

Organizing Adults – Teacher Teams – Common Planning

A central lesson from secondary reform efforts to date is that structural reforms such as small learning communities, interdisciplinary teams and flexible scheduling do not automatically transform secondary schools into high performing learning organizations. Realizing the potential of these reforms requires that they be activated by groups of adults with the will, skill, and time to translate these opportunity structures into personalized, responsive and effective learning experiences for students.

Common Planning presupposes a small learning community or team structure in which a group of teachers teach the same students during a given school year or over multiple years. Teaming and Common Planning have been described most often as middle school practices where teams are made up of an interdisciplinary group of teachers (e.g., a team made up of one teacher in each of the following disciplines: math, English, science, and social studies). In innovative high schools, however, at least three types of teams are evident: Small Learning Community/grade level teams made up of all adults who work with students in a small learning community or with a particular grade level and who use CP to set and monitor broad student engagement and achievement goals and practices; subject-area teams made up of teachers who teach the same subject and who use CP primarily to guide improvements in practice related to curriculum, instruction, and assessment in a particular subject area (e.g., differentiated instruction, re-teaching in response to benchmark assessments, and credit recovery options); and interdisciplinary teams made up of teachers from different content areas, and often guidance counselors and other support staff, who share the same students throughout a semester or school year and who use CP to identify and immediately respond to students who are off track or falling off track.

In addition to collaborative organizational structures, Common Planning also supports the use of student data to guide instructional and school improvement. The wealth of student assessment and other data now available to educators in schools has expanded rapidly in recent years, increasing the demand for data literacy and use by teachers and principals (Data Quality Campaign, 2009; Stringfield et al., 2005; U.S. Department of Education, 2009; Wayman et al., 2006). Growth in the sheer amount and availability of raw data, however, has not been accompanied by development of technical and human systems necessary to translate data into information and action that improves outcomes



for students. Systems are not in place to generate relevant indicators or present them in an easily interpretable and actionable format, leaders are not knowledgeable or held accountable for improvement on the indicators, and school personnel rarely receive formal training on data analysis, interpretation, and use in instructional decision making (Miller, 2009). Common Planning is increasingly pursued as a primary opportunity both for training school-based adults in data systems and in using data reports to guide systematic, focused discussion about students and activate responses to Early Warning Indicators.

Finally, CP is essential for school-based educators to collaborate with community-based partners in meaningful and sustained ways. High schools often have long lists of “partners” that remain inactive in part because there is no regular time during the work day and week to plan and assess joint work. The task of developing and maintaining partnerships may fall to a single coordinator—frequently an administrator with many other duties or a teacher with limited release time. Although a coordinator is important to developing and activating partnerships, he or she will struggle to effectively integrate the services of community partners into the daily work of the school without frequent opportunity for teachers and partners to meet, plan, review, and deepen their collaboration. Such integration is important not only to ensuring that partnerships have an impact on students and are sustained, but also to meeting the needs of more than a handful of students. A high school principal presenting at a recent conference recounted his finding that his school had 11 different community partners who were serving a total of 79 students (many were serving the same students) in a high need school of 1,500.

Administrative leadership and support is cited as a primary essential condition for Common Planning. Principals and other school leaders set expectations, recruit and form the teams, prioritize common planning in the school schedule, coordinate training for teachers and secure space for team meetings. Analyses of recent interviews with administrators and teachers in a district where ninth grade academies have been launched in every high school identify a strong scheduler as a key resource to their ability to implement Common Planning.

Adapted from: What high school reform structures does common planning support?

<https://www2.ed.gov/programs/slcp/finalcommon.pdf>

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