SMALLER
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PROGRAM

Common Planning: A Linchpin Practice in Transforming Secondary Schools

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Introduction

A central lesson from secondary school reform efforts to date is that structural reforms such as small learning communities (SLCs), interdisciplinary teams, and even flexible scheduling do not automatically or instantly 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. In the words of one school reform leader, "small schools are the launch pad, not the rocket ship." As the secondary school reform movement matures, there is growing understanding that it is now time to build the rocket ship and to develop the renewable energy sources needed to achieve the moonshot of our generation—graduating all young people from high school prepared for success in college, career, and civic life.

Common Planning (CP) is a reform that is emerging as an essential component of the rocket ship, and a fuel source as well. While recognizing that no one reform holds the key to improving schools, we argue that Common Planning is a linchpin practice in transforming secondary schools—an underutilized yet critical social technology necessary to creating learning environments that proactively identify and address the diverse and changing needs of adolescent learners. The following sections elaborate the promise and challenges of Common Planning and offer recommendations for stronger, more widespread implementation and rigorous study.

What Is Common Planning and Why Is It Important?

Brooklyn Generation School opened in 2007 as part of a restructuring of the former South Shore High School in Brooklyn, New York. It currently serves about 230 minority and low-income students in grades 9 to 11 and expects to grow to more than 700 students as it adds a 12th grade and middle grades over the next several years. The school recently drew national attention for its unorthodox schedule. At Brooklyn Generation, teachers instruct only three classes a day, get 2 hours of Common Planning with colleagues each afternoon, and have a highly reduced student load—as few as 14 students per class. The schedule was created with support from the United Federation of Teachers, the local American Federation of Teachers affiliate, enabling teachers to retain their benefits as union members and district employees (Sawchuk, 2010).

A distinguishing feature of Brooklyn Generation, and other break-the-mold high schools, is the institutionally expected and sanctioned practice of adults meeting together on a frequent and regular basis to review and craft plans to improve the academic

engagement and achievement of the students they serve. This practice of Common Planning represents a major departure from traditional high school routine where teachers typically are assigned individual time during the school day to prepare for their classes and meet with their peers only infrequently in subject-area department or schoolwide faculty meetings. Although research continually decries teacher isolation and links collaboration among adults in schools with higher levels of teacher commitment, satisfaction, efficacy, and improved student outcomes, CP has remained a marginal practice found only in leading edge "innovation" high schools.

Common Planning now is receiving increased attention in light of its potential to advance three social processes viewed as central to creating effective learning environments for adolescents:

1. Personalization: A personalized learning environment is characterized by strong, positive relationships between adults and students. Adults understand and are responsive to the needs of individual students, and students experience tangible caring and support from adults who know them well and assume responsibility for their advancement. High schools have always had adults who extend themselves to students, acting beyond the dictates of their roles as administrators or classroom teachers to reach out to, advocate for, and provide extra support to struggling students. Studies indicate that these relationships can make the difference between whether students succeed or fail, and further indicate that a sense of collective responsibility for student achievement among school staff as a leading feature of high schools that produce higher and more equitable achievement outcomes for students (Johnson, 2007; Rhodes et al., 2000). However, few high schools are intentionally organized and resourced to ensure that these relationships and extended roles are established and enacted as a matter of course. Common Planning provides time, opportunity, and expectation that teachers will place student needs and progress at the center of their work and assume collective responsibility for student learning.

For example, CP enables groups of teachers who teach the same students to identify very early in the school year those who are falling behind. They can then use their CP time to meet with the student (and family members) to discuss strengths, identify challenge areas, and develop an action plan coupled with appropriate supports to help the student get back on track. This course of action builds relationships and communicates to students in no uncertain terms that their success is worth the time and attention of every adult who interacts with them in school every day.

2. Instructional Coordination/Integration: Without CP, adults working in smaller learning communities and teacher teams will have difficulty transforming the fragmented nature of students' high school experiences. Staff in reforming high schools typically engage in summer retreats and monthly meetings designed to enable administrators and teachers to develop shared norms for behavior and academic performance, grading rubrics, and even interdisciplinary curricula. More frequent

planning time is needed throughout the school year, however, to ensure implementation is both consistent and adjusted to meet changing conditions and the diverse needs of the particular group of students (and adults) in the school/SLC/team that year. Research in schools using teacher teams with Common Planning finds that high levels of CP (at least four team meetings per week with each meeting lasting at least 30 minutes) are associated with higher student achievement gains, as measured by state math and reading test scores, compared with schools with less frequent or no CP (Flowers et al., 2000).

3. Peer Learning and Continuous Improvement: Common Planning has long been cited in school reform literature as a primary vehicle for teachers' ongoing professional development and for securing strong implementation of organizational, curricular, and instructional reforms (Desimone, 2002). Recent studies of human capital development in schools find, not surprisingly, that knowledgeable and skilled teachers increase the skill and knowledge of those with whom they interact (Jackson and Breugmann, 2009). When well implemented, CP provides structured time during the school day for teachers to share instructional challenges and best practices and to participate in sustained development activities that meet the standards of the "new professional development" (i.e., the activities are job-embedded, focused on relevant topics, and allow time for practice and reflection over time) (West, 2002). The provision of Common Planning time has been identified as a core principle of successful resource allocation in high-performing high schools in part because it helps build an active professional learning community among staff (Miles and Darling-Hammond, 1998).

Common Planning also has been linked to lower turnover among teaching staff, and lack of CP has been cited as a common source of dissatisfaction among teachers who transferred schools. According to one national study, having CP time with other teachers in their subject area or participating in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers on issues of instruction significantly reduced the risk of teachers leaving their posts by about 43 percent (Smith and Ingersoll, 2004). Among teachers who transferred schools, two-thirds cited lack of planning time as a reason for leaving (U.S. Department of Education, 2001). It follows that a more stable teaching staff is more able to build the trust and communication necessary for open reflection, inquiry, and continuous improvement.

What High School Reform Structures and Practices Does Common Planning Support?

To activate the processes described above, CP 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: (1) SLC/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; (2) 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 (3) 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 appropriate responses. (For examples, see descriptions of Diplomas Now! and the Thurgood Marshall Academy.)

Table 1 summarizes the types of teams high schools can develop, who serves on them, the ways in which they can use indicator and report data, and the kinds of interventions and student supports they can activate. See also the recent report from the National High School Center on applications of the Response to Intervention (RtI) framework in high schools. This report further elaborates schoolwide, targeted, and intensive supports that teams can activate (National High School Center et al., 2010).

Table 1: Types of Teams That Use Common Planning in Transforming High Schools

Teams	Team Members	Use Data To:	Responses/Interventions
Grade Level	All adults who work with students in a particular grade level	Set and monitor broad student engagement and achievement goals and practices	• School- or grade-level-wide interventions that touch all students (e.g., positive behavior and incentive systems, interdisciplinary curriculum, active instruction, extracurricular activities, advisories focused on social/study skills, and college/career awareness) • Targeted interventions that address subgroups of students showing signs of falling off track (extra help and credit recovery, counseling, mentoring, and family involvement) • Intensive interventions for the small number of students who require one-on-one attention and social service supports
Subject Area	Teachers who teach the same subject	Guide instructional improvement, including differentiated instruction and credit recovery	
Interdisciplinary	Teachers from different content areas, guidance counselors, and other support staff who share the same students throughout a semester or school year	Identify and immediately respond to students who are off track or falling off track	

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 nominal "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.

Early Warning Indicators Project/Diplomas Now!

On Track to Graduation: The Early Warning Indicators Project (EWIP) is a collaboration of the Philadelphia Education Fund, the School District of Philadelphia, Johns Hopkins University (JHU), City Year, and Communities In Schools (CIS). The EWIP piloted a collaborative method for Feltonville Middle School—a large inner-city middle school with approximately 750 students, about 90 percent of whom are minority and economically disadvantaged. The program is designed to monitor students' attendance, course performance, and behavior to ensure appropriate and timely intervention to promote successful transition into high school and on-

time graduation. At the heart of the project are biweekly Common Planning meetings in which teachers who share the same students meet with City Year volunteers and CIS social workers to view the data, identify off-track students, and plan necessary interventions and supports.

The EWIP follows a three-tiered system of intervention to ensure that every child is reached. The first tier consists of schoolwide programs designed to reach 80 percent of the students (e.g., positive behavior and incentive systems, interdisciplinary curriculum, active instruction, extracurricular activities, advisories focused on social/study skills, and college/career awareness). For the remaining 20 percent of students whom tier 1 does not reach, there are more targeted programs (extra help and credit recovery, counseling, mentoring, and family involvement). Those students not served by tier 2 will be offered intensive and individualized supports by tier 3 (one-to-one counseling and social service supports). The EWIP stakeholders understand that a lasting impact of these reforms relies on this structure embedded into everyday life at Feltonville. To guarantee success, the EWIP has installed the following elements:

EWI Project Manager—This individual works onsite to guide the school-based work. He or she works closely with the principal and leadership team and staff and co-leads EWI meetings, compiles real-time data and analysis for these meetings, and coordinates early interventions throughout the school. In some schools, this role is filled by a full-time organizational facilitator provided by the JHU Talent Development program. In others, the EWI project manager is a half-time JHU facilitator, half-time administrator, or lead teacher.

EWI Work Teams—These teams, made up of administrators, teacher team leaders, counselors, and CIS and City Year coordinators, meet during the summer for several days of intensive work to develop the schools' comprehensive set of interventions. The teams meet quarterly during the year to reassess the effectiveness of the interventions.

EWI Grade Group Teams—Grade group meetings are said to be the core of EWIP. These biweekly meetings typically run for approximately 45 minutes and provide time for teacher teams to meet and collaborate with the community partners and discuss specific students. The work that occurs during these meeting can be described as "hands on." Students are identified, and in-school and out-of-school interventions are selected or evaluated.

EWI Data Tool—An EWI data tool was developed to provide teachers and all EWIP stakeholders with real-time data based on four indicators (attendance, math and language arts grades, behaviors, and state assessments). The EWI data tool is embedded in every meeting and is the basis for all decisions regarding students' needs and the effectiveness of interventions that are in place.

At Feltonville, the goal of the pilot was to reduce the number of students displaying indicators of being off track to high school graduation—that is, students failing either their math or reading/English language arts course, attending less than 80 percent of the time, or earning a poor behavior mark or suspension (Balfanz and Neild, 2007). After implementing the collaborative EWI process for just 1 year, Feltonville Middle School cut the number of students off track to graduation in half (Balfanz et al., 2007).

The EWIP at Feltonville generated the leading reform approach called Diplomas Now!, which

uses Common Planning time in concert with other practices to improve student outcomes. Diplomas Now! formalizes the unique collaboration between JHU's Talent Development Secondary program, City Year, and CIS, which uses EWI/Common Planning time to advance a disciplined practice of data-driven, student-focused meetings designed to activate school- or grade-level-wide, targeted, and intensive interventions. A central component of the approach is the regular and systematic collection and review of data concerning student progress. The data combined with the collaborative planning process inform decisions to match individual students with particular interventions to prevent students from being misidentified for an intervention—for example, placing a student who scores above grade level in math in an extra-help math class because she is unfocused or acting out in her regular math class. Diplomas Now! currently operates in 10 middle and high schools in Philadelphia, New Orleans, and Chicago, with plans for expansion into 60 schools with support from a U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation validation award and a matching grant from the Pepsico Foundation.[1]

Thurgood Marshall Academy, Washington, DC

Thurgood Marshall Academy (TMA) is a law-themed public charter high school located in Anacostia—Washington, DC's most impoverished community. The school opened in 2001 and currently serves 390 students in grades 9 to 12, of which 100 percent are African American, 70 percent qualify for the National Free and Reduced Lunch Program, and 11 percent receive special education services.

TMA has been recognized for its collaborative data-driven improvement process, which involves a rigorous assessment program comprising both summative and formative assessments, a customized benchmark assessment system aligned to the District of Columbia-Comprehensive Assessment System (DC-CAS) (an assessment of students on math and reading in grades 3, 8 and 10; composition in grades 4, 7, and 10; science in grades 5 and 8; and biology in high school), and regular Common Planning meetings. The benchmark assessments are administered to 9th and 10th graders in English, math, and science every 6 to 8 weeks and provide data on student mastery of specific skills, objectives, and standards. Teachers meet quarterly to analyze the data, looking for patterns and trends as well as surprises. It is common to hear teachers exclaim over particular students or groups of students nailing a tricky concept—or bombing on one. Teachers share ideas and resources, and they discuss common errors, how students might have misunderstood the concept, as well as how they might learn it better the second time around. Then, based on the analysis of student scores, each teacher creates a quarterly Classroom Instructional Plan (CIP), which identifies areas that need to be retaught and describes how they will be retaught. Outlines for the CIPs are developed in the meetings, and teachers complete them in the week following the meetings. The teachers refer to their CIP to tailor instruction so that it meets the needs of the students, spiraling needed content and skills into daily warmup activities, class work, and homework, and then submit their CIPs to the academic director, who refers to them during followup meetings with the teams and with individual teachers as part of a monthly teacher evaluation process. These sessions are facilitated by the academic director and assistant director for curriculum and instruction, both of whom have the knowledge and

[1] Dr. Nettie Legters is a consultant for the Diplomas Now! program.

expertise to ask probing questions and provide direction on how to identify student needs and modify instruction.

Despite having a majority of its students enter with math and reading skills equivalent to sixth grade, measures of school success indicate that Thurgood Marshall Academy is indeed advancing student achievement:

- Thurgood Marshall Academy has met the academic targets for Adequate Yearly Progress in both reading and math for 2 consecutive years (2008 and 2009).
- In the 2009 administration of the DC-CAS, Thurgood Marshall Academy ranked first in math and second in reading among all 27 DC open-enrollment high schools (67 percent proficient in reading and 72 percent proficient in math).
- Over the past 3 years, DC-CAS data indicate marked improvement in math (40 percent) and reading (28 percent) scores.
- Thurgood Marshall Academy's DC-CAS scores are three times higher than those of neighborhood high schools.
- In 2009-2010, the school became the first high school in the city to exit school improvement status.

Thurgood Marshall recently was one of 15 high schools profiled by Harvard University's Achievement Gap Initiative for ways in which the school's leadership has raised achievement and narrowed achievement gaps through data-driven instructional improvement (The Achievement Gap Initiative, 2010).

MS 244—Bronx, New York

The New School for Leadership and Journalism (MS 244) is located in the Kingsbridge neighborhood in the Bronx. MS 244 is a large urban middle school with approximately 750 students, of whom more than 76 percent are Latino, 17 percent are African American, and 95 percent are eligible for free and reduced price lunch. Dolores Peterson has been the principal of the New School for Leadership and Journalism for almost 10 years. Her strength as a leader is her ability to build capacity among her staff to use data and Common Planning to implement progressive strategies for preparing students for high school and beyond.

In 2008, Mrs. Peterson rearranged the school's master schedule to incorporate collaborative planning time among her teacher teams. Grade-level teams meet weekly to plan and review student data. MS 244 has partnered with a nonprofit organization, which supplies the school with quarterly data that monitor individual students' performance in attendance, classroom grades, behavior, and state exams. Each quarter, the school can see which students are on track to high school graduation and which students require interventions and supports to bring them back on track. According to early-indicators research, whether a student is on or off track to graduation is determined by his or her attendance rate, math and language arts classroom grades, and daily behavior. Teachers use this data to view students as individuals or look at the aggregate of class, grade level, gender, or subgroup data such as special education or English language learners. Through this analysis, they determine appropriate supports to implement for

different students or student subgroups.

After a year of analysis, MS 244 and the nonprofit supporting its work found that, although gains were made with individual students, the results were minimal and required time and resource-consuming interventions that showed minor progress in some cases. After collaboration with her teacher teams during an annual retreat, Mrs. Peterson concluded that, although they had detailed and current data, they were still missing the whole picture. She felt strongly that only through looking at the whole child would one be able to determine the roots of the child's challenges and educational/social emotional needs.

The principal and the leadership team (a professional learning community consisting of a vice principal, dean, teacher team leader from each grade level, guidance counselor, and parent coordinator) decided to create a personal student interview. The purpose of the interview was to get a holistic view of who a child is and what real issues are hindering the child's learning and social-emotional growth. The interview consisted of questions such as "Who do you live with?", "Have you ever lived with anyone except your primary care giver?", "Do you feel safe at school?", "Do you feel safe at home?", "Is there an adult at school you feel you can trust?", and "What is important to you?" The team then selected a small group of students consistently showing up as off track and began the one-on-one interviews with the students.
The interviews were conducted orally and were later featured as Word documents linked to the data spreadsheets provided by the nonprofit. Now MS 244 is able to pick up on nuances such as "Kia has low attendance and is failing math but has excellent behavior and high language arts grades. Her personal interview reveals a young sibling with asthma and a mother who works two jobs, which forces Kia to spend many days at home caring for her sibling." Before the inception of the interview, the school might have thought Kia needed an attendance incentive program and a remedial math class, which would not have addressed the serious and more pertinent issue of Kia needing child and health care for her sibling.

Hillsdale High School/Stanford School Redesign Network

Hillsdale High School in San Mateo, California, serves an ethnically and economically diverse population of approximately 1,200 students. The majority of students are Latino, and more than 40 percent speak a language other than English at home. In response to lower-than-average test scores and a reputation as a school for "tough to handle" youth, Hillsdale converted from a large, comprehensive high school to three relatively autonomous, vertically aligned smaller learning communities serving 400 students each. Beginning with the freshman class in 2003-2004, Hillsdale phased in one grade level per year in each of its SLCs. Each SLC has a Junior Institute for the 9th and 10th grades, and a Senior Institute for 11th and 12th grades. All students in each institute (except for beginning English speakers and special day class students) take their four academic core classes (English, social studies, math, and science) from a team of teachers who share a collaboration period in addition to each teacher's individual preparation period. The school aims to provide a schedule in which each teacher team has autonomy over a daily 4-hour block of instructional time. Hillsdale has reduced class size, added the collaboration period, and hired additional teachers through a reallocation of staffing, additional district support, and temporary funding through a federal SLC grant.

Hillsdale has used Common Planning and other structural changes to foster teacher

collaboration across subject areas, reduce student tracking, and use performance-based assessments to help all students achieve at high levels. The school has eliminated low-track science classes and now enrolls all students in 9th grade biology and 10th grade chemistry. As a result, 100 percent of African American and Latino ninth grade students were enrolled in biology during 2003-2004 compared with only 18 percent in 2002-2003. Overall, Hillsdale enrolls a far greater percentage of African American and Latino students in biology and chemistry classes than do other schools in the district. In addition, its performance on district common assessments (DCAs) is nearly equal to that of schools that enroll only high-track students in these courses.

Hillsdale is one of several high schools featured in a series of case studies developed by Stanford University's School Redesign Network. The case studies highlight how large, comprehensive high schools like Hillsdale are implementing small learning communities with teams and Common Planning to achieve significant improvements in student engagement and academic preparation (Lance and Vasudeva, 2007**).**

Great Schools Partnership (Maine)/Five High School Consortium

In 2006, a consortium of five high schools in Maine received a $2.3 million Small Learning Community grant from the U.S. Department of Education to implement SLCs, teams, and Common Planning. Of the five schools, four are large (ranging from 950 to 1,500 students), two are urban/suburban, three are rural, and all have growing populations of English language learners.

In a recent interview, the project director of the consortium described how the schools have established SLCs and teams for their 9th and 10th graders and currently are focused on extending the model to their 11th and 12th grades. Common Planning began as voluntary "critical friends" groups but came to be viewed as essential to strong SLC implementation. Now each school has instituted CP among interdisciplinary teams as a mandatory practice. Each interdisciplinary team meets once a week for an 80- to 90-minute block. Cross-grade subject area teams meet monthly after school. The schools also have delayed openings each month so that teams can meet for 75 minutes to engage in reflection, professional development, and Common Planning. Teams are led by team chairpersons, and leaders and staff are trained in and are expected to use meeting protocols developed by the National School Reform Faculty (2010). During the meetings, teams review students' work, analyze data, and discuss specific students. They also create grading rubrics, discuss professional literature, and identify and share best practices. Some administrators require meeting reports and/or minutes as a way of holding teachers accountable for using the time in a meaningful and productive way.

The project director emphasized the need for training for teachers and administrators in how to run and participate in team meetings. With training, adults in schools can learn to collaborate in meaningful and time-effective ways. Without training, it is difficult to reap benefits from Common Planning. The project director also observed that securing the participation of seasoned teachers typically required additional effort because the very success of those teachers in their classrooms made it difficult for them to recognize the need for collaboration. Part of the Great Schools Partnership technical assistance supports included opportunities for teachers to read and discuss books such as Ann Lieberman's Making Practice Public: Teacher

Learning in the 21st Century (Lieberman, et al, 2010).

Schools in the consortium have documented increases in graduation and college-going rates. They also have seen increased adult collaboration and student perceptions that there are teachers who collectively care about them and support their learning. The project director also observes that some of the same communication protocols that adults are using in their team meetings are finding their way into classrooms as teachers seek ways to make their instruction more effective.

Elements of Effective Common Planning

Although research does not yet provide a strong enough base to articulate best practice, ethnographic studies point to a number of conditions and practices that support productive and sustained Common Planning in middle and high schools (White, 1997; Gunn and King, 2003). Administrative leadership and support is cited as a primary essential condition for CP. Principals and other school leaders set expectations for CP, recruit and form the teams, prioritize CP in the school schedule, coordinate training for teachers, and secure space for team meetings. Ensuring protected time for CP is a particularly important administrative role, often requiring careful staff planning, skilled scheduling (sometimes by hand because computer programs designed for high school scheduling typically do not include algorithms for teams with CP), and even building- or district-level contract negotiations. 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 CP (Legters et al., in progress).

Observations in these schools also found that teachers responded positively when they were provided with dedicated space for their collaborative work. One school with well-established CP in both 9th and 10th grades provided teacher teams with a separate portable equipped with two rooms, multiple computers with Internet, and phones with outside lines in each room. Teachers appreciated the professional facility, which enabled them to meet with each other and with students in a space where they were unlikely to be interrupted and where they could readily access student data and communicate with students, parents, and community partners.

Although time and space are necessary conditions for CP to occur, strong CP requires attention to group process in which members are linked through common goals, established routines, and regular self-assessment. Qualitative studies find that high functioning “mature” teams use their planning time productively in part because they set and work toward clear, challenging, yet attainable goals (Harvey and Drolet, 2004; Katzenbach and Smith, 1993). For example, one team pursued a signature goal of eliminating academic failure among students on the team while increasing the overall level of achievement, and secondary goals of focusing on the value of service as a common curricular theme and improving students’ organizational skills. The team used

these goals to organize their planning (White, 1997). One observer of teaming went as far to say that teams without an articulated common purpose or set of performance goals are rendered no more than "(P)suedo-teams…where the sum of the whole is less than the potential of the individual parts" (Katzenbach and Smith, 1993).

Less-established teams might need specific expectations initially set with administrators to guide their process. For example, the principal and academy administrator in the school mentioned above worked with teachers during the summer to set the expectation that interdisciplinary teams of teachers who share the same students would use their 30-minute CP for data-driven discussions of student progress at least twice a week. In those meetings, teachers had the goal of discussing at least five students and making contact with them and/or their families by phone or in-person meeting to troubleshoot academic problems or provide positive feedback on students' performance. Over the course of the semester, teams were expected to make contact with every student/family at least once. Teams completed electronic logs to record their contact and monitor student responses to their interventions (Legters et al., in progress).

In addition to goals, strong CP has an established routine. A team leader or coordinator provides an agenda (usually crafted with input from other team members) and facilitates the meeting, time is managed carefully, and the meeting ends with a review of action items. Routines and protocols need not create a stiff, joyless interaction but can help prevent CP from degenerating into a purely social exchange or an unproductive gripe session. In White's ethnography, one teacher describes how his team evolved a more formal routine:

> *(O)ur early team meetings consisted of sitting around and talking about sports or complaining about specific kids or about how the administration didn't know what they were doing….We now think we have it right. Our meetings now have a purpose and a fairly regular format. We still mix business with some pleasure and joking, but we get things done" (White, 1997).*

When asked about what instigated the shift, the teacher reported that one influential teacher on the team had been negative about the planning process. It was not until that teacher was transferred and a new teacher joined the team that the team reassessed its performance and tightened its format. Had the team initially been provided with a focused protocol, received training to develop conflict resolution and consensus-building skills, and been supported with monitoring and feedback, it might have achieved a higher level of performance without the transfer. Part of this team's practice, and that of other teams observed in these studies, is a routine self-assessment to reflect on the health of the group process and the extent to which the team is meeting its performance goals. This assessment involves team members setting aside a regular time (monthly or quarterly) to discuss where the team stands with respect to its group

process and goals. Such assessment may be guided by frameworks that include the following pillars of successful teaming: the practice of lifelong professional learning, careful nurturing of professional relationships among team members and among administration, a positive outlook toward teaching and their school, and an integrated and creative curriculum (Dickinson and Erb, 1997).

An important point of agreement across these studies is that Common Planning is fundamentally a cultural and developmental process. As such, successful CP does not boil down easily into a fixed formula of rules and procedures. Studies of mature, high-functioning teams indicate that adults must be skillfully attuned to language, beliefs, values, and group dynamics to make productive use of their time and to elicit their best as individuals and as a team. The conditions and structures described above facilitate that process, but the power of CP can be realized only through the vision, commitment, and discipline of those engaged in it. Hence, leaders instituting CP are well served by paying close attention to team formation, training, and accountability mechanisms. "Teachers are not natural team players," writes an observer, because they are not trained or rewarded to collaborate. They must learn how to set goals together, deal with conflict, and make decisions as a group to become productive.

Teams also must be given the chance to work at CP. Longevity has been cited as a facilitating element of strong teaming practice. Studies find that teams can take up to 3 years to advance the social processes of personalization, integration, and continuous improvement described earlier (Gunn and King, 2003; White, 1997). Mature teams were found to spend more time on curricular and instructional issues and less time on managerial items, for example. Working together over time allows teams to go through the long-understood cycle of coming together (forming), learning how to deal with disagreement and conflict (storming), beginning to establish routines for work and behavior (norming), and consistently and positively improving student learning outcomes (performing) (Tuckman, 1965; Scholetes, 1994). Senge (1994) describes this process as necessary for moving a group from a place where members are simply participating in discussion where different points of view are merely exchanged, to participating in a dialogue where the shared purpose is to create new points of view that effectively address the problem at hand. In sum, quality use of Common Planning is not a single event but a developmental process that requires time to build strong relationships and practices. As one team leader put it, "I hope they never decide to change our team makeup because it is a lot of work to build trust and respect with four other people" (White, 1997).

Implementing and Sustaining Common Planning: Challenges and the Path Forward

> *The workshops are very beneficial, but what's more beneficial is that we have common planning and we can get together and we can meet. And when those houses are pure, it works like you wouldn't believe. (Ninth grade teacher)*

This teacher's words underscore the benefits of Common Planning described above. Getting Common Planning to "work like you wouldn't believe," however, requires overcoming numerous technical, legal, and human resource challenges to implementation.

Scheduling

Scheduling is frequently cited as one of the most difficult technical challenges to securing CP in high schools. Traditionally, high schools build a master schedule around individual student course requirements with little attention to the grouping of teachers who end up teaching any given student or group of students. Grouping students and adults in small learning communities and teams, placing students in the courses they need, and further ensuring that groups of teachers who teach the same students share a planning time in common presents a much more complex set of priorities. The demands of scheduling around teams and Common Planning typically overwhelm computer-based scheduling programs, and school staff often report resorting to carrying out much of the process by hand. At least one field manual reports that the scheduling process itself also requires more collaboration; a single administrator can no longer lock himself or herself in a room for a few days with a computer program and produce the master schedule. Instead, schedulers must work closely with the principal and SLC/team leaders to ensure that priorities like Common Planning are communicated and met (Clark et al., 2006).

Even when a schedule is created that includes CP, it can be undone by unanticipated changes in student enrollment, staffing, and district/state policies. The administrator at one school that began implementing a ninth grade academy as part of a districtwide initiative described how larger-than-expected projected enrollment and class-size requirements threw off their Common Planning effort. "Best laid plans," he said, and went on to recount how his perfectly balanced schedule that allowed his ninth grade teams 45 minutes of Common Planning each day unraveled when actual enrollment exceeded the projected enrollment upon which the initial schedule had been built.

The administrator reported working closely with the scheduler to maintain as much integrity in the team/Common Planning structure as possible, and teachers reported sharing information informally with teachers who ended up teaching "their" students but did not share a Common Planning period. The change disrupted the momentum

behind Common Planning in the academy, however, and administrators and teachers reported falling back on informal interaction and monthly grade-group meetings to discuss student progress and supports. Unfortunately, the monthly meetings were scheduled after school and attendance was characterized as sporadic.

There is limited information on whether CP is more or less easily scheduled if a school follows a particular period structure, for example, a block schedule made up of four 90-minute periods a day, an A/B schedule with eight year-long courses offered in 90-minute periods every other day, or various iterations of a traditional day made up of seven to eight shorter periods. Comments from the field and in national forums suggest that scheduling CP in a block schedule requires additional teaching resources (up to 10 percent added staff) because of the fewer degrees of freedom[2] schedulers face with that structure, leading some to argue that it is not feasible in spite of its benefits (Northeast and Islands Regional Education Laboratory, 1998; Freeman and Maruyama, 1995; Irmsher, 1996). Regular CP is evident in high schools adopting a block or flexible block schedule, however, and schools are finding creative ways to overcome implementation challenges. In Baltimore's Talent Development High School (BTDHS), for example, staff gained permission to reduce the time for each class from 90 to 80 minutes and to extend the school day by 10 minutes. This change enabled the school to establish a 50-minute period at the end of each day reserved for an arts and expression course for 9th graders and career exploration courses for 10th through 12th graders. These courses were offered three times per week and staffed by community members representing various local organizations and businesses. On the other 2 days, teachers led student-advisory groups. This plan gave administrators and staff in every grade-level, subject-area, and interdisciplinary team an opportunity to meet multiple times each week to review student progress, plan interventions and activities, and engage in professional development activities. Serving nearly exclusively students from poverty and minority backgrounds, BTDHS stands out in Baltimore for its high promotion, graduation, and achievement rates.

Hillsboro High School outside of Portland, Oregon, is another school that has prioritized weekly Common Planning time. In that case, the school gained permission from the district for students to arrive late to school 1 day per week so teachers could design and assess the impact of schoolwide literacy instruction. The school saw marked improvements after this change, with a 10 percent gain in the number of students meeting or exceeding statewide writing assessment standards (Kassissieh and Barton, 2009).

[2] In a block schedule, teachers teach fewer classes per term (typically three instead of six or seven), and students are often scheduled in groups (e.g., with homerooms and/or teams) assigned to the same small group of four to six teachers. These structures limit the number of options (degrees of freedom) a scheduler has to place students in required and elective courses. This contrasts to traditional individualized schedules where schedulers have multiple teachers and class periods in which to place a student for any given course.

Collective Bargaining Agreements

Legal provisions in collective bargaining agreements (CBAs) that regulate teachers' time can challenge schools seeking "late arrival," "early release," lengthened school days, and other adjustments needed to create Common Planning time. A recent analysis of eight CBAs from districts in three states finds that CBAs can be obstacles to scheduling flexibility (Price, 2009). Time use rules in CBAs, for example, can directly restrict Common Planning by being very specific about the amount of time teachers may spend in staff meetings and how many of those meetings may occur during a school year. The study also found, however, that CBAs might be barriers only because principals and other educators perceive them to be and, in fact, are more flexible (or ambiguous) and typically offer options for waivers and more reform provisions than are widely known or utilized. Following Raywid (2002), Price cautions against exclusive use of waivers and side agreements because they can be readily eliminated and tend to isolate reforming schools. Many of the CBAs studied, however, also included special reform-related sections allowing schools autonomy and flexibility with their schedules. The San Francisco contract, for example, specifically refers to Common Planning time, stating that schools can build CP time into their schedules by reducing the minimum report time by 5 to 10 minutes and notes that "time for common planning time…shall be considered part of the work week." The contract also authorizes the principal to set his or her school's own schedule (Price, 2009, p. 19).

The extent to which school or district leaders take advantage of such provisions in CBAs likely depends on the personalities and the nature of the relationship between the leader and the building- or district-level union representatives. In one of the high schools implementing a ninth grade academy mentioned earlier, "(t)he union issue came in" as the principal put it. Several teachers perceived that the 30-minute Common Planning requirement was an infringement on their individual planning time. Because the principal had taken time to build awareness and engaged teachers in planning and designing the academy, the complaint was limited to just a few teachers and the principal felt confident that his case was both contractually and politically sound and was preparing to fight the grievance.[3] In another school in the same district, however, the principal decided to disband CP after a teacher filed a grievance, fearful of being out of compliance with the CBA. Teacher teams in the ninth grade academy in that school, however, continued to meet regularly during their lunch period because CP had become a valued part of their daily practice.

Ensuring Productive Meeting Practice

Even with supportive schedules and policies in place, school staff members are bound to struggle with Common Planning. Educators are rarely trained to collaborate with their

[3] The outcome of the action was unknown to the authors at the time of publication.

peers and typically are neither incentivized nor rewarded for doing so. As a result, CP may not be used productively or have the anticipated impact on teaching and learning. Participants can become frustrated and come to perceive team meetings as burdensome extra work. Groups generally underestimate the task of developing collaboration skills (National Staff Development Council, 2001).

The past decade has seen the emergence of a number of resources designed to support more productive collaboration among school-based staff. Literature and training materials focused on the development of professional learning communities in schools reinforces the value of collaboration and offers tools such as discussion protocols and processes for establishing group norms and standard operating procedures (Wellins et al., 1991; Worchel et al., 1992; Annenberg Institute for School Reform, 2004; Dufour, 2004; National School Reform Faculty, 2010). The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement offers resources and tools including a five-question self-assessment that teams can use to help keep their collaborative efforts on track (Learning Point Associates, 2007).

While tools and training materials are emerging, the field remains challenged by a dearth of understanding about how to reliably "re-culture" adults in schools to embrace and fully participate in collaborative work. Are there processes that can accelerate the development of high performing teams and productive Common Planning? What is the role of incentives and accountability mechanisms, and how do school leaders implement these without prompting intractable resistance? What does strong group process look like, and how can teachers and school leaders know when it is occurring and when it is not? Further development focused on such questions could help ensure that Common Planning is not only a good idea, but a feasible and sustainable practice as well. Development could include high quality video images of effective model Common Planning meetings, for example, with discussion guides for teams, and exploration of how adults in schools are using (and could be using) email and social networking technology to facilitate productive collaboration in schools.

Measuring Implementation and Impact

The evidence base for the effectiveness of Common Planning is populated by precious few qualitative and quantitative studies. By and large, these studies demonstrate positive associations between CP and desirable teacher and student outcomes (see Middle Level Education Research, 2007 for review). They do not, however, establish causality, nor do they examine what it is that teachers do during their CP time that brings about positive changes in student outcomes. Extant studies also are almost exclusively focused on middle-level education with only a few qualitative case studies cited earlier in this paper focusing on high schools.

There is growing recognition of the need for more rigorous and deeper research on CP. In 2006, the Middle Level Education Research special interest group of the American

Educational Research Association launched a national research project on Common Planning time. The project has trained more than 60 researchers across the country in using common data collection tools to collect teacher interview data and observations of CP team meetings. The project now is training researchers to use a survey instrument to collect data from teachers about CP practices, benefits, outcomes, and its impact on students and teachers. Goals of the project include creating a national database on the use of CP in the middle grades and expanding and disseminating research knowledge of CP (Mertens et al., 2009).

Investment in similar research activities at the high school level (or in a combined secondary effort) could yield much needed common metrics for assessing implementation and outcomes of Common Planning. With these tools, reformers and evaluators need not spend time re-creating the wheel. Instead, they can access implementation rubrics and checklists and images of strong CP that would enable them to carry out high-quality training and assessment of their CP efforts and, ultimately, achieve stronger implementation and impact. Such activities would need to be accompanied by investment in studies of CP involving longitudinal design, adequate controls, and multilevel analyses to more rigorously establish linkages between CP and student outcomes.

Conclusion

At the outset of this paper, we characterized Common Planning as a "linchpin" practice in transforming secondary schools because it links structural reforms with human actors in schools, thereby activating the social processes that characterize high-performing learning environments. The accumulation of experience and research evidence to date strongly indicates that CP can make a difference in building stable staff that are committed, responsive, and collectively responsible for instructional improvement and student advancement. It also indicates, however, that teachers and administrators are unlikely to use CP effectively without leadership, structure, training, and support. Crafting a reliable linchpin moving forward will require awareness of the challenges to implementing CP, and further investment in research, resources, and training to ensure that productive Common Planning becomes routine and widespread.

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