

Guidelines and Resources for Collaborative Teams

Teacher-to-teacher collaboration provides professional support for teachers by offering a variety of perspectives, ideas, and strategies to enhance the overall classroom experience for students. Schools that support effective collaborative teacher-based team practices have higher student achievement.

Effective Practices for Collaborating With Others	Additional Guidelines & Strategies	Internet Resources & Digital Tools
<p>Establishing a culture of trust and open dialogue is a central to the effectiveness and sustainability of collaborative teams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaboration among colleagues will only work when teachers and administrators trust each other and feel safe to discuss their queries and concerns without fear or criticism. ● Students report that they feel a sense of safety, that their teachers care about them, and that they are more motivated and academically challenged in schools where there are high levels of trust and collaboration amongst the adults. ● Educators can engage in the following practices to help establish a positive, trusting culture: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Build relationships with the members of your team while setting goals and doing the important work of <u>educating students</u> together. ○ Listen to the comments and concerns of team members and seek to know them personally. ○ Be deeply involved with the goals and strategies of the school/district, and strategically and openly commit resources toward the accomplishment of the goals. ○ Develop the capacity of team members by <u>providing opportunities</u> for them to be strategically involved with the work of school/district improvement. ○ Give team members <u>credit</u> for their hard work and specifically recognize the contributions they are making to the overall success of the school/district. ○ Look at organizational setbacks as temporary and focus on solutions and next steps — develop language that is proactive and not blame centered. 	<p>Supporting Instruction</p> <p>Building Relational Trust</p> <p>The Power of Teacher Collaboration</p> <p>Making the Most Out of Teacher Collaboration</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Be honest about errors and mistakes as a leader — apologize and focus on solutions and next steps. ● The five facets of trust presented by Megan Tschannen-Moran and Wayne K. Hoy (1999) are imperative for building positive relationships between colleagues. Following is the definition of trust from <i>The Five Facets of Trust</i>: “An individual’s or group’s willingness to be vulnerable to another party based on the confidence that the latter party is benevolent, reliable, competent, honest, and open.” <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Benevolence – Confidence that one’s well-being or something one cares about will be protected by the trusted party... the assurance that others will not exploit one’s vulnerability or take advantage even when the opportunity is available. ○ Honesty – The trusted person’s character, integrity, and authenticity... acceptance of responsibility for one’s actions and not distorting the truth in order to shift blame to another. ○ Openness – The extent to which relevant information is shared... openness signals reciprocal trust. ○ Reliability – Consistency of behavior and knowing what to expect from others... a sense of confidence that one’s needs will be met in positive ways. ○ Competency – The ability to perform as expected and according to standards appropriate to the task at hand (Von Frank, 2010, p. 2). 	<p>Megan Tschannen-Moran’s Research Tools to Determine Trust and School Culture</p>
Strong Instructional leaders support successful collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Strong instructional leadership from principals and other administrators and a sense of trust amongst the faculty and administration work to make collaborative teams effective and positive. Strong instructional leaders <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Review evidence (assessment results) of student learning and explore effective practices to improve learning. 	<p>Questions to Guide Collaborative Team Dialogues</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Promote and participate in professional learning opportunities that strengthen practice. ○ Engage in frequent classroom visits accompanied by feedback and rich, reflective learning dialogues. ○ Focus resources to strategically support priority teaching goals. ○ Engage actively in dialogues with individual teachers and teacher-based collaborative teams about assessment results, instructional practices, and professional learning needs. ○ Maintain a positive learning culture anchored in relational trust. 	
<p>Collaborative teams have proven to be a cornerstone for high achieving schools when they are well supported by administrators and experienced and dedicated teachers. There are many different ways to structure strong collaborative teams.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● The makeup of teams will vary by school. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Primary schools often use grade level teams and content area teams, whereas secondary schools may have content departments where teachers can also work on grade-level teams or specific course teams. ○ Some smaller schools have cross-curricular teams where teachers of certain subjects work together to plan cross-curricular lessons. ○ Smaller informal meetings with a few teachers can be as beneficial as the regular team or department meetings. ○ An experienced mentor teacher can lead a formal team, or the leadership of a team can rotate within the group every semester or year. ○ What is most important is to determine what team structure works best for the teachers and the students they serve. ● School schedules need to be arranged so that teachers have opportunities to collaborate with teams of colleagues regularly. This makes professional learning and collaboration a part of the teachers' everyday experience. ● The meetings for formal collaborative teams should follow general, dialogue- 	

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	<p>friendly guidelines:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Establish roles: Determine who will lead the team, take notes and relay them to the rest of the team, and who will coordinate the meeting times. ○ Have a focus: An formal agenda with bullet points is not necessarily required for every meeting as it sometimes creates pressure for compliance rather than space for open dialogue. However, a focus for the meeting is important. ○ Be prepared: What do the teachers need to review or be familiar with before the meeting? Make certain that it is clear what materials, texts, and data teachers need for the meeting. ○ Make assignments: What is expected of each teacher prior to the next meeting? What are the deadlines for specific assignments? ○ Keep track of the time: What is the target start and stop time? Who will be the timekeeper? The facilitator or team leader should keep the team on track and focused during the discussion. ● Note that teacher collaboration meetings are not venting or complaining sessions. They are meant to be an open dialogue – a productive exchange of ideas and problem-solving sessions. Just as teachers expect their students to be productive with each other’s precious time, teachers need to do the same for their colleagues. Also, all voices need to be heard. ● Gentle ground rules should be established for team meetings, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Determine which decisions should be made with group consensus. ○ Determine where there is space to make individual decisions about content or teaching strategies. ○ If teachers do not agree about how to proceed with a certain part of the curriculum, establish a plan for a variance. 	

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<p>Collaborative team meetings need to be high quality and frequent.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● High quality collaboration happens when teachers regularly examine evidence of student learning. This not only includes examining academic progress both formally and informally, but also surveying students to determine their perspectives about what they are learning. ● Collaborative efforts during and effective meeting will lead teachers to develop lessons and teaching strategies that address what the data reveals about the students' needs. ● The following questions will be addressed at effective team meetings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Within the standards identified for learning, what are the concepts and skills that students need to master? ○ How will the standards be addressed in the assessments and learning experiences developed for students? ○ What evidence of student learning will best illustrate whether or not students are reaching the skills and concepts included in the standards at the appropriate BT and DOK levels? ○ What does this data reveal about what our students understand and what they do not understand? Why are we getting these results? ○ What do we need to reteach or teach differently? How can we address their deficits collectively and individually? ○ What does the data reveal about students who are reaching the goals for learning? How can we extend their learning? How and when should we replicate our effective practices? ○ How can each student be informed about his or her next steps in learning? What feedback will we provide that will help them to move their own learning forward? 	<p>Three Ways Student Data Can Inform Your Teaching</p> <p>Using Student Achievement Data to Support Instructional Decision Making</p> <p>Eight Tips for Making the Most of Co-Teaching</p> <p>Using Data to Support Instructional Decision Making</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● An extensive focus on instructional strategies that are selected based on the evidence of student learning is a critical part of collaboration. Team members need to ask the following questions: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ What are the learning objectives for these students? ○ How can we adjust, modify, or create learning experiences for our students that will help them better meet these learning objectives? ○ How will we provide feedback that moves learning forward? ● The interpretation of data needs to be as objective and as student-centered as possible. ● High quality collaboration occurs when teams of colleagues make collective and informed decisions about curriculum and instructional practices. ● Student achievement improves when teachers work together to address their student learning goals by <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Preparing and sharing instructional materials, presentations, assessments, rubrics, feedback strategies and learning activities. ○ Co-teaching and having flexible grouping to meet students' learning needs amongst grade levels and within classrooms where possible, ○ Participating in peer observation, learning walks, and lesson studies that are built into the day where teachers can see their colleagues in action. ● Teachers should also reflect upon and evaluate the effectiveness of their team's curriculum and instructional practices as well as their instructional responses to student data. This way, they can revise or reteach the material if students do not respond well to what they implemented as a team. ● The catalysts for the focus of these high-quality collaborative meetings can vary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The source of the reflection can simply be that the team is going through a set 	<p>A Different Approach to Teacher Learning: Lesson Study</p>

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	<p>of students' labs or essays noting common problems in students' work. The team can discuss what instructional strategies might address the issues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The team may decide to discuss the results of pre- and post-assessments focusing on the strengths and weaknesses they are seeing in their teaching according to the students' responses. ○ Lesson studies may be the focus. Perhaps teachers have observed each other teaching similar lessons. They have taken notes on student responses and gather to compare what they are seeing. ○ Another valid discussion point may be a questionnaire the teachers have administered with their students asking about the effectiveness of classroom learning experiences. 	
<p>One-to-one teacher collaboration, when well executed, can positively impact student achievement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Collaboration that is one-on-one can often be in the form of mentoring or coaching where an experienced teacher coaches a new one. Teachers who have been coached or mentored regularly have notable increases in their students' achievement. The following key factors make this collaboration a successful experience for the new teacher: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The mentor needs to be open, kind, and thoughtful and have a positive working relationship with the newer teacher. The new teacher needs to feel that he or she is an equal to the mentor and that they are working and learning side-by-side. ○ The focus of the mentoring relationship should be on the personal growth and development of the new teacher rather than the rigid implementation of a teaching philosophy or set of strategies. ○ There needs to be a regular meeting time and sufficient time to reflect openly and discuss what happens during instruction time. 	<p>The Art of Coaching Teachers</p>

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ There needs to be regular discussion about how to interpret data and use it to inform teaching strategies. 	
<p>Cross-curricular collaboration (or interdisciplinary instruction) allows students to apply and transfer knowledge from one subject to another.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● If teachers plan together in interdisciplinary or cross-curricular settings, students are better able to transfer and apply information they are learning from one context to another. Their critical thinking skills are enhanced by the challenge of making new connections in new contexts and by attempting to understand a bigger picture. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ For example, creating a circuit-training plan in a physical education course would be greatly enhanced by understanding the science and mathematics involved in creating such a plan. ○ Or, planning and performing a play such as the <i>Diary of Anne Frank</i> would have greater meaning if students studied WWII in social studies and read and studied the book in their English Language Arts courses. ● There are three basic ways that teachers work in a cross-curricular fashion: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Aligned collaboration occurs when, as in the examples above, social studies and English teachers work to align their study for the year so that they are focused on the same time period at the same time. ○ Cooperative collaboration occurs when teachers actually work in tandem on related concepts in real time. For example, the algebra teacher presents a new concept and the chemistry teacher shows how this concept is important to science and applicable in the real world. ○ Conceptual Collaboration occurs when teachers must deeply understand the components of both subject areas. More often, this is accomplished through team teaching, as in an American Studies or World Studies course. In this scenario, both teachers are in the same room at the same time and work 	<p>Cross-curricular Thematic Instruction</p> <p>Interdisciplinary Approaches to Teaching</p> <p>Effective Strategies for Interdisciplinary Teaching</p> <p>Deeper Learning: Why Cross-Curricular Teaching is Essential</p> <p>Tips for Team Teaching Across the</p>

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	<p>as active participants in each other’s lessons. They plan together so that the concepts and objectives of the course build on each other from both content areas. Not all schools have the resources and flexibility to offer such courses, but when well executed, they provide deep learning experiences for students.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When cross-curricular teams coordinate students learning experiences, they can also create one assessment of student mastery of the skills and concepts from the standards in the disciplines involved. • When students know that their different teachers are working together on courses it provides them with a greater sense of community and safety as well as motivation to actively engage in the course work. 	<p>Curriculum</p>

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