

## It's Not 'Planning Time' If Teachers Are Told How to Use It

By Ilana Garon on October 21, 2014 9:10 AM



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There are several ways that teacher-time could be restructured, or existing procedures better utilized, in order to improve both instruction and student learning:

- 1) Teachers need uninterrupted, dedicated individual planning time (for creating lessons, making photocopies, and calling parents) in large blocks, not scattered periods throughout the day. This time should be "sacred"—administration cannot hijack this time for so-called professional responsibilities, such as coordinating the PSAT, coming up with ideas to revamp school culture, or attending pre-observation conferences. Space must be allocated in schools to allow teachers access to phones, computers, Xerox machines, and working Internet.
  - 2) Teachers should be given a full range of choices for professional responsibilities outside of classroom teaching. These can include school leadership/administrative opportunities (such as the "hybrid roles" that are becoming popular in some schools), supporting or advising student activities, standardized test coordination, overseeing discipline within the school, designing professional development opportunities, or leading professional learning communities.
- All of these should be given equal priority; too often, for instance, student activities oversight becomes a "back burner" priority for schools, necessitating teachers choosing to do so on their own time. A certain number of hours per week should be designated for professional responsibilities, which teachers would be held accountable for filling; within those confines, teachers should have many options for applying their interests and skills to daily school functioning.
- 3) Team-teachers need common planning time as well as common teaching time. This goes double for special education and general education teams, who need time not only to prepare for a diverse group of students (which may include making modifications to lesson plans), but also to go over IEPs, meet with social workers or school psychologists, hold tri-annual reviews, etc. This obviously cannot happen when team-teachers have entirely different planning periods.
  - 4) Monthly teacher workdays (or work afternoons) occur in many schools. These workdays should be closed off to outside learning consultants, and removed from any "network" oversight. Rather, teachers should determine what professional learning opportunities or school development initiatives should take place during these workdays. These can include off-campus seminars that may be useful for improved content knowledge or pedagogy.
  - 5) Most important: Teachers need dedicated time to work with students one-on-one or in small groups, outside of class, several times a week—much like "office hours" at a university. This time likely needs to be scheduled during students' lunch periods (meaning students' lunch-time cannot become a default time for staff meetings). This time is used for tutoring, for extra explanations of difficult concepts, for offering reading recommendations, for administering make-up tests, or for talking with students privately about issues that may be occurring in or out of class.

It's imperative for teachers to have time to meet with students in an unstructured setting in order to individualize education—yet, no time is allocated during the school day for this type of interaction. The ability to engage with students in dynamic and personally meaningful ways is one of the hallmarks of great teaching; it's time we allowed teachers the opportunity to interact with their students in a way that fosters this type of experience, within the structure of a normal school day.

**Read more of this edition of Teaching Ahead: [Restructuring Teachers' Time](#).**

Join a Twitter chat about hybrid roles and meet two 2014-2015 Center for Teaching Quality teacherpreneurs on Wednesday, Oct. 22 at 7 p.m. ET using the hashtag [#CE14](#).

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