

Finding Time and Using it Effectively

Schools need strategies that identify or create time for teachers to work together and with parents in activities that promote school-level accountability and foster continuous improvement, especially planning, data analysis and reflection.

We know with certainty that high-quality instruction in schools is enhanced by a professional community among the teachers and staff. Teachers need to be equipped to interact differently not only with their students, but also with their colleagues, parents and other partners in school improvement. These new roles and responsibilities emphasize collaborative work, such as planning, developing curriculum and assessments, looking at student work, peer mentoring and reflecting on practice. And this requires time.

A number of schools and districts have found creative ways to bring staff together. Below are some previews of how a few of those schools work around constraints of time. Keep coming back. We will be supplying more information about the experiences of these schools and will be adding to our list of tools.

In their article, "The Time Dilemma in School Restructuring" (1993), Watts and Castle identify the following five strategies for creating, reallocating and using time. Many categories will overlap when actually implemented, and some will be more useful in certain contexts than others. Check out the [Collaborative Planning Time for Teachers and Pathways to School Improvement](#) sites for online resources about use of time. Following each description below is one short example of a school pursuing the strategy.

Better-Used Time: When Watts and Castle interviewed teachers, they found general agreement that faculty meetings, in-service meetings, etc., are insufficient for professional development and planning. This strategy involves getting more out of current convening times.

Example: At Deepwood Elementary School in Round Rock, Texas, the principal limits administrative faculty meetings to one Wednesday a month. During the other three Wednesdays, teacher study groups meet together (Murphy, 1997).

Common Time: This strategy designates specific time periods during the school day for individual teachers to prepare and plan together.

Example: Grass Lake High School in Grass Lake, Michigan, has a mandatory Wednesday morning professional development period for all teachers. Because this is a planning period for the entire staff, it has fostered increased collegiality. For example, once a month teacher study-groups meet at this time to discuss student work, critique each other's assignments, and share strategies.

Freed-Up Time: This strategy doesn't attempt to restructure the calendar, school day or usual teaching schedule. Instead, it uses various interventions to break teachers out of traditional constraints. Typically, administrators, substitute teachers, or parents watch students while teachers meet.

Example: Winnona Park Elementary in Decatur, GA benefits from a team of 19 college students that spend every Thursday at the school. The students participate in Eco Watch, an environmental leadership program of the Atlanta Outward Bound Center. They perform classroom and school-wide environmental activities with the elementary students, which in turn frees teachers to meet together on Thursdays (Murphy, 1997).

Purchased Time: Some districts find ways to purchase teachers' after-school time while staying within the district's existing budgetary constraints.

Example: The Round Rock Independent School District in Round Rock, Texas compensates teachers who participate in professional development study groups. The teachers' one-hour weekly after school meetings equal two full days of staff development. Therefore, on two days designated as staff development days on the school calendar, participating teachers do not report to school (Murphy, 1997).

Restructured or Rescheduled Time: This strategy formally alters the time frame of the day, schedule, etc. It requires policy changes and the support of all stakeholders, including parents.

Example: In Merritt Island, Florida, the Gardendale Elementary Magnet School has adopted a year-round calendar, with three-week intersessions between quarters. The intersessions permit concentrated, multi-day meetings for teacher planning, for which participants receive compensatory time (Raywid, 1993).

References

- Murphy, Carlene. (1997). "Finding Time for Faculties to Study Together."
(To be published in the *Journal of Staff Development*.)
Murphy outlines strategies for finding or making time by using several case study examples from her work with Atlas Study Groups.
- Raywid, Maryanne. (1993). "Finding Time for Collaboration."
Educational Leadership. September: p. 30-34.
Raywid outlines ways to free up collegial interaction time and provides some examples.
- Watts, G. and S. Castle. (1993). "The Time Dilemma in School Restructuring."
Phi Delta Kappan. December: p. 306-310.
Watts and Castle maintain that professional development is directly related to quality instruction. They outline methods for making teachers' time more flexible and name five strategies for using time differently at the school level.

Source: Annenberg Institute for School Reform (1989, April 17). *Finding Time and Using it Effectively*.
[Online] Available WWW:www.aisr.brown.edu/tools Permission to reprint granted by The Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Time Analysis Worksheet

| Sources of Time for Planning | How Is the Time Currently Used <small>(include frequency and duration)</small> | How Could the Time Be Reconfigured for Planning and Professional Development? | Implications |
|------------------------------------|---|---|--------------|
| <u>Inservice Days</u> | | | |
| <u>Staff Meetings</u> | | | |
| <u>Department or Team Meetings</u> | | | |
| <u>Common Planning Time</u> | | | |
| <u>Release Time</u> | | | |
| <u>After School</u> | | | |
| <u>Summer</u> | | | |