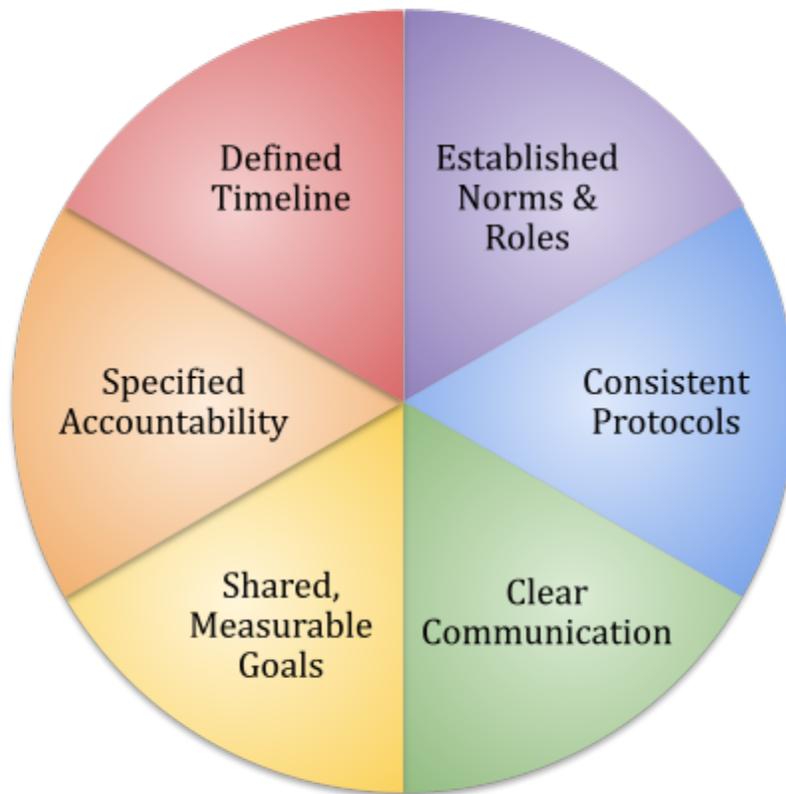




Guide to Successful Teams

The following defines six components of building successful educator teams and a culture that facilitates collaborative, meaningful work. Educators have very limited time outside of the classroom to work together. So, it is critical that this time is valuable and focused and leads to meaningful, measurable improvement for students and the school.

Six Components of Successful Educator Teams



Establishing Norms and Roles

Purpose: Educators spend most of their time teaching in an autonomous environment, and time outside of the classroom is scarce. Norms and roles assure that when educators gather to collaborate, it is done in a safe, productive team environment. Defined norms and roles will help set expectations required to build a positive culture and climate.

Timeframe: Norms should be established at the first meeting when a group is formed. At future meetings, the norms should be reviewed at the start, and the group should choose a norm to pay specific attention to during the meeting. Team members can adopt roles suited to their skills and preferences; roles can be static or rotated.

Components:

- Norms document: When possible, norms should be posted. Keep the number of norms between 5-7. Norms should guide timeliness, efficacy, and quality of interactions.
- Roles Document: Roles should focus on gaining full participation and eliciting strengths from each member of the group.

To Consider: Start with existing norms and roles, such as the 7 Norms of Collaboration or Roles and Responsibilities, but allow the team to modify these, as desired. Create a survey and administer it periodically to evaluate the climate of the team.

Leader's Role: The leader should initiate and facilitate conversation to ensure that norms are agreed upon. But it is important that the leader *facilitates* ONLY, and refrains from dominating the discussion, thereby encouraging participants to determine the norms and roles. The leader should foster a positive and supportive climate.

Participants' Roles: Participants should stay active and engaged. They should abide by and enforce the norms. Each participant should hold him or herself, and others accountable. Each participant should adopt a role within the group that maximizes the group's effectiveness.



Following Consistent Protocols

Purpose: Consistent protocols for data analysis, goal setting, action planning, trust building, communication, and shared decision making are vital to ensure the rigor in the team process that leads to success. Consistent protocols enable leadership and team members to hold teams accountable. Protocols build teaming capacity within staff. They also define the process and create clear and recognizable goals.

Timeframe: Initial protocols can be chosen or created up front; however, it is fine to create or implement protocols as your team process unfolds.

Components: Protocols are used in all the steps of the team's work: trust building, communication, goal setting, action planning, data analysis, entry and exit process identifying students the team is supporting, and shared decision making. The protocols will vary, depending on the team's goals and purpose.

Items to Consider: Protocols can be living documents that are continuously revisited, adapted, or updated as they are used. At the same time, teams should give them a chance before revising them. Don't let great be the enemy of good!

Leader's Role: Introduce protocols and facilitate consensus around them.

Participants' Role: Contribute to the development of protocols and adhere to them.



Ensuring Clear Communication

Purpose: A well-thought out and documented plan to communicate a team's activities ensures that the whole staff will work collaboratively to meet goals.

A communication plan must lay out the communication of goals and activities between members, between teams and the staff at large, and between the building staff and leadership teams.

Timeframe: A communication plan will be a working document that is frequently reviewed and adjusted. A draft communication plan should be completed at the first or second team meeting.

Components: The communication plan should include all team information and activities, and who needs to be made aware of those activities. The plan should include the activity/information being communicated, the stakeholder who will create and convey the communication, the intended audience, the timeframe of the given communication, the method of communication, and the goal of the communication.

Items to Consider: Dedication and persistence are essential to successfully documenting and following a communication plan. It can be too easy to overlook this step. When deciding what to share, be targeted and communicate just what is necessary. Enable expanded communication for those who are interested. Remember that access to information is sensitive in schools; it can serve to coalesce or divide a staff.

Leader's Role: Facilitate development at the beginning, and oversee and monitor the communication plan.

Participant's Role: Follow through with all communication activities defined.



Sharing Measurable Goals

Purpose: Measurable goals ensure follow through and effectiveness. When measurable goals are set, teams have proof of efficacy and a standard against which to hold themselves accountable. Interim action steps constitute the path to that larger goal, and each action step should have an observable and/or measurable outcome to keep the team on track.

Timeframe: The team's purpose should be defined in meeting one. The overarching measurable goal should be defined within the first two or three meetings, and ensuing action steps should be fleshed out as a natural continuation of that work. A team's purpose and goal may be revised, but it's important that they exist to guide the work being completed. Revisiting the team's articulated purpose and overarching goal--even if just to remind everyone--is important, and can even be done at the beginning of each meeting.

Components: A team's purpose should clearly define what is driving the work of the team. It involves the underlying principles that motivate the work, and therefore, the purpose statement is best developed through collaborative conversation. Establishing a common language and understanding is time well spent. A team's overarching measurable goal is their priority goal in relation to their purpose. Action items must be clear and tied to a measurable goal. Action items and goals can be measured by quantitative or qualitative data or by a descriptive rubric.

Items to Consider: Be rigorous with this work. Teams will wander without clear direction. It takes effort to define challenging but attainable, measurable goals, but they must be meaningful, challenging and achievable. It is gratifying and motivating for a team to review their goals and action items and have tangible evidence that goals have been met! Review frequently and celebrate!

Leader's Role: Ensure that the team identifies a clear purpose and measurable goal(s). Provide feedback about how the team purpose aligns to building goals and whether measurable goals are attainable but rigorous. If the team is struggling with consensus, the team leader should pull in the school or district lead to provide direction.

Participant's Role: All participants should contribute to the articulated team purpose and measurable goal(s). Participants should stay engaged in the difficult process until consensus is reached.



Specifying Accountability

Purpose: Building or District oversight and leadership is essential for team success. Leadership must recognize the value of the team's work and integrate it into the larger school infrastructure. Established routines and protocols enable leadership to review the work being completed, and provide feedback.

Timeframe: Building or District leadership should be present at initial meetings to underscore the importance of the work, and assess the functionality of the team. Throughout the year, regular review of meeting notes completed by the educator team should be housed in a common location and reviewed by the building or district leader. The timing of review and feedback from an administrator must be made explicit to the team, and follow through is important. A building and district leader should attend educator meetings periodically for check-ins, to get a face-to-face update on progress. Team members should upload notes and artifacts at the end of meetings to assure consistency. Protocols for member-to-member communication between meetings should be established, so colleagues can help each other with follow through in the face of so many competing school day obligations.

Components: Pre-established consistent and structured formats for note-taking at meetings should define exactly what information will be communicated by the educator team to school or district leadership. These note-taking protocols should include the overall educator team goals, action steps, accomplishments, and obstacles. Protocols to assure member-to-member accountability should be articulated as part of norms and roles. Accountability protocols should be developed to report to, and get feedback from, central office staff on building- level team goals and processes.

Items to Consider: Accountability must be rigorous, timely, and consistent. All teams should be familiar with the protocols and have common expectations. Timely, consistent descriptive feedback from leaders affirms the work that teams are doing, and can powerfully affect the trajectory of a team. Part of accountability is using the opportunity to celebrate the success of your teams!

Leader's Role: Teachers are rightfully focused on the classroom. Commitments that are not direct interactions with students are the first to be compromised when educators are overwhelmed. It is the leader's responsibility to support follow through by being diligent with his/her accountability role and by providing positive support so that teams know that there is someone checking on their follow through.

Participant's Role: Be receptive to feedback and support team members to help them with follow through. Celebrate your successes and take responsibility to make changes where change is needed.



Defining Timeline

Purpose: With such limited and precious time out of the classroom, a defined timeline guides team work completion and communication.

Timeframe: Ongoing. Timelines are created from the initial conception through the completion of the work.

Components: Timelines must define a consistent meeting schedule and duration, how that time is managed, when deadlines are for 'homework' completion, when student interventions can occur, when information from teams is communicated, and when educator teams must report 'up the chain' to school and district leaders.

Items to Consider: Be visual. Use a common or shared calendar. Be public – this information should be well communicated, so the expectations for everyone's involvement is understood across all staff.

Leader's Role: Be imaginative to make time for teachers to collaborate and get the needed work done. Be imaginative to reward teams that go out of their way to meet outside of contracted time. Review team's timelines and offer feedback.

Participant's Role: Remain flexible with timing to get the work done. Make the most out of meeting time by attending to agenda times and tasks.

