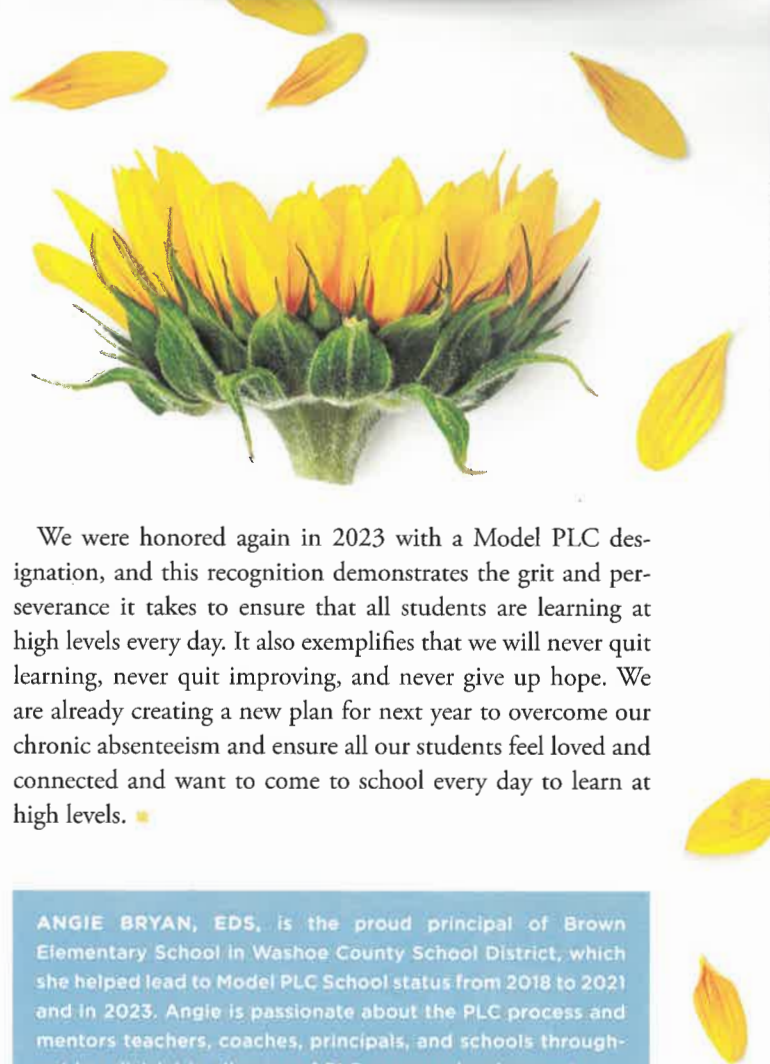






Our staff continued to work very hard during this time; therefore, not achieving the Model PLC status was disheartening. We were doing the right work; however, our data wasn't demonstrating the growth needed. We utilized our vision and mission and continued to persevere and collaborate. Focusing on our HOPE collective commitments was crucial during this time.

While strategizing the use of our data, we began to see improvements again in growth. We focused on the holes in our instruction and implemented "What I Need" (WIN) time, which had been prevented throughout the pandemic years due to the restrictions of keeping students within their own classrooms and the necessary distance mandates by the state. From the data, we saw that implementation of schoolwide SMART goal common formative assessments for science and behavior, in addition to our focus on ELA and math, were also necessary. We realized we needed to start looking at the whole child after our isolated time through COVID, and our students needed more. See the performance plan data for 2022-23.



We were honored again in 2023 with a Model PLC designation, and this recognition demonstrates the grit and perseverance it takes to ensure that all students are learning at high levels every day. It also exemplifies that we will never quit learning, never quit improving, and never give up hope. We are already creating a new plan for next year to overcome our chronic absenteeism and ensure all our students feel loved and connected and want to come to school every day to learn at high levels. ■

ANGIE BRYAN, EDS, is the proud principal of Brown Elementary School in Washoe County School District, which she helped lead to Model PLC School status from 2018 to 2021 and in 2023. Angie is passionate about the PLC process and mentors teachers, coaches, principals, and schools throughout her district in all areas of PLC process development.

### SCHOOL PERFORMANCE PLAN SMART GOAL DATA: 2022-2023

SPP: CFA Data Based on 4 SMART Goals Each Quarter										Goal: 85% or Higher ELA & Behavior, 90% for Math & Science							
1st Quarter										2nd Quarter							
Grade Level	ELA		Math		Science		Behavior			ELA		Math		Science		Behavior	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST		PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
K	25%	85%	15%	90%	5%	91%	50%	79%		0%	100%	45%	90%	8%	94%	8%	59%
1	65%	93%	75%	90%	20%	46%	50%	79%		37%	96%	54%	83%	25%	96%	47%	81%
2	15%	86%	35%	95%	15%	93%	50%	79%		25%	97%	35%	95%	18%	96%	47%	78%
3	10%	69%	15%	85%	3%	71%	50%	79%		10%	100%	20%	94%	5%	60%	83%	53%
4	15%	87%	20%	92%	10%	55%	50%	79%		22%	80%	18%	100%	8%	50%	56%	70%
5	15%	10%	3%	84%	3%	66%	50%	79%		0%	81%	5%	82%	5%	78%	75%	72%
Overall	24%	72%	27%	89%	9%	70%	50%	79%		16%	92%	30%	91%	12%	79%	53%	69%
3rd Quarter										4th Quarter							
Grade Level	ELA		Math		Science		Behavior			ELA		Math		Science		Behavior	
	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST		PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST	PRE	POST
K	67%	88%	33%	83%	40%	94%	58%	83%		39%	80%	42%	87%	19%	96%	44%	94%
1	27%	82%	13%	89%	15%	80%	80%	93%		25%	93%	64%	91%	59%	97%	1%	94%
2	23%	89%	8%	97%	33%	86%	76%	76%		11%	92%	25%	90%	26%	94%	53%	94%
3	25%	78%	10%	85%	20%	53%	77%	94%		7%	71%	9%	82%	5%	60%	5%	91%
4	50%	88%	30%	85%	25%	88%	88%	91%		15%	80%	20%	85%	17%	82%	44%	81%
5	17%	88%	16%	93%	3%	91%	87%	93%		23%	86%	7%	80%	2%	80%	88%	95%
Overall	34%	86%	18%	89%	23%	82%	78%	88%		20%	84%	28%	86%	21%	39%	39	92%