



Faculty Meetings Transformed

How to let staff lead learning

By *Chris Bennett*

All too often, faculty meetings involve the sharing of information that could be easily conveyed via email or weekly newsletters. We recently chose to flip our meetings from dissemination of administrative information to targeted professional development sessions. Our goal: to make faculty meetings more purposeful and meaningful, while building capacity and relationships within our staff.

Many factors led to us flipping faculty meetings. For example, budget cuts eliminated all nonessential outside professional development opportunities for teachers. We are a 100 percent free lunch school; however, our Title I budget for this school year was cut, forcing us to become even more frugal with our spending.

In-house professional development allows us the opportunity to build capacity within teacher-leaders. We were able to expand upon our relationship with the School of Education at our local university, Gardner-Webb University. Instructors from their

School of Education led sessions for our teachers each month on our campus. And finally, meaningful, purposeful opportunities were specifically based on our teachers' needs.

We still have a traditional beginning-of-the-year faculty meeting because there's value in bringing everyone together over a meal, introducing staff, and passing out back-to-school information to make sure everyone is on the same page. But after August, our faculty meetings focus on small group professional development.

As administrators, we expect to see evidence of engagement, collaboration, use of technology, and formative assessment during classroom visits. Flipped faculty meetings allow us to model this idea for teachers.

Making It Work

We wanted to make our professional development sessions purposeful, intentional, and meaningful for

teachers in order to enhance buy-in, engagement, and follow-through. So, we created and sent a Google form listing more than 20 areas of potential professional development—any area we felt would benefit our staff—and sent it to our teachers. We used teachers' feedback to narrow our focus.

Results from the survey were analyzed, and four strands for professional development emerged. In 2016–2017, we focused on:

1. Differentiation
2. Literacy
3. Questioning
4. Facilitating Learning and Engagement

Initially, our plan was to introduce one new session per month. However, upon reflection, we chose to host a professional development session one month and a follow-up session the subsequent month, in order to allow for time to deeply discuss topics.

We chose teachers and other staff members to present, based on their strengths and areas of expertise as observed by administrators and the curriculum coordinator. Having in-house teachers present increased the validity of presentations, as their strategies have been proven to work with our population and can be replicated across grade levels.

Topics our educators explored in each strand included:

Differentiation:

- *Content, Process, Product.* This challenged participants to design opportunities for differentiation in their classroom and to return to the subsequent session to share their successes and challenges.
- *Digging Into Webb's Depth of Knowledge.* The session (led by Gardner-Webb University professors) discussed the relationship between in-depth thinking as adults and how teachers can help students reach a deeper level of thinking using Webb's Depth of Knowledge.
- *Makerspace and the 4Cs (communication, collaboration, critical thinking, creativity).* The group explored the concept of makerspaces and how they can support the 4Cs to improve student learning and engagement.

Literacy:

- *Unlocking Literacy With iPads.* Participants explored strategies discussed in Keys to Literacy training. They also brainstormed ways to incorporate these strategies using iPads in the classroom to further increase engagement.
- *Comprehension Strategies: Scaffolding for Struggling Learners.* This workshop addressed comprehension strategies that can be used in any content area, as well as how to scaffold these strategies for struggling learners.
- *Get Your Google On!* Teachers were exposed to various Google items relating to literacy and math instruction.

Teacher Takes

"Having choices for professional development sessions over the school year has been very beneficial. The choice provided opportunities to participate and learn about topics that addressed and met specific needs for my area. Also, having one's peers present professional development sessions was comfortable and helpful in that we didn't have to go through the introductions in the usual ways, taking up time from the session." — Susan Johnson, media specialist

"The professional development sessions were a targeted use of our time. They gave us an opportunity to grow in areas we chose without having to sit in meetings." — Jessica Viole, third-grade ELA teacher

"I think teachers were more invested in the professional development sessions because it was a topic they chose. I believe that also made them more likely to apply what they had learned in their sessions." — Jennifer Stimpson, counselor

Questioning:


- *Effective Questioning.* Teachers took a closer look at "why" we ask questions. The group explored strategies demonstrating effective questioning and revisited Bloom's taxonomy as they worked to create effective, higher-order questions for their content areas.
- *Accessible Mathematics: 10 Instructional Shifts That Raise Student Achievement* book study. We did a five-meeting book study with our third-, fourth-, and fifth-grade math teachers (as well as anyone else who wished to attend). We also used one of the professional development sessions to extend this study.
- *Leveling Questioning.* Teachers discussed how to create inviting and engaging questions, and learned how to use different levels of question starters throughout subject areas. Participants played several traditional board games, incorporating questioning strategies.

Facilitating Learning and Engagement:

- *Hope and Growth Mindset in Students of Poverty.* The group examined brain research behind "hope" as a critical student success factor,

distinguished between fixed and growth mindset, and explored easy strategies for integrating hope and growth mindset into instruction.

- *Engagement and Poverty.* Faculty and staff examined how poverty affects student engagement and why it is critical that we actively work to increase engagement in this student population.
- *Unmotivated to Engaged.* This subsequent session explored strategies to help us turn "lazy" or "unmotivated" students into engaged learners.

Teachers were receptive to the process, and each session lasted longer than anticipated, with teachers sharing ideas, strategies, and stories of success and growth. We estimate, in total, that our teachers received 700 "free" hours of professional development this year by utilizing this model. A byproduct of this focused time was relationship-building, as teachers worked in small groups with teachers across grade levels, content areas, specials/elective areas, and support staff. 

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