



Indicator: Instructional Teams meet for blocks of time (4 to 6 hour blocks, once a month; whole days before and after the school year) sufficient to develop and refine units of instruction and review student learning data. (5092)

Explanation: Instructional Teams typically meet regularly for “business” meetings, maybe a couple times a month. But they also need blocks of time to dig into formative assessment data and develop and refine units of instruction and differentiated lessons.

Questions: In addition to regular business meetings, do your Instructional Teams get scheduled blocks of time in sufficient quantity for the deep work of instructional planning?

We have established the importance of instructional teams, and that teams need specific plans and work products to produce. In order to do this, teams need time to meet. For many schools, this is one of the most difficult indicators to address. Schools are hemmed in by union agreements about how much time teachers are at the school.

Marzano (2003) points out that leadership should not reside with one: individual; a team approach to planning and decision making allows for distributive leadership. Planning and decision making within the restructured school require *teams, time, and access to timely information*. That is, decision-making groups must be organized and given time to plan and monitor the parts of the system for which they are responsible. This is an immense challenge in most schools, where teachers are available for very little time beyond the hours for which they are responsible for teaching and supervising students. Finding time for a group of teachers to meet is not easy, but essential. Different groups or teams of school personnel have different needs for the amount and distribution of time required for them to attend to their responsibilities. Additional time is needed for professional development; professional development should be directly tied to classroom observations and analysis of student learning data. (Redding, 2007, p. 101)

There are limits on the number of days a teacher is required to be at the school. Schedules are established long before a school year begins. So, carving out a 4 to 6 hour block of time for a team to meet is a challenge. However, it is not impossible, and it is necessary. Hattie (2012) writes, “Planning can be done in many ways, the most powerful is when teachers work together to develop plans, develop common understandings of what is worth teaching, collaborate on understanding their beliefs of challenge and progress, and work together to evaluate the impact of their planning on student outcomes.” (p. 41)

Decisions about what a student is taught are best made by the teachers responsible for particular groups of students—grade level teams or subject area teams, which we will call “instructional teams.” Instructional Teams are manageable groupings of teachers by grade level or subject area who meet to develop instructional strategies aligned to the standards-based curriculum and to monitor the progress of the students in the grade levels or subject area for which the team is responsible. Instructional Teams need time for two purposes: 1) meetings, and 2) curricular and instructional planning. A 45-minute meeting twice a month is ideal for maintaining communication and organizing the work at hand, operating with agendas, minutes, and focus. In addition, a block of 4 to 6 hours of time once

a month is necessary for curricular and instructional planning, and additional whole days before and after the school year are a great advantage. (Redding, 2006, p. 46)

In order to truly affect student outcomes, teams of teachers need to have time to look at what is working and what is not, to “solve the dilemmas in learning, to collectively share and critique the nature and quality of evidence that shows our impact on student learning, and to cooperate in planning and critiquing lessons, learning intentions, and success criteria on a regular basis. Yes, this takes time to work together....” (Hattie, 2012, p. 171-172). It does take time, but it is time well spent.

For English Language Learners

The Inter-American School in Chicago provides an example of a school that has been successful in adopting an effective team structure to improve ELL instruction. At this school, teachers at each grade level work together to develop their goals and objectives for instruction and student outcomes, jointly develop teaching units that are aligned with schoolwide curricular goals, and coordinate their activities.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of instructional programs and make decisions about school improvement and professional development needs, teams should monitor the progress of ELLs through regular examination of multiple sources of data such as school performance and aggregated classroom observation data. The team should also take responsibility for the academic success of ELLs by working with students, teachers, administrators, and families to support good instruction; improving documentation of ELLs’ accomplishments; and ensuring the provision of equitable and appropriate assessments for ELLs.

References and Resources

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