

Time for Teacher Collaboration

Because educators identify collaboration as the most crucial element in effective literacy instruction, Congress should stipulate in federal legislation allocation of sufficient time during the school day for teachers to collaboratively plan, implement, and assess student learning. Time for structured collaboration is central to implementing the comprehensive literacy learning included in LEARN, Striving Readers, and the Common Core State Standards.

Effective collaborative teams build sustainable capacity in schools by providing teachers with skills, structures, and support systems to continually learn from and refine their shared practice. The fall 2012 national survey of over 2,000 teachers conducted by the National Center for Literacy Education yielded important results for determining steps needed to build this sustainable capacity that will help schools prepare students for college, career, and civic life. Findings include the following four important points.

1. Literacy is the responsibility of every subject area.

The education profession is taking shared responsibility for developing literacy learning. 77% of educators agree or strongly agree that literacy is “one of the most important parts of my job.” Educators want in-depth opportunities to learn more about the Common Core, differentiating instruction, reading instruction, content area literacy, and writing instruction.

2. Collaboration is the most valued form of professional learning.

When money is tight, investing in the most effective form of professional learning is smart. Educators, including teachers and building administrators, affirm that collaboration works because it allows educators to tap the expertise of their colleagues.

3. The amount of time educators have for collaboration is small and shrinking.

The most effective school systems in the world design their schools so that teachers spend substantial portions of their day working alongside other educators to think through challenges together. Well-known scholar Michael Fullan identifies “collective capacity” built through planned collaboration as the “hidden resource” that US school systems have neglected to cultivate.

Although teaching teams exist in most schools, 30% of them have 30 minutes or less *per week* and 25% have one hour or less *per week* to work together. Only 22% have two or more hours per week for this essential work.

A disturbing trend is the *decline in time* for collaboration as revealed by comparing a 2009 Met Life survey and the 2012 NCLE survey. In 2009 24% of educators had three or more hours for structured collaboration; in 2012 the number declined to 10%. Teachers having less than 30 minutes per week moved from 12% to 29% during that same three years, a 17% decline in time.

4. Effective collaboration that builds collective capacity needs systemic support.

Research shows that educator teams need time to build a collaborative culture, take an inquiry stance, and use evidence in order to have a positive impact on student learning. Policymakers can support capacity building that improves student learning by stipulating in their development of policies, rules, and regulations the necessity of sufficient time for teacher collaboration during the school day.

Three initiatives on the national level rely on structured teacher time for effective implementation. The LEARN Act, to be introduced in this Congress in the House by Representatives Polis and Yarmuth and in the Senate by Senator Murray, supports a comprehensive approach to literacy learning, across subject areas and across grades. The Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program, which generated state-wide plans in over 40 states and is funded currently for implementation in six states, offers collaboration across sectors and among educators who have rarely had connections in the past to support literacy learning in districts and schools. The Common Core State Standards, not a federal program but supported by the Department of Education, calls for attention to literacy in all content areas so that students become college and career ready.

NCTE asks legislators to cosponsor LEARN and the Striving Readers Comprehensive Literacy Program and to provide encouragement to the Department of Education for professional learning support that connects teachers across content areas. Structured collaborative time during the school day will contribute to the effective implementation of literacy learning through each of these three initiatives.

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