

Making Time for Collaboration

It is also imperative that teachers be provided with time to meet during their contractual day. We believe it is insincere and disingenuous for any school district or any school principal to stress the importance of collaboration, and then fail to provide time for collaboration. One of the ways in which organizations demonstrate their priorities is allocation of resources, and in schools, one of the most precious resource is time. . . . The following list is not meant to be comprehensive but is merely intended to illustrate some of the steps schools and districts have taken to create the prerequisite time for collaboration.

➤ **Common Preparation** – Build the master schedule to provide daily common preparation periods for teachers of the same course, or department. Each team should then designate one day each week to engage in collaborative, rather than individual planning.

➤ **Parallel Scheduling** – Schedule common preparation time by assigning the Specialists—physical education teachers, librarians, music teachers, art teachers, instructional technologists, guidance counselors, foreign language teachers, etc.—to provide lessons to students across an entire grade level at the same time each day. The team should designate one day each week for collaborative planning. Some schools build back-to-back specials classes into the master schedule on each team’s designated collaborative day, thus creating an extended block of time for the team to meet.

➤ **Adjusted Start & End Time of Contractual Day** – Members of a team, department or an entire faculty agree to start their workday early or extend their workday one day each week to gain collaborative team time. In exchange for adding time to one end of the workday, the teachers are compensated by getting the time back on the other end of that day. For example, on the first day of each school-week the entire staff of Adlai Stevenson High School in Lincolnshire, Illinois begins their workday at 7:30 a.m., rather than the normal 7:45 a.m. start-time. From 7:30 – 8:30 am, the entire faculty engages in collaborative team meetings. Student arrival begins at 7:40 am, as usual, but the start of class is delayed from the normal 8:05 until 8:30. Students are supervised by administration and non-instructional staff in a variety of optional activities such as breakfast, library and computer research, open gym, study halls, and tutorials. To accommodate for the twenty-five minutes of lost instructional time, five minutes is trimmed from five of the eight fifty-minute class periods. The school day ends at the usual 3:25 p.m., buses run their regular routes, and Stevenson teachers are free to leave at 3:30 rather than the 3:45 time stipulated in their contract. By making these minor adjustments to the schedule on the first day of each week, the entire faculty is guaranteed an hour of collaborative planning to start each week, but their work day or work week has not been extended by a single minute.

➤ **Shared Classes** – Teachers across two different grade levels or courses combine their students into one class for instruction. While one teacher/team instructs the students during that period, the other team engages in collaborative work. The teams alternate instructing and collaborating to provide equity in learning time for students and teams. Some schools coordinate shared classes to ensure that older students adopt younger students and serve as literacy buddies, tutors and mentors.

➤ **Group Activities/Events/Testing** – teams of teachers coordinate activities that require supervision of students rather than instructional expertise (i.e. videos, resource lessons, read-alouds, assemblies, testing). Nonteaching staff supervise students while the teachers engage in team collaboration.

➤ **Banking Time** – Over a designated period of days, instructional minutes are extended beyond the required school day. After banking the desired number of minutes on designated days, the instructional day ends early to allow for faculty collaboration and student enrichment. In a middle school, for example, the traditional instructional day ended at 3:00 p.m.; students boarded buses at 3:20 and the teacher contractual day ended at 3:30. The faculty decided to extend the instructional day until 3:10 p.m. rather than 3:00 p.m. By teaching an extra ten minutes nine days in a row, they “bank” ninety minutes. On the tenth day, instruction stops at 1:30 and the entire faculty has collaborative team time for two hours. The students remain on campus and are engaged in clubs, enrichment activities, assemblies, etc. sponsored by a variety of parent/community partners and co-supervised by the school’s non-teaching staff.

➤ **In-Service/Faculty Meeting Time** – Schedule extended time for teams to work together on staff development days and during faculty meeting time. Rather than requiring staff to attend a traditional whole staff inservice session or sit in a faculty meeting while directives and calendar items are read to highly educated professionals, shift the focus and use of these days/meetings so members of teams have extended time to learn with and from each other.