



# TOOLS

## Explore how you use time — and find ways to improve it

BY JOELLEN KILLION

Ask any educator what the major challenge is in providing effective professional learning and the answer is probably the same: time. Many schools and districts, nevertheless, find ways to create schedules that provide regular, frequent opportunities for teacher collaboration and collaborative professional learning.

Learning Forward's workbook, *Establishing Time for Professional Learning*, which can be found on the Learning Forward website, is a tried-and-true resource that guides districts and schools to develop, vet, and implement recommendations for increasing collaborative learning time for educators, and then evaluate the effectiveness of the change. The workbook is grounded in a rich set of tools.

Here we share two of those tools to kick-start your efforts to study how you use learning time and make needed changes. They are designed to surface beliefs about time because understanding personal assumptions provides fundamental information for teams as they discover how they are currently using time, make meaning of those findings, and make and implement new plans. These two tools can be used alone or in combination with the rest of the workbook.

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### Suggestions for use

1. Ask team members to independently complete the first tool, Exploring Assumptions About Time. It presents some contradictory positions about time and asks each person to identify where their beliefs fall along a spectrum. Provide time for individual reflection and possibly a pair-share discussion.
2. Use the second tool, Staff Perceptions About Collaborative Time, to conduct a quick check on staff perceptions about collaborative professional learning. Gather responses from as many staff members as possible. Compile the results and share mean scores with staff.
3. Facilitate a team discussion about individuals' and the team's beliefs about collaborative professional learning time, using the six questions at the end of the second tool as a guide or inspiration. Consider how the group's beliefs align with the current approach to collaborative learning time and whether any changes might be needed.
4. For further exploration, use the full workbook, *Establishing Time for Professional Learning*, to create a time study team and engage in a deeper dive into time use in your system.

## Exploring assumptions about time

Use the statements below to explore your personal assumptions about time and time for collaboration among educators in schools.

Each row contains two statements that represent different perspectives on one aspect of time. Indicate which perspective more closely aligns with your personal view by placing an X in one of the five boxes.

For example, in row 1, if you agree more with the statement on the left, yet not fully with it, you might place an X in box b. If you do not have an opinion related to the statements in row 1, you might place your X in box c.

One perspective about time	Range of agreement					Another perspective about time
<b>1</b> Time is a fixed commodity that cannot be adapted.						Time is a resource to adapt to our needs.
<b>2</b> Time constrains our efforts.						Time enhances our efforts.
<b>3</b> Determining how time is allocated and used during the workday is an individual decision.						Determining how time is allocated and used within a school day is a collaborative decision.
<b>4</b> Decision-makers or policymakers outside the school determine the amount of time available for collaborative professional learning and work.						The amount of time available for professional learning is determined inside the school through a collaborative process that engages all stakeholders.

To download the workbook:  
[learningforward.org/report/establishing-time-professional-learning/](https://learningforward.org/report/establishing-time-professional-learning/)

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		a	b	c	d	e	
5	Time controls us.						We control time.
6	Leaders in our school and district do not support teacher collaboration as a means of increasing teaching effectiveness and student achievement.						Leaders in our school and district support teacher collaboration as a means of increasing teaching effectiveness and student achievement.
7	Parents and community members believe that factors other than collaboration among teachers and ongoing professional learning lead to increased student achievement.						Parents and community members believe that collaboration among teachers and ongoing professional learning lead to increased student achievement.
8	The district expects educator professional learning to occur outside educators' workdays.						The district expects educator professional learning to occur routinely as a part of educators' workdays.
9	The more time allocated to student learning, the more they learn.						It is not the amount of time allocated that affects student learning, but rather how time is used.
10	Increasing time for collaborative professional learning among educators decreases the amount of time for student learning.						Increasing time for collaborative professional learning among educators can be accomplished without decreasing significantly the amount of time for student learning.

## Staff perceptions about collaborative time

Use this tool to conduct a quick check on staff perceptions about collaborative professional learning and work. The survey might be added to an online survey tool to make it easier to use and compile results. Gather responses from as many staff members as possible, compile the results, and share mean scores with staff.

### Where are we now?

1. Our school includes time during the contract day for teachers to learn and work together in teams whose members share common goals (school, grade level, department, etc.) for student learning.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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2. In our school, professional learning occurs primarily during the school day.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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3. In our school, teams of teachers have scheduled time several times per week for professional learning.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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4. Our principal uses staff meetings for professional learning.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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5. Teachers in our school are hesitant about asking for help from their peers.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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6. Teachers in our school use all available time for collaborative professional learning and work.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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7. In our school, teachers value individual planning time.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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8. Teachers in our school believe that collaborative professional learning and work improves their individual effectiveness.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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9. Teachers in our school prefer to plan individually rather than collaboratively.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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10. Teachers in our school use collaborative time to identify and solve issues related to student learning.

<b>Strongly agree</b>	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
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11. The benefits I receive from having time for collaborative professional learning with my peers are:

12. The challenges I have with having time for collaborative professional learning and work with my peers are:

Use the questions below with the staff to analyze the results.

1. What trends or patterns exist in the responses?
2. What surprises us?
3. Which will support our efforts to create additional time for collaborative professional learning?
4. Which are potential barriers to creating additional time for collaborative professional learning?
5. What do these results suggest we need to pay attention to as a school as we study time for professional learning?
6. If we were able to create more time for collaborative professional learning and work, how would we expect these results to change in a year or two?

**Source: Killion, J. (2023).** *Establishing time for professional learning.* Learning Forward.