

ESTABLISH TIME



FOR LEARNING

FINDING TIME
TO COLLABORATE
TAKES CREATIVITY
AND COMMITMENT

THE ISSUE IN BRIEF

THE MAJOR CHALLENGE with time is finding it. Current school-day schedules and school-year calendars are leaner than ever because of budget reductions. States and districts have implemented furlough days to balance lean-and-mean budgets that show no sign of improving. Few are willing to take the leap toward reducing instructional time to improve learning because of the illogical nature of that proposition.

Yet across the nation and around the globe, instances exist where increasing time for educator collaborative professional learning that incorporates developing and analyzing assessment data, instructional planning, designing and implementing interventions, giving and receiving feedback, and reflecting on practice has positively influenced student achievement. The logic is simple: Better instruction leads to better learning.

By Joellen Killion

Finding time for job-embedded professional learning is one of the most frequently cited challenges with implementing change in education (ASCD, 2012; MetLife, 2012, 2013; Scholastic & Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012). Teachers, principals, education leaders, policymakers, and others recognize that professional learning is an important component of any plan to implement Common Core and other state standards. Yet they also acknowledge that time isn't available for the job-embedded, collaborative professional learning teachers want and research supports. Budget reductions in recent years have eliminated or significantly reduced opportunities for professional learning.

Many schools and districts, nevertheless, regularly find ways to create school-day schedules that provide

regular, frequent opportunities for teacher collaboration. Implementing college- and career-ready standards, new assessments, and other reforms requires focused time for collaboration among educators for professional learning and collaborative work.

Innovation in any industry requires time for retooling existing practices, equipment, procedures, and facilities. Implementing innovation in education also requires retooling — not once, but continuously. Change is dependent on learning — acquisition of knowledge, skills, practices, procedures, and dispositions. This type of acquisition is not instant. It requires building from awareness to expert use. Some suggest that process requires 10,000 hours of practice to achieve expertise (Colvin, 2010; Ericsson, Prietula, & Cokley, 2007; Gladwell, 2008) regardless of the field. Educators and education agencies are willing and eager to invest in continuous improvement to improve student success. They are fully aware that education is fundamental to any society's eco-

A sample case study

This fictional case illustrates how districts can use and adapt existing time within the schedule for collaborative professional learning.

Teachers in Martin School District had attended a number of the state-sponsored summer institutes on Common Core State Standards as well as served on the state’s model curriculum writing team. Now they were turning their attention to moving the standards into routine practice in their classrooms.

Because the standards required teachers to make several significant shifts in their familiar content and instructional strategies, they had struggled to keep up with

the necessary planning. They wondered if their decisions about classroom curriculum, formative assessments, and instruction aligned with those of their peers. They expressed this concern frequently at monthly faculty and grade-level, team, and department meetings.

The district’s Common Core State Standards implementation team met each month to consider challenges and issues related to implementation of Common Core standards. Members repeatedly talked about the need for teachers to have more time for professional learning, collaborative planning, reflection, analysis of student work, and refinement of content and pedagogy. The district’s chief academic officer and superintendent met with principals to understand how much time

was currently available and what options were possible for increasing time for teacher collaboration without either reducing time for student instruction or causing a financial burden for the district.

To examine the questions, the district created a time study team and invited representatives of key stakeholder groups, including teachers, school administrators, parents, community members, central office staff, and students. The superintendent charged the team with studying the issue of time within established parameters. Within six months, the team offered its recommendation to the superintendent, who carried it to the school board. Upon the school board’s approval, the district applied for and received a waiver of 15 minutes from the state’s

required amount of daily instructional time.

In the new school year, the district added the waiver time to the existing time, giving teachers in Martin School District 120 minutes each week over three days for collaborative professional learning and planning to make the curricular and instructional shifts designated by the new standards.

Principals, with support from central office staff and their own staff, acknowledged that they were responsible for creating the daily schedule within their schools to allocate the 120 minutes for collaboration, and for monitoring and supporting effective use of that new time. With the new school-day schedule, teachers accepted collective responsibility to use the time effectively to ensure each student’s needs were met so that achievement increases.

economic, social, physical, and mental well-being.

Yet, in the midst of rapid change with significant ramifications and consequences for students and educators, they are grappling with how to plan, manage, monitor, and execute implementation in a way that will increase the likelihood of success among multiple complex initiatives.

Implementation science suggests that dissemination and diffusion depend on a constellation of interrelated factors related to the innovation itself, the context in which it is implemented, the resources allocated to it, political will, personnel, and many others (Schillinger, 2010). Essentially, both the quality of the innovation and the methodology used for implementation influence the transfer of research into practice. Across the nation, policymakers, business leaders, parents, community leaders, and educators agree that college- and career-ready standards that require deeper learning for all students are long overdue.

In an analysis of schools with extended learning time, among the eight common factors contributing to student academic achievement are two related to teacher learning and collaboration. The authors point out that “more than one-third

of the schools in this study reported scheduling 15 or more days of professional development and planning — days when teachers are in school but students are not” (Kaplan & Chan, 2011, p. 63).

While the number of such teacher days varied from district to district in the study, the total rarely exceeded five or six in districts with conventional schedules. Along with the additional teacher days, many schools arranged schedules and staffing when school was in session to ensure regular opportunities for teachers “to meet with one another and with coaches and administrators as well” (Kaplan & Chan, 2011, p. 63). Schools in the study managed to create time for teacher collaboration in multiple ways.

The authors summarize their findings about the nature of time invested in teacher collaboration: “In fact, building teacher skills takes time: The hard work of refining lesson plans, analyzing student data to identify areas for improvement, and sharing instructional strategies requires that teachers and administrators have sufficient time to meet and work together. An expanded school schedule affords the time needed for this type of col-

This additional time within the school day for teacher collaborative learning was insufficient to promote the deeper learning the district's curriculum and instruction team knew teachers needed for full implementation of the new standards and assessments. They requested that the district consider increasing the number of professional learning days in the school-year calendar from four to eight to allow for content-specific, cross-school, and even districtwide professional learning focused on the district's new curriculum and instructional framework.

Their desire was to establish a firm foundation of knowledge and skills in the instructional strategies for Common Core standards. District leaders also wanted to prepare teacher leaders, including all grade-level,



team, and department chairs, on facilitating collaborative professional learning and work.

The first year of implementation of the revised school-day schedule was a learning experience for everyone. Teachers valued time with colleagues for learning and planning and acknowledged that they needed strategies and processes to be more efficient and effective. Principals asked for more guidance on how to support and coach teams and teacher leaders who facilitated

the teams. Central office staff struggled with letting teachers determine the focus of a large portion of their professional learning.

At the end of year one, teachers and principals reported that, despite the challenges of learning to work collaboratively, the time was well-used. Teachers felt more confident in implementing the district's new curriculum aligned with Common Core standards, had a greater respect for their peers' contribution to their success, and valued the time to learn

and work with colleagues. They reported that they had a stronger sense of community within the school. Most importantly, student achievement was steadily increasing, and principals reported that teachers were supporting each other's professional growth.

Overall, teachers, principals, and district leaders know that educator learning is as crucial as student learning. They feel confident they are addressing the challenge of creating some of the time they request for educator learning. However, they know that they need to demonstrate that the investment in educator professional learning is paying dividends for students before they are able to achieve the goal of three to four hours per week and 10 days per year.

laboration" (Kaplan & Chan, 2011, p. 63).

In other nations that outperform the U.S., students have less instructional time and teachers have substantially more time for collaborative professional learning (Wei, Darling-Hammond, Andree, Richardson, & Orphanos, 2009). Schools, school systems, and states face intense education reform driven by the need to ensure that all students are college- and career-ready when they graduate. To put that reform into action, school leaders must commit to investing the time needed to achieve full implementation and results for students.

The assumption behind Learning Forward's workbook, *Establishing Time for Professional Learning* (Killion, 2013), from which this article is adapted, is simple: Any change worth doing is worth doing well. The new standards will not lead to changes in students' daily learning experiences unless educators are retooling learning for students. To engage in the retooling of learning requires an investment in educators' collaborative learning, planning, analysis, and redesign.

As decades of research in professional learning conclude, deep practice requires intensive, standards-based, collaborative

professional learning, sometimes extending across multiple years, that incorporates opportunities to practice without risk, coaching with feedback, and ongoing learning to refine and extend executive control of new practices. Foremost among the investments needed, according to educators, is time.

The purpose of Learning Forward's workbook is to guide districts and schools as they develop, vet, and implement recommendations for increasing collaborative learning time for educators, and then evaluate the effectiveness of the change. Implementing new standards and other innovations related to improving student achievement requires time for teachers to plan, analyze, and revamp instruction. It demands opportunities for teachers to engage in professional learning, engage in feedback and coaching, and use the feedback to continuously refine their practices. Coupling effective professional learning that includes school- and classroom-based support with time for collaboration with peers and experts is one strategy available to districts and schools implementing college- and career-ready standards.

WORKBOOK ORGANIZATION

Establishing Time for Professional Learning is organized into seven sections, each associated with one step of a process for studying, designing, and implementing time for educator collaboration, and then evaluating its success. (See the seven steps outlined at right.) Practitioners and education leaders may use the tools in the workbook to identify current allocations of time for professional learning, analyze how that time is being used and what results are associated with it, and increase the effectiveness of the existing time before seeking additional time.

These tools can be used by teams of educators, parents, and community members working together to examine the issue of time for collaborative educator professional learning. Schools, districts, and states are likely to be at various stages of implementation with providing frequent, routine time for educator collaboration. The workbook's processes and tools provide educators, parents, and community leaders with resources to create time for educator collaboration, increase the amount of time for collaboration, or refine the use of collaborative time to achieve the district's and school's goals related to implementing Common Core standards, new assessments, and other reforms.

The workbook provides guidance to teams that are working together to create time for educator collaboration. Other Learning Forward resources can also help prepare educators for collaborative professional learning and work. Produced through the initiative Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College- and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core, these resources and tools (available at www.learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core) help states and districts with the process for developing comprehensive professional learning plans.

Not all schools and districts will need to complete each step. Leaders in schools that already have established time for professional learning might be interested only in evaluating their use of time. They might want to recommend strategies for increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of available time, or perhaps examine strategies for increasing the amount of time for professional learning.

There are two ideas to note about this seven-step process. First, this is not just a procedure to increase time *available* for professional learning. Rather, it is to increase time in which educators are *engaged* in professional learning. Second, this is not about creating time for individual planning of professional learning. It is about creating time for collaboration among teams of educators who share common professional learning needs based on identified student learning needs. If such shared work is the work a school or district wants to undertake, then this seven-step process will be useful.

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7 steps to establish time for professional learning

1. **Form a time study team.** Engage representatives from various parts of the school or school system community to participate in the time study process and determine who will develop recommendations for the decision makers.
2. **Examine assumptions about time.** Explore processes for assessing current perceptions held about time for education. Understanding personal assumptions about time early in the process will provide fundamental information for the time study team as it engages in its work.
3. **Understand existing time.** Develop strategies for conducting an analysis of how time is currently used to inform the work of the time study team. In some cases, repurposing existing time is the first way to increase time for collaborative professional learning.
4. **Study time options.** Discover resources that can guide the time study team as members examine models from other schools and school systems to inform their work.
5. **Form and adopt recommendations about time.** Launch a public discussion about how to fulfill the need within the given parameters. After developing concrete recommendations, members of the time study team should decide how to vet them for consideration and modification before they make final recommendations.
6. **Establish a plan to implement and evaluate accepted recommendations.** Ongoing monitoring and assessment is an essential part of the work that can generate information about the efficiency and effectiveness of the time investment.
7. **Review time use and results.** Use ongoing data to make adjustments and improvements in the use of time to achieve the maximum benefits for educators and students.

“The first thing to understand is that schedules are not sacred. Unfortunately, most school administrators believe they are sacred to the point of being married to them. As a former principal, I understand that factors such as our stomachs and yellow buses sometimes dictate the schedule. All too often, however, schedules are geared to

what is best for the bus drivers and cafeteria workers’ schedules — especially if they do both — rather than being geared to what is best for students and teachers.

“My point is that a schedule is not what enables or disables collaborative professional learning. It is the top-down commitment to professional learning, or



lack thereof, that promotes or hinders collaborative professional learning. A

schedule is a ‘thing’ that can be — and should be — manipulated in ways that are best for student learning. Collaborative professional learning does not begin with plans for a schedule change, but with commitment to a cultural change.”

— Jack Linton

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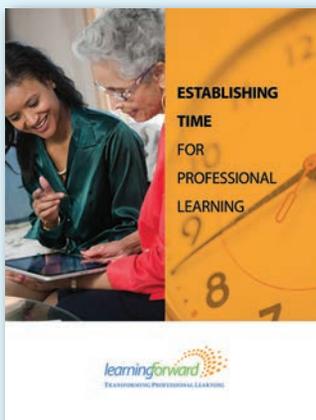
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LEARN MORE ABOUT FINDING TIME

This article is adapted from the workbook *Establishing Time for Professional Learning* by Joellen Killion (Learning Forward, 2013). Finding time for job-embedded professional learning is one of the most frequently cited challenges with implementing the Common Core State Standards. The processes and tools in this workbook provide educators, parents, and community leaders with resources to increase or refine the use of time for educator collaboration to achieve goals associated with any key initiative.

Where members can find the workbook:

www.learningforward.org/docs/default-source/commoncore/establishing-time-for-professional-learning.pdf

Where members can take the online course:

www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/online-courses/establishing-time-for-collaborative-professional-learning