

Adapting Private Sector Staff Mechanisms in Schools to Foster Efficiency, Collaboration, and A Culture of Respect



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Host Organization: Amazon 126

ETP Type: *Professional Development*

Subject/Grade: 8th Grade Science

Abstract

In an increasingly difficult world for educators, both teachers and administration are looking for ways to increase teacher retention. One of the barriers to teacher retention is the increasing expectations in a teacher's workload, causing educators to work up to 20 hours outside of the given work week. This disparity necessitates increasing efficiency in all areas of work, including collaborative staff environments such as staff meetings and grade level teams. This ETP is a Professional Development seminar in order to better construct staff time and staff decision making. Utilizing an established method of communication from Amazon126, staff and administration at Summit Public Schools will have an opportunity to adopt private sector best practices into the public sector to allow for more valuable time spent amongst staff.

Focal Content & Supporting Practices

California Standards for the Teaching Profession (2009)

Standard 6: Developing as a Professional Educator

- 6.2 Establishing professional goals and engaging in continuous and purposeful professional growth and development
- 6.3 Collaborating with colleagues and the broader professional community to support teacher and student learning
- 6.7 Demonstrating professional responsibility, integrity, and ethical conduct

21st Century Skills and Applications

Communication and Collaboration:

- Serves as integral member of team; contributes to overall team coherence and culture; creates lasting professional relationships

Initiative and Self Direction

- Develops tools, methods, or other improvements for own or others' jobs that increase department or organization productivity

Measurable Objective(s)

1. Teachers/administrative staff will weigh in on the efficiency of staff meetings.
2. Administrative staff will be presented data regarding staff perception and potential solutions, utilizing some of Amazon's meeting frameworks.

Formative Assessment(s)

- Teachers will complete a pre-survey about the current meeting structures at their school and at any other schools they have worked at.
- Measure level of engagement during PD
 - Zoom chat/number of participants for virtual
 - Number of participants engaged for in-person
- Measure number of survey responses during the PD. (For full engagement, you should be getting 100% of surveys back in real time.)

Summative Assessment(s)

- Commitment from administration/any staff that facilitates amongst staff to try one of the options given in the PD at the end of Zoom PD
- Teachers/admin complete post-survey about which proposed meeting structures would work with their staff to increase efficiency and create a culture of respect amongst staff.

Fellowship Description

Over the summer, I was a Mechanism Improvement Fellow at Amazon126, assessing a weekly reporting process called a New Product Introduction Review (NPIR) that Amazon utilizes amongst all operational teams to achieve the following:

1. Communicate program updates.
2. Get help from cross-functional team and leaders.
3. Gain insight about possible gaps from the perspective of experienced Executive Leaders.

Through a series of interviews with key stakeholders and an all-staff quantitative survey, I determined best practices of the Weekly NPIR practices and identified any gaps with the process itself or how the teams implement the mechanism. (At Amazon, "mechanism" refers to a beginning-to-end best practice that is iterative and replicable that can be evaluated to measure efficiency over time.)

As part of my Fellowship, I attended Weekly NPIR meetings across all device product lines (Tablets, E-readers, echo, Co-Ro, Fire TV, Health & Wellness). By analyzing the level of engagement and the array of stakeholders in the meetings, I scheduled a series of interviews from the Directors (Senior management) to the Core Team (Product-specific employees) to better understand both the process and the perception of the NPIRs.

In addition to the qualitative interviews, I created a survey using Qualtrics in order to gather some quantitative data about the efficiency of the mechanism and to gather ideas for increasing mechanism efficiency from team members who I did not have time to meet with.

During my time here, I developed my skill set in a plethora of ways, one of which is in scheduling in Microsoft Outlook for over 25 total interviews. I have sharpened my ability to conduct effective interviews and consolidate qualitative data from anecdotes. I learned how to use Qualtrics, a cloud-based subscription software platform for experience management, and develop a survey to have a clear sense of inputs for our desired output. Finally, I created a whitepaper for a final presentation for the Amazon126 Device & Product Operations team to present my findings during the final week of my Fellowship, which helped develop the clarity of my academic writing. These skills are transferable across disciplines, specifically those which require program management in STEM. There is such a wide variety of careers in STEM fields like tech or field work that require management skills, appointment setting, and survey building, that are not explicitly taught, so I am very grateful to have honed in on those skills during the duration of my Fellowship.

Fellowship Connection to School/Classroom

My school, Summit Public Schools: Tamalpais, has a set of foundational ideals that include collaboration and technological savviness, which guide our work as educators in the classroom and amongst our staff. Our entirely digitized platform delivers curricula in a way that prepares our youth for an increasingly digitized world, and it also challenges its staff to continuously develop their skills in metric and data analysis. STEAM is a key component in Summit's youth development, but often Technology and Engineering are seen as second to Science and Mathematics just by nature of schools—standardized testing, antiquated curricula, etc. and there are few opportunities to highlight the career options in STEM.

My role as a Mechanism Improvement Fellow at Amazon126 reinforces one of the principles I reiterate to my students throughout the year—that there are plenty of jobs in the STEM world outside of a “doctor” or “professor.” I hope to instill in my students that the scientific method is our way of making the world a better place, and how you use it comes in many forms. My role as an Ignited Summer Fellow is analyzing the very mechanism that allows teams across product lines, functional groups, and management levels communicate on a weekly basis. This mechanism is an example of the scientific process in action as applied to one of the largest technology corporations in the world.

Lastly, after working in policy advocacy and community organizing, I moved to education and think of it as a second career. I have found my unique purpose in the world inside the walls of an 8th grade STEM classroom; however, there are some things about my previous career that I often miss, one of which is the staff culture in professional non-education spaces. I find that in education, the child-first or metric-centered models leave teachers feeling underappreciated, overworked, and burnt out. Amazon126's staff culture is one that simultaneously respects the autonomy of an individual's work and values the importance of collaboration, all the while prioritizing efficiency. I believe that we need to utilize private sector employee models in the public sector of education in order to solve the teacher retention crisis and fundamentally shift how our society views educators. For these reasons, my summer at Amazon126 supports my development inside the classroom as an STEM educator and outside the classroom as a changemaker in the workplace.

Instructional Plan

Introduction/Framing

This PD Workshop intends to show teachers and administrators three different types of meeting formats to compare and contrast the efficiency of giving status updates versus fostering collaborative staff time. The goal of this workshop is to get the group of staff to understand how to best utilize their own time for collaboration. By using an established method of communicating updates from Amazon126, staff will have an opportunity to assess Amazon126's meeting best practices and potentially adopt alternative methods of updates and communicating for their team. This ETP takes an established professional development seminar, “Recognizing and Understanding Emotions: Anger” and shifts the traditional Powerpoint presentation to a writing-based working meeting that fosters both collaboration and respect of one's professional time. Staff will be guided through this PD in 3 ways—a traditional Powerpoint method, the Amazon126 method where they are given the entire material to read through, and a blended hybrid method where teachers can choose how to follow along.

- Time required: (1 70-minute PD session)
- Primary Objectives:
 - Collect inventory of current meeting/in-person communication structures and various pros/cons.
 - Offer alternative methods (writing/working- based methods) to traditional means of presenting, i.e. Powerpoints or pre-meeting surveys
 - Real-life workshop of alternative discussion method that prioritizes efficiency and presumes competency.
- Secondary Objective(s)
 - To brainstorm efficient means of conducting collaborative staff meetings.
 - To gain teacher input on what shifts would further foster a culture of respect amongst

staff.

Focal question(s):

- 1) *Are the ways in which we share ideas and update amongst staff time-efficient?*
- 2) *How can we better utilize our time? What methods and best practices could staff adopt to better spend collaborative work time?*

Teacher Activities:

1) Participants take pre-survey IN THE PD (10 min):

- a) The session will begin with a survey tinyurl link on the board. (Make a copy of [this form](#) by clicking the link and clicking "Make a copy." For ease, convert to a tinyurl or send the link directly to teachers at the start of the PD.) Soft music will be playing. Giving 10 minutes for the PD factors in for people coming in late.

2) Discussion around survey results (10 min)

- a) Display Google Poll results on a projector. Prompt questions as follows:
 - i) *What do we notice? What stands out?*
 - ii) *What do we wonder? Are these results consistent with your personal beliefs or are you surprised at the group consensus?*
 - iii) *Are there any ideas we are divided on?*

3) 3 different meeting structures using "Mentoring Pathways: Anger"

a) [Powerpoint with presentation](#):

- i) This is the traditional method for teacher professional development at Summit Public Schools. An administrator walks through the Powerpoint, asks for teacher volunteers to read, and paces themselves through the slides. Facilitator notes live at the bottom of each slide.
- ii) Facilitate slides 1-17 in this way to go through the material in the traditional method. There are facilitator notes for slides that need more in-depth discussion which can be viewed in Presenting mode.

b) [Written PD format-Amazon126](#):

- i) This is the Amazon126 method for meetings. You give the entire written information to the audience beforehand, and allow them to read the information on their own. (5 minutes for every page is the standard, i.e. a 3 page document you would allot 15 minutes for reading time.) There is no Powerpoint, only a written document emailed or printed out and given at the top of the meeting.
- ii) After slide 17, give each person a print out of the 3-pager above. Give them about 10 minutes to read starting with page 2. Allow them to read pages 2 and 3 at their own pace, advising them to mark up as you go.

c) [Blended: Powerpoint without presentation and written format](#)

- i) This is a way to utilize pre-existing Powerpoints or allow for quicker meetings if your staff still enjoys having a Powerpoint presentation. Have the teachers click through the Powerpoint themselves to review all of the information beforehand and facilitate conversation from what they want to bring up for discussion as you click through the remainder of the slides.

4) 5 min break:

- a) Advise the group to stretch, get coffee, water, etc. for the remaining 20 minutes of the session.

5) Reflection + Brainstorm further alternatives (10)

- a) Facilitate in group discussion.
 - i) Guiding questions:
 - (1) What method did you like the most/the least?
 - (2) What principles guided the various ways of delivering the PDs?
 - (3) What principles do we want to prioritize in our group?
 - (4) Do we need to change the way we have been spending collaboration time? What method could work for our group?

6) Secondary Survey IN THE PD SESSION (10 min)

- a) Final 10 minutes to finish the survey. (Make a copy of [this form](#) by clicking the link and clicking "Make a copy." For ease, convert to a tinyurl or send the link directly to teachers at the start of the PD.) Write tinyurl on board. Allot for anyone needing to leave 5 minutes

early. Set soft music to play as people head out.

Additional Supports

- Social-Emotional Learning:
 - Begin the session with a fun, optional go-around to ease tension and orient teachers/admin into the session.
 - Pre-send agenda and all materials so that all participants have a clear idea of what the session will entail.
 - 5 minute stretch break during PD
- Virtual Learning: On Zoom, type discussion questions into chat for educators who have lower auditory retention.
- Diverse Learners: Using dyslexia-friendly fonts such as Verdana, Arial, or Comic Sans.

Materials

- Google Forms for Surveys:
 - [Pre-Survey](#)
 - [Post-Survey](#)
- [Traditional Powerpoint Example](#)
- [Written example of the Powerpoint meeting conducted via writing instead](#)

References

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Keywords

Professional Development, Collaboration, Cross-collaboration, Staff Culture, Presuming Competence, Teacher Retention, Meeting Protocol, Whitepaper