Teachers' Time: Collaborating for Learning, Teaching, and Leading

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About This Series

Findings from SCOPE's *Teachers' Time: Collaborating for Teaching, Learning, and Leadingy* are published in four reports, a cross-case analysis, and a research brief.

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This study examined four U.S. schools—Hillsdale High School in San Mateo, CA, International High School at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, NY, Pagosa Springs Elementary School (K-4th grade) in Pagosa Springs, CO, and Santa Monica Alternative Schoolhouse (SMASH) (K-8th grade) in Santa Monica, CA—that organize and structure teacher time and work so that teachers are encouraged to collaborate with one another in their efforts to enrich teaching and learning. The study is designed to help both practitioners and policymakers understand the teaching and learning implications of structuring time differently in schools, and provides detailed accounts of how time is organized within budget and schedule constraints. In addition, the study illustrates how these uses of time relate to a range of educational outcomes from building more successful curriculum, to supporting teacher learning and development, and to facilitating deeper, more meaningful learning opportunities for students.

The case studies used interviews, observations, and document reviews to examine and describe:

- How the schools reorganized teacher and student time within the school day;
- What students and teachers did within the re-organized time;
- The interaction between the re-organized use of teacher and student time; and
- The enabling conditions for using the re-organized time well.

Why Time Matters

There is compelling evidence that teachers are the most significant in-school factor affecting student learning (Kain, 1998; McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, & Hamilton, 2003; Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2000; Rowan, Correnti & Miller, 2002; Wright, Horn, & Sanders, 1997), and the effects that teachers have on student learning have been found to be cumulative and long-lasting (McCaffrey, Lockwood, Koretz, &

Hamilton, 2003; Sanders & Rivers, 1996). Further, research on teacher learning communities provides evidence that schools with "strong" professional communities—communities characterized by shared norms and values, a focus on student learning, social trust, deprivatization of practice, collective responsibility, and collaboration—show a range of valued outcomes from teacher learning (Grossman, Wineburg, & Woolworth, 2001; Little, 2003; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Rosenholtz, 1989) to changes in classroom practice (Elmore, Peterson, & McCarthey, 1996) and implementation of reform (Louis, Marks & Kruse, 1996; Louis & Marks, 1998; Newmann et al., 1996; Newmann, King & Youngs, 2000). Moreover, research on teacher collaboration demonstrates that students also benefit from opportunities that allow teachers time to work and learn together (Kraft & Papay, 2014; Louis, Kruse, & Marks, 1996; Rosenholtz, 1989). Therefore, organizing schools to develop high-quality teaching and teachers has great potential to improve the quality of instruction and realize positive benefits for students and teachers.

Yet, few schools structure teacher time and work in ways that create opportunities for teachers to learn with and from each other during the school day. Often times, professional learning is something that happens outside of teacher contract hours or during the summer, divorced from the classroom and the problems of practice with which teachers are struggling. The four schools in this study exemplify the exception to the rule and demonstrate that schools can modify traditional structures and policies to encourage teacher collaborative work so as to improve the learning experiences of students as well as their own.

The Comparative Use of Teacher Time Study builds on findings from the Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) of 2013 (OECD, 2014) which showed that the teaching occupation is structured and supported differently in various international jurisdictions and the outcomes for teachers—what they know, what they do, and how teaching knowledge evolves—varies depending on those structures and supports. The TALIS 2013 data offered lessons on the conditions under which teachers teach, such as time to plan curriculum and share expertise with other teachers, affects the quality of teaching. In addition, the TALIS 2013 data showed that teacher self-efficacy and job satisfaction are each correlated with the frequency of teacher collaboration, including joint teaching, observing another teachers' class, and providing feedback, engaging in joint activities across classes, and taking part in collaborative professional learning.

Findings

The study unpacks the organizational structures and conditions that support how schools organize teacher time and work in ways that prioritize and bolster teacher collaboration, ongoing professional learning and development, and enriched opportunities for student learning. Despite school context and geographical differences, all four schools shared characteristics and nine relevant themes emerged. The schools' intentional use of time prioritized collaboration with colleagues and focused on the whole child across multiple domains of human development. In addition, the non-traditional structuring of teacher time and work was enabled by organizational conditions: coherent and shared philosophy, shared governance, continual learning, professional capacity, multiple roles for teachers, district support, and participation in networks of like-minded educators.

Prioritized collaboration.

All four case study schools prioritized teacher collaboration and allocated time in the schedule to allow teachers to work and learn with each other. For example, at Hillsdale High School, teachers received at least one collaboration period per day, averaging 5.22 hours per week. At Pagosa Springs Elementary School, teachers collaborated in content teams or grade level teams for up to 90 minutes,

three days a week, to align curriculum, develop common assessments, and share instructional ideas.

Focus on student learning and development.
Each school's schedule was organized around what would work best for the whole child and importantly, what would work best for the teachers to help each other do what would work best for the students. Moreover, clear goals and shared pedagogical approaches drove the design of the schools' respective master schedules.

Coherent, shared philosophy.
Organizing teacher time and work in non-traditional ways necessitates a clear conception of why and for what purpose it is being done. All the schools had a clear coherent philosophy that was more than words on the wall and that shared philosophy, like their commitment to the whole child, was known and followed like a guiding star.

Shared governance.
Collaboration was also structured into the marrow of the schools' structures and processes through multiple approaches to shared governance. All four schools created structures to allow teachers to make critical decisions about the school and encouraged participation in decision-making processes.

Continual learning.
In the four schools, the schedules and what happened within the schedules evolved continually. Even in the schools with a longer history of non-traditional organization of teacher time and work (e,g., Hillsdale and International high schools), it has taken over a decade to produce the "new" schedules. Importantly, the schedules were not fixed and checked off the to do list, but continually revised and tweaked to address the strengths, interests, and needs of the teachers and their students.

Professional capacity.
All four schools hired well-prepared teachers, who were a good fit with the school's guiding philosophy of human development, teaching, and learning. In addition, the schools allocated time in the master schedule for weekly whole school professional development. In doing so, the schools facilitated the ongoing professional learning and development of teachers and, more importantly, set the institutional expectations for collaboration as a means to promote high-quality instructional practice.

Multiple roles for teachers.
In addition to hiring and supporting high quality educators, the schools created multiple and flexible roles for teachers, both in working with their students and also in working with each other. The schools used the strengths, interests, and needs of teachers flexibly so that the time created was time well used to support the students. These multiple and flexible roles for teachers, including in three of the four sites significant roles in school decision making, were essential for the schools to function within budgetary and contractual constraints. While these schools had some additional resources when they began their changes, eventually they had access to the same fiscal resources and personnel as all the other schools in their districts. They didn't, for instance, have additional full time equivalent (FTE) staff; they just used their existing FTEs differently.

District support.
While it would not be accurate to describe the work of the schools as district initiatives, the districts did play an important role in enabling the work. In two of the schools, for instance, the districts provided additional resources to help kick-start the efforts. In addition, the central offices also provided sustaining support by affording the schools with operational flexibility and permission to make budgetary and staffing decisions based on the goals of the staff and students.

Participation in Networks.
The schools also benefitted from participation in networks of like-minded schools and educators. Pagosa Springs is an active member of the Generation Schools Network (2017), a nonprofit that promotes student-focused public-school transformation. Hillsdale has been an active participant in multiple networks, most recently the California Performance Assessment Consortium (Learning Policy Institute, 2016). Multiple networks have support the work of International High School: *The Center for Collaborative Education; the Middle College National Consortium; the City University of New York (CUNY); and the Internationals Network for Public Schools.*

Conclusion

The collaborative school practices in place at these schools engage educators to share decisions and responsibilities towards a commonly held vision. As teachers learned with and from each other through their collaborative relationships, they strengthened their sense of collective responsibility for student learning. In addition, the work was guided by leadership that skillfully created structures and activities to support and sustain the non-traditional organization of teacher time and work. In the schools we studied, collaboration provided teachers multiple opportunities to exercise leadership, working together towards a common vision, while bringing different expertise to the practice. It wasn't always, and still isn't, easy for these schools. Strategically managing partnerships, maintaining the permeable permission to be different, avoiding meeting creep, sustaining the learning culture of the school through the inevitable personnel churn, not to mention, the need to continually change the schedule as the strengths, interests, and needs of the students change—require ongoing work. The teachers in these schools would tell you, however, the outcomes for the students as well as their own personal growth and development, make it worth the effort.

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