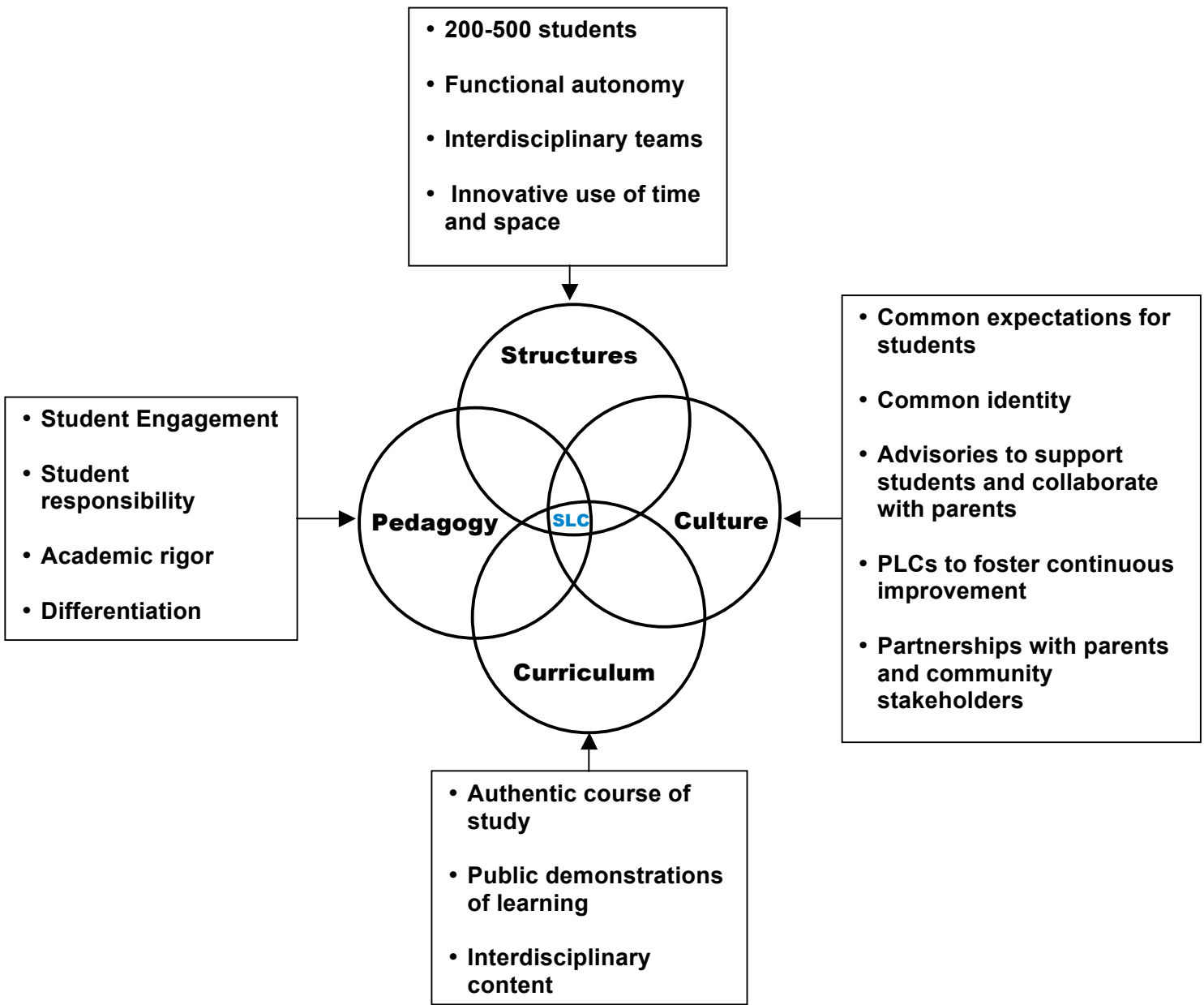


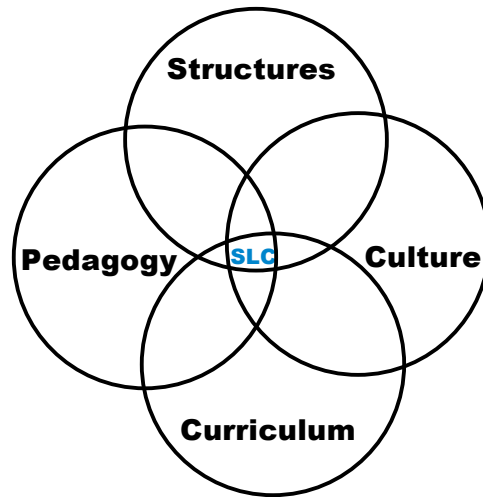
Designing Smaller Learning Communities

The development of small groups of teachers sharing small groups of students will not, in and of itself, improve student achievement. It does, however, create the conditions for increased student success, when coupled with a rigorous academic curriculum and effective instruction.

IDE Corp. views the development of Small Learning Communities through four interrelated action areas.



Designing Small Learning Communities: Action Areas



1. **Development of Structures** to support the pedagogical underpinnings of SLCs, including:
 - a. Establishing SLC teaming plan (e.g., Freshman Success Academy with mixed grade 10-12 career academies; mixed grade 9-12 career academies; mixed grade 9-12 academies, etc.);
 - b. Determining student groupings;
 - c. Determining teacher teams;
 - d. Determining administrative / leadership structures;
 - e. Determining schedule structures (i.e., 42-minute periods vs. various block options);
 - f. Determining teaching schedules to allow for collaborative time; and
 - g. Establishing a communication structure for ongoing communication within SLCs, across SLCs, across schools, and between home and schools.

2. **Development of an SLC culture**, including:
 - a. Establishing Professional Learning Communities for successful collaboration and reflection (including developing team norms, collaborative thinking tools, and strategies for moving past obstacles);
 - b. Developing a name and theme for each team within the SLC (e.g. concept-based vs. celebrating the qualities of a famous person);
 - c. Developing common expectations across a teaching team (e.g. behavior rubrics, homework policies, etc.); and
 - d. Establishing commonalities students will face as they move from class to class within a team and from team to team across their student career in an SLC.
 - e. Establishing a Student Advocacy Program that includes advisory and family advocacy structures; and
 - f. Developing partnerships with parents and community organizations.



3. **Development of academically rigorous curricula**, including:
 - a. Rigorous, standards-based content that goes beyond minimum standards and prepares students to achieve at “Advanced Proficient” levels on N.J. state testing;
 - b. What the student should be able to “do” (e.g., higher-order application of learning) as a result of completing a unit of study;
 - c. Essential questions and enduring understandings (as per *Understanding by Design*) that guide the unit of study;
 - d. Essential learnings (e.g., content, concepts, and skills to be mastered);
 - e. Assessment tools;
 - f. Instructional materials that connect curriculum to the SLC theme; and
 - g. Content support for teachers - Curriculum guides should be paired with videocasts on challenging lessons so that teachers can learn what they need to teach the content. Additionally, district-wide, subject-area blogs can offer teachers support they need to teach academically rigorous content.

4. **Establishment of highly effective teaching strategies**, including:
 - a. Employing a problem-based approach (authentic, life-related, open-ended problems to solve that drive the student to master the curriculum via the SLC lens) to curriculum delivery;
 - b. Structures and strategies to differentiate instruction at three levels: lesson, unit, and classroom;
 - c. Using rubrics to drive instruction and assessment;
 - d. Structures and strategies for gathering ongoing assessment data and utilizing it to make instructional decisions; and
 - e. Implementing co-teaching strategies that best utilize the talent and expertise of multiple adults in a classroom during instructional time.

