PREVIEW

A late start one day a week provides time for differentiated staff development.

Assessments reveal specific training needs for veteran teachers, beginning teachers, and teachers who are new to the school or the district.

An inservice schedule includes teacher-led breakout sessions, time for departments to collaborate, and the flexibility to meet district training needs.

Staff Development

Finding the RIGHT FIT
THREE YEARS AGO, when I joined the staff of Agua Fria High School in Phoenix, AZ, as an assistant principal, I was excited to find that the students’ school day started an hour and a half later than normal each Wednesday to provide staff development time for the teaching staff. That first year, however, neither the principal, Bryce Anderson, who was also new, nor I knew the needs of the teaching staff, and we didn’t use the Wednesday morning time as effectively as we could have. In fact, Wednesday mornings often became faculty meetings instead of a time to develop the skills and knowledge base of the teachers. The following school year, the principal was committed to changing that. He scheduled regular faculty meetings before and after school to handle school management issues and charged me with turning our Wednesday morning time into teacher development time.

**Taking Stock**

When I considered the mix of veteran and new teachers, all of whom had different backgrounds and experience levels, I quickly realized that a one-size-fits-all model didn’t work if the time on Wednesday mornings was going to be valuable for everyone. Through several different surveying methods (formal and informal), I gathered feedback about what we had done the first year.

I learned that many of our teachers wanted to share their expertise with colleagues and were insulted when they were always in the audience being told information they already knew by outside facilitators. The teachers who were new to teaching appreciated learning the basics of classroom management and teaching strategies, but they didn’t feel comfortable asking questions in large groups. The teachers who were new to the state or the district had specific information they needed to learn, but they didn’t need to be taught the basics that teachers new to the profession needed. And different content-area departments had specific needs for collaboration within their departments.

With these insights, I planned an inservice schedule for the coming year that devoted one Wednesday a month to lesson sharing and curriculum collaboration within departments, two Wednesdays each month to improving instruction by learning or refining instructional skills, and one Wednesday each month to correlating school improvement with our school accreditation cycle.

Planning the department collaboration mornings required flexibility in how the time was spent, depending on the needs of each content area. Department leaders met and shared ideas for how they would like to use time in their specific areas. Many took time in their first department meeting of the year to brainstorm the department’s needs with the members of their individual departments. Ultimately, each department leader facilitated their department meetings during department collaboration time. At the beginning of the year and periodically thereafter, I sat down with each department leader to solidify his or her individual plans for those mornings. And during department chair meetings, sharing ideas for department collaboration time was a standing agenda item.

**Leslie Standerfer** (lstanderf@aguafria.org) has worked as an assistant principal in the Agua Fria Union High School District in the outskirts of Phoenix, AZ, for the past three years. She currently serves as a member of the NASSP NCLB Task Force.
**Wednesday Morning Breakout Session Evaluation**

Date: 

Session: 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The topic was timely and applicable.</th>
<th>YES</th>
<th>NO</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The information presented was useful.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would like another session on this topic.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would recommend this session to a colleague.</td>
<td>YES</td>
<td>NO</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The best part of the session was:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Something I would change about the session was:

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

---

**The Legacy of Collaboration**

I have just been reassigned from one high school in the district to another, and it is with mixed emotions I approach this move. I love the excitement and challenge of going to a different school, establishing working relationships with the staff members, and being won over again by amazing students. And as an assistant principal, I learn new lessons on leadership from each principal I work with. But I also worry that the few good things I am able to do at each school disappear with me as I walk out the door. This is why collaborative leadership is vital.

My first administrative position provided me with a model of what educating students should be about. The principal was a phenomenal leader who knew the importance of establishing clear procedures and important traditions. She set high expectations and then provided the resources and knowledge to meet them, gave each member of the school community a voice in decision making, and established programs that rewarded students for positive behavior. She also took the time to recognize staff members who went above and beyond both publicly and with personal notes and tokens of appreciation. She told me that her job was to build a culture of high expectations and respect that would be sustained long after she left the school.

For example, she decided to focus on having students and staff members think of the school as a community of respect and service. She brought a committee of teachers and student leaders together to plan the program and gave me the responsibility of coordinating it all. I did, and four years later, even with that principal now at the district office, the focus on respect and service is still a running agenda at that school.

My next school was a middle level school that had undergone many changes in administration over the past couple of decades. My first week on campus, a 20-year veteran teacher and department leader told me that I seemed like a nice person and all, but I shouldn’t get too upset when the staff wasn’t excited about new ideas because programs come and go with the administrators who bring them. What a sad sentiment for a fresh, naïve administrator to hear. During the year I was at that school, I did my best to do some of what I had seen my previous mentor do to build staff
I had learned from the staff that differentiation would be key to planning the mornings that were devoted to improving instruction by learning or refining instructional skills. At our back-to-school retreat, staff members broke into small groups to brainstorm topics that they would like more information on and practice with. The topics included classroom management, strategies to use with diverse populations, technology instruction, grant writing, cooperative learning, and reading strategies. As the brainstorming session ended, each group turned in its list of needs. I followed up the retreat with an invitation to all teachers to join the campus staff development committee.

**Designing Breakout Sessions**

Following a format similar to the one used at many professional conferences, the volunteer committee planned breakout sessions two mornings a month on various topics that teachers had expressed interest in. We offered anywhere from three to five sessions each month, and teachers could choose which two sessions they wanted to attend. These breakout sessions let teachers share their expertise with their colleagues and provided a forum for small-group discussion about how various strategies work in the classroom. Sessions for new teachers included candid discussion of successes and concerns in which veteran teachers offered praise and suggestions. Sessions that focused on specific topics of interest helped teachers of all experience levels grow and learn new things.

When teachers attended conferences, they were encouraged to share what they learned in breakout sessions. Outside facilitators were brought in to teach topics when appropriate and no one on staff had the expertise to do so. And feedback sheets filled out at the end of each session enabled the committee and the presenting teachers to continually monitor how the sessions were going.

**Adapting to New Challenges**

After a year of implementing the differentiated Wednesday mornings, we changed the schedule to meet the changing needs of the school and the staff. The district introduced a curriculum-mapping initiative that required us to devote some Wednesday mornings to learning the mapping process and sharing maps with colleagues. Department leaders expressed concerns about the number of times departments were meeting during the year. Some core areas needed more time in departments, and some were not able to fill the time effectively. To meet one department’s needs, we decided to use breakout sessions for department time instead of dedicating a separate Wednesday morning once a month for departments to meet.

---

morale. I took the time to write notes of appreciation to staff members: One staff member said that in 15 years of teaching she had never received an individual note written by an administrator. I established a lunchtime student forum similar to one my previous principal had established and the students gave me valuable feedback about how they viewed the school, the staff, and the administrative team. With the support of the principal and teachers, we did make some of the changes that the students suggested and saw an increased level of respect because the students felt they had some ownership in the school. Sadly, as predicted, when the principal and I left that middle school for new positions at the end of the year, the student lunch forum left with me.

Next, I became an assistant principal at Aqua Fria High School, from which I have been reassigned in the district. I don’t know that I established anything lasting in my three years as an assistant principal, but I did work to foster teacher growth and recognition. I was in classrooms and at activities, so I knew what teachers and students were facing each day. I had difficult conversations with wonderful teachers who needed to refine their practices in certain areas. I worked with a committee of teachers to design a professional development program that provided teachers with choices on what skills and knowledge they refined during our weekly staff development sessions. I saw teachers who had tuned out staff development years ago reengage and try new practices in their classrooms. I can only hope that those teachers who worked with me to establish a program that is benefiting their colleagues and the students will continue to work with the administrators to collaborate and grow together.

I know change is a necessary part of life if we are going to continue to grow and allow the people we serve with to continue their growth as well. And I know that each of us as school leaders brings unique gifts to the students and staff members who we serve. But the reality is that we are often at schools for less time than any other employee on campus. When we establish avenues for teachers and staff members to take part in the leadership of the school, the good traditions established through collaborative leadership will remain long after we leave.

—Leslie Standerfer
Agua Fria High School

Location: Avondale, AZ
Grades: 9–12
Enrollment: 1,800
Community: Suburban
Demographic: 52% Hispanic, 30% White, 14% Black; 4% other; 26% free and reduced-price lunch
Administrative team: 1 principal, 2 assistant principals, 1 athletic director
Faculty: 77
Staff: 75

The numbers of teachers serving on the staff development committee and willing to present breakout sessions increased the second year. The staff development schedule, with the exception of the mornings devoted to curriculum mapping, consisted of breakout sessions that met the needs of individual teachers and allowed collaboration and dialogue in a safe environment for all teachers.

When teachers were asked what the best part of breakout sessions were during the second year, they said that they liked sessions that were presented by an informative, thoughtful, well-prepared presenter who was knowledgeable; that contained pertinent information in a concise and understandable manner; and that included information that was extremely useful. They also liked collaborating with colleagues on teaching strategies and receiving easily applicable suggestions for modifications in the classroom.

Learning Together
Every educator has sat through inservices thinking that his or her time could have been better spent in the classroom grading papers or planning lessons. At Agua Fria, however, staff members consistently offer positive comments about our staff development time, which indicates that our program is valuable and useful. This is the result of a staff working together to evaluate their individual needs and collaborate on their learning process. When that happens, inservice time can be truly be teacher development time. PL

Advertisement