

Flip the Script on Staff Engagement

Empower your faculty and staff through
collaborative, **interactive**, and **focused** staff meetings

School leaders are always looking for ways to empower teachers and give them a voice—and staff meetings are a great place to start. Rethinking staff meetings is an effective way to incorporate innovative ideas that break the typical staff meeting mold and make them more interactive, collaborative, focused, and productive. Use this *Leading Lessons* staff guide with your staff to flip the script of your staff meetings in ways that empower your faculty and staff.

Change the Name. Change the Focus.

The phrase “staff meetings” can bring on a yawn or even a feeling of dread for some teachers. One of the best strategies for principals looking to incorporate collaboration is to change the name. Communicate the focus on collaboration right from the start by calling these meetings what they are: opportunities to empower teachers to support their students and each other. With your staff, consider the following questions to set goals for your staff meeting and determine a name for the meetings that better reflects those goals—or even your school spirit by incorporating your school mascot into the name. Some ideas that came out of a recent NAESP Twitter chat on this topic were staff reunion, staff mastermind, huddle, chat and chew, collaboration in action, staff gathering, and professional collaborative learning.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1 What goals and outcomes do we want to accomplish from each staff meeting? Consider how this meeting will affect all aspects of the school community—students, faculty and staff, administration, and school families.

2 How can we rename staff meetings to flip the script to a culture of collaboration?

Set the Stage for Collaboration

How administrators welcome staff into the meeting space and the environment they set up for a successful staff meeting can make or break the outcome of these staff meetings. The space should feel comfortable and safe and serve as a space your faculty and staff look forward to coming to when gathering with your team.

Here are three ways to get started:

- 1. Provide food.** It doesn't have to be fancy or gourmet. Depending on the time of the day you hold your staff meetings, some simple pieces of chocolate, chips, fresh fruit, or other staff favorites is all you need. Ask them what their favorite snacks are and incorporate those for a personal touch.
- 2. Create a welcoming space.** Make sure teachers are able to see each other during meetings. Whether in a big circle or small groups at tables, make sure everyone has a seat and they all have a good vantage point.
- 3. Play music.** It's an easy way to bring energy into a space. It's also another way to add a personal touch: Ask your team what their favorite songs are, and create a playlist with those songs and play it at all of your meetings.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What is one must-have component when setting up a welcoming physical (or virtual) meeting space?

Incorporate Inclusion Activities

It is important that everyone feels included in the collaboration right from the start of the meeting. Doing a simple inclusion activity can help everyone feel a sense of belonging and feel like their voice matters. Bonus? Incorporate inclusion activities that teachers can also use in their classrooms.

Here are two examples of inclusion activities:

- 1. Penny For Your Thoughts:** Give each staff member a penny and have them think about what is heaviest on their mind as they enter the meeting space. It can be something personal or professional; there is no right or wrong answer. Working in small groups, everyone is asked to give a penny for their thoughts. The participant shares what is on their mind and then tosses the penny into a cup in the center of the table. They leave the penny and their thoughts there until the end of the meeting when they can pick it back up again.
- 2. Name Ball:** This is simple activity helps staff learn each other's names while having fun. Staff stands in a circle and one staff member starts the activity by tossing a ball to someone across the circle while saying their full name in a loud voice. Then, that staff member does the same and the activity continues until all staff members have caught the ball. Then, they repeat the same pattern, trying to go faster. You can time them, throw in more balls so multiple balls are going at once, or switch up the game to have them name a favorite summer activity.

REFLECTION QUESTION

How can we use inclusion activities to set the stage for a culture of collaboration during staff meetings?

Make the Mundane Magical

Inevitably, staff meetings will cover topics that are more mundane than fun. However, we can incorporate collaboration into every topic. Even going over the staff handbook can be collaborative if we make it into a team scavenger hunt.

One idea is “Pick and Ask or Tell.” Put items for review or discussion into a large manila envelope. Teachers work in small groups and pass around the envelope, picking an item out when it is their turn. They can tell the rest of the group about the item or they can ask a question about the item to learn from the group.

REFLECTION QUESTION

1 What topics to support school success can we learn more about?

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2 How do we “flip the script” to make mundane meeting topics collaborative?

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Take Time for SEL

Intentionally incorporating time to stop, breathe, and ground ourselves at the beginning and end of a meeting allows us to be present for our meeting and to leave our meeting feeling encouraged rather than discouraged.

Incorporating strategies like temperature checks and reflection activities that focus on social-emotional learning (SEL) competencies is a great way to get started. Giving staff the opportunity to lead community-building circles can be another effective way to incorporate and model SEL during staff meetings. Simple and encouraging adult coloring pages laid out on tables with fun color pencils can help settle the team's mind as they come in from a long day of teaching.

REFLECTION QUESTION

1 What types of SEL competencies and mindfulness can you incorporate into your staff meetings?

2 Who on your team is passionate about exercise, dance, health, for example, and willing to get the adults moving and use teamwork to engage in SEL?

Celebrate Staff

Embedding intentional opportunities into existing staff meetings for adults to reflect and connect with one another, celebrate one another, and interact with one another to share appreciation and reflections is critical to the success of a team, building trust, and creating a strong and safe school culture.

REFLECTION QUESTION

What are some ways we can create opportunities to celebrate staff and help staff celebrate each other during meetings?

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