

Providing Adequate and Structured Teacher Instructional Planning Time

Center on Instruction

Common planning time for grade level, subject, or interdisciplinary teams has increasingly been considered a crucial part of school improvement. Research suggests that sufficient, scheduled planning time is essential for these teams to be effective (Flowers, Mertens, & Mullhall, 1999). Collaborative teams, in which teachers share planning time and a common group of students, have been correlated with better school culture, more effective parent communication, higher student achievement, and increased teacher motivation and job satisfaction (Kassissieh & Barton, 2009; Flowers et al., 1999; Little, 1982; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Piccucci, Brownson, Kahlert, & Sobel, 2002). There is good reason to believe that joint planning time is also critical for building the type of professional learning community that schools aspire to achieve.

Generally, common planning time can provide opportunities for teachers to collaboratively discuss and resolve curricular issues, coordinate lesson plans, and locate common “problem spots” (i.e., areas in the grade level curriculum that tend to cause problems). This time can also be used to generate high-quality explanations of terms in mathematics and science that are difficult to explain, to determine key academic language necessary for success in that grade’s curricula, and to generate useful examples for lessons in reading comprehension, vocabulary, literary analysis, math problem solving, and others. Some structured planning time for teams can also be used to provide grade-level, subject, or interdisciplinary team professional development.

Action Principles

For District

1. Ensure adequate teacher planning time in district schedules by adding school days, adjusting the length of the school day, modifying the early release/late start schedule, or using a block schedule (Finding Time for Training and Collaboration, 2003).
2. Allocate resources to support planning times for teachers and teams (Miles & Frank, 2008).
3. Provide professional development to support collaboration and teaming. This may entail a format for grade level teams or content-area teams (at the secondary level) to use in group meetings (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008).
4. Develop tools to help teacher teams productively discuss curricula, instruction, and student progress (Oxley, 2007).
5. Set expectations for routine teacher collaboration, analysis, evaluation, and experimentation (Little, 1982).
6. Restructure budgets so that funds are provided for teacher planning time.

For School

1. Establish clear expectations for the work products developed during planning time (Kassissieh & Barton, 2009; Prager, 1992).
2. Prepare agendas for team planning time so that time is used efficiently (Kassissieh & Barton, 2009; Prager, 1992).
3. Organize the instructional schedule to include sustained time for team collaboration (Mclaughlin & Talbert, 1993; Kassissieh & Barton, 2009; Prager, 1992). All teachers at each grade level should have one common planning time a week.
4. Utilize other teachers, the principal, aides, or parent volunteers to free teachers to participate in team meetings (Prager, 1992).
5. Create a weekly schedule for planning time that specifies the purpose for each period, that is, to plan individually, with their grade level colleagues, and in subject or interdisciplinary teams (Prager, 1992).

6. Offer relevant professional development for grade level, subject, or interdisciplinary teams. Consider asking teams to identify areas of need based on results of annual assessment data. Use these areas of weakness to choose professional development that will be relevant to the team (Herman, Dawson, Dee, Greene, Maynard, Redding, & Darwin, 2008; Little, 1982).
7. Include teacher leaders in organizing planning time, expectations, and professional development (Little, 1982).

References and Resources

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