



As you continue to look for and find time for collaborative, job-embedded professional learning, do not become discouraged or give up before meeting all of your goals.

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CALL TO ACTION

Frederick Brown

FINDING TIME TO LEARN IS A PUZZLE WE CAN SOLVE TOGETHER

Like many of you, my professional and personal schedules can get pretty hectic. There are some days when I literally don't know if I'm coming or going. Nonetheless, I always find time to check in with my family, get in a few relaxing or intense bicycle rides, and occasionally take time away from work for a bit of downtime and rejuvenation. I do these and other things because I value them. I recognize their importance, so I make the time to do them.

When I was an assistant principal and then a principal, I carried that mindset with me in the process of creating the schools' master schedules: I made sure to devote time to the things my teams and I recognized as important. It was a daunting task — especially because we didn't have the schedule-building software available today, so we wrestled with spreadsheets and blocked paper. This process was then, and remains today, like a Rubik's Cube. The second you think you've got it all figured out, someone reminds you that a major need was left unmet. Then once you make that adjustment, four additional needs move to the "unmet" category! All of which is to say that I understand why it can seem overwhelming for school and district leaders to create schedules that allow for the kind of job-embedded, collaborative professional learning we know makes a difference for teachers and their students.

Yet I frequently see schools and districts that are finding consistent time for subject-area or grade-level teams to meet and plan, engage in professional learning using the same instructional materials their students will use, and visit one another's classrooms. They do this because they know this kind of professional learning makes a difference, and they prioritize it. So do the authors throughout this issue of *The Learning Professional*.

Elsewhere in this issue, you'll read about a workbook Joellen Killion created, *Establishing Time for Professional Learning*, as part of a grant-funded professional learning initiative. We have excerpted a tool from that workbook called Examining Assumptions About Time, which asks users to consider various perspectives on time in general and professional learning time specifically. It helps educators understand how they think about time and how that impacts the way they structure their work (Killion, 2023).

I wish I had had this tool years ago when I was confronted by the naysayers who said it wasn't worth trying to build schedules that created time for all the things our teams valued. For example, I could have benefited from reflecting on one of the prompts that asks users if they believe time is a fixed commodity that cannot be adapted, a resource to adapt to one's needs, or somewhere in between. When first confronted with the task of building a schedule that met all our needs, I felt time was more of a fixed commodity. It took a real commitment and a lot of trial and error before that opinion began to change. Intentional reflection and thoughtful

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conversation could have helped our team be even more strategic about time than we were.

Another prompt in the tool asks users whether they think time allocation is an individual decision or a collaborative one. This can help school teams recognize and reassess their beliefs about collaboration and lead to a systemic approach that promotes collaborative learning time. I know how important that vision and universal commitment is. If our individual teachers or even some of our teams had tried to find time in the school day to collaborate on their own, without the support of us building leaders or the support of the whole staff, it might have happened only occasionally — at best. It took all of us working together to create a building-wide schedule that allowed consistent collaboration among all of our grade-level and subject-area teams.

In addition to reflecting on these prompts in the tool, school and district leaders can learn from the way Standards for Professional Learning recognize the importance of dedicated time for professional learning. The rationale for the Resources standard specifically calls out time as an essential resource:

“Educators have a unique appreciation for time as a critical resource for professional learning.

Sustained, job-embedded learning requires time during the work day as well as on professional learning days during and beyond the school year. Collaborative, team-based professional learning happens ideally during the work week, with consistent, protected times for teams to meet.

“School and system leaders create time for professional learning when they establish master schedules with dedicated blocks of time for learning. They also examine other noninstructional uses of time in the schedule and maximize use of those hours to prioritize learning — for example, through the redesign of faculty and staff meetings” (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 68).

The role of dedicated, intentional allocation of time is also embedded in other standards. For example, the Learning Designs standard points out the importance of aligning professional learning to the cadence of the academic year and curricula, with ongoing and sustained support throughout the year. The Culture of Collaborative Inquiry standard cannot be met without dedicated time, as it is grounded in the recognition that “achieving long-term goals takes time, persistence, and trusting relationships as well as regular cycles of planning, learning, testing, data collection, and analysis” (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 60). And

the Implementation standard notes that applying new learning is an “ongoing process [that] requires educators to adapt procedures, calendars, meeting agendas, staffing arrangements, substitute assignments and other structures” (Learning Forward, 2022, p. 52).

As you read through the rest of this issue, I encourage you to focus on the possibilities of time and ground your work in the assumption that prioritizing professional learning time will enhance your efforts rather than constrain them. Look for examples where school and district leaders stayed committed to their vision of ensuring that teams of teachers and leaders have the time to engage in the kind of professional learning that leads to the development and sustainability of new practices. As you continue to look for and find time for collaborative, job-embedded professional learning, do not become discouraged or give up before meeting all of your goals. Your teachers and your students will thank you for making the time.

REFERENCES

- Killion, J. (2023).** *Establishing time for professional learning.* Learning Forward.
- Learning Forward. (2022).** *Standards for Professional Learning.* Author. ■

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT / Peter Carpenter

to someone like a Chris Emdin and introduce yourself. Really and truly, it is *the best* professional learning conference I’ve been to. I’ve been to all of them, and this is by far my favorite.

Advice for first-time conference attendees: It’s a lot to take in. I would offer a few things. First, find the things that you’re curious about. Make a list

of questions before you go. Search for sessions that look like they will answer those questions. If you have a goal to become a better coach, or become more equity-minded, or make connections with people who are in your same role, we can do that for you at this conference. Second, take full advantage of the location. There is so much history in the nation’s capital. Go out

and enjoy the monuments or get out on the town. It will be the holidays, so it will be beautifully decorated. The last thing I’d say is to take full advantage of all that the conference has to offer. Go visit the vendors. Go to the meet-and-greets. Go to the bookstore. Don’t just feel like you have to go from session to session. Those are still high-quality investments in yourself. ■