



Finding Time

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A teacher's job has always included more than just what takes place while students are in the classroom—and always should. Besides the obvious lesson planning and grading, teachers need to be involved in curriculum development, data analysis of student learning, problem-solving, and other professional development activities related to teaching/learning research and strategies. These activities are necessary if we are to make a difference in student learning. However, they all take time, and to be *effective*, they will require more than just a few minutes grabbed here and there. So, where do we find this time? That question has become a significant problem for many schools. Here are some ideas that various districts are using.

Make Your Current Meeting Time More Efficient

Many scheduled meetings could be much more productive if the district would establish a set of rules, called norms, and adhere to them without exception.

1. Have a clear purpose and expected result for the meeting. Communicate these details to all who will attend in advance.
2. Make sure everyone has sufficient notice of the meeting, the timeframe, and location to enable them to participate.

3. Start on time and have all your materials ready.
4. Have an agenda for the meeting and stick to it. If an additional topic comes up as a result of the meeting, put it on the next meeting's agenda.
5. Do not waste meeting time on topics or announcements that can be delivered electronically or by memo.
6. Keep phones on silent and close laptops and tablets unless the meeting tasks require them to be open.
7. Avoid sidebar conversations during the meeting.
8. End on time.
9. Have someone in charge of leading and organizing the points above.

When to schedule shorter meetings

A late start or early release. Starting school an hour later or ending school an hour sooner allows the entire staff to meet. Even though this isn't always accepted with a lot of enthusiasm by parents, communicating the change in schedule far enough in advance can generate support over the feelings of inconvenience.

Common Planning Time. Because there is a definite time limit, staying focused on the agenda is critical to a productive meeting. Districts whose teachers meet daily have a fixed routine down to make these meetings productive.

Using teams. Many school districts use the team approach, where several teachers work with multiple classes at one time. While this frees up other teachers for additional time to collaborate, it also allows for blocks of time for rotations through "specials" like music, art, and physical education.

Before or after school. Once again, this type of meeting has a time limit, but it can be a quick way to touch base. If a district has an online meeting platform, teachers can gather virtually without leaving their classrooms.

When Extended Time is Needed

Summer work. This option is becoming the most popular. Teachers can have a "boot camp" to meet for consecutive days. The amount of time could be full, half, or three-quarter days for a week or two. Extended days allow teachers to accomplish quite a bit during the sessions. There are no plans to make for substitutes, and teachers' focus will be less divided.

Release time- one day a month. A full-day meeting allows teachers to start fresh at the beginning of the day with minimal interruptions. Usually, all colleagues are available because it is during a contract day. While a substitute is required, the cost of this is less than paying for out-of-contract teacher time.

Release time - consecutive days. Even though it is challenging to be out of the classroom for successive days during the school year, it does allow teachers to get “on a roll” for the task at hand. Productivity tends to be higher when workdays are back to back.

After school meetings. This choice is the least desirable option and should only be scheduled if there is no other alternative. There are no substitutes needed, but teachers are tired after school. Some may even have extra duties, which may prevent a full team from meeting at the same time.

The solutions for “how to find time” presented in this E-Hint are simply the ones most commonly used now. However, each district should think creatively and explore other options. What’s essential is for boards of education and district leaders to recognize the impact that the additional teacher-time has on student learning. With higher achievement as the result, it should make “finding time” a number one priority.