

# Here's How

## Leadership guidance for new principals



### #4: How to plan a staff meeting

Pittsburgh loves The Point—that spot where three rivers converge and the Steel City was born. In your school, The Point is the staff meeting—the place where building management, collaborative culture, and continuous improvement converge. Effective principals uphold transparency and perseverance. They support trusting relationships to promote professional capacity. They direct everyday operations toward the school's mission and vision. All are incorporated into the possibly underutilized and certainly maligned vehicle known as the staff meeting.

#### Getting Started: What and How

Effective principals turn staff meetings into powerhouse venues for collaboration, collegiality, and engagement on the path to student achievement.

1. Work with staff to establish meeting norms and protocols. Finding agreement on what constitutes consensus helps support your decision-making and convinces opponents to go along with the majority.
2. Schedule according to district and contractual requirements. If attendance is not optional, make that as clear as any other routine expectations.
3. Develop a relevant and timely agenda focused on curriculum, coaching, and instructional supports needed for staff to build capacity and effectiveness in the classroom. Give teachers time to reflect by sending it at least three days in advance.
4. Train facilitators, including yourself, to keep discussions on track and solicit input from everyone.
5. Create a “no multitasking zone.” No checking phones (except for emergencies). No sidebar conversations.
6. Structure meeting formats to suit the group and the topic. Consider assigning small groups to discuss the topic and report out their best ideas.
7. Develop a participant-centered learning environment that invites inclusion and meaningful conversations about instructional strategies.
8. Choose a staff member who is detail-oriented and adept at accurately capturing verbal discussions and action items to take good notes.
9. End with clear action steps and understanding of each participant's responsibilities.
10. Remember those notes? Use them to follow up and keep track.

#### Research says ...

- Staff meetings can improve schools by helping staff feel valued and engaged in purposeful peer interactions.
- When deciding how to allocate resources, effective principals ask how their decisions will help teachers improve instructional capabilities, contribute to academic growth and student well-being, and improve or sustain school culture.
- Principals who use staff-meeting time to disseminate information miss opportunities to engage staff in professional learning and increase instructional efficacy.

#### Resources

- *“Faculty Meetings: Opportunities for Learning and Collaboration”* — Institute for Public School Initiatives, University of Texas at Austin
- *“How to Address Tough Topics in Staff Meetings”* — Edutopia
- *You're the Principal! Now What?* — Jen Schwanke
- *What Great Principals Do Differently* — Todd Whitaker
- *The Principal: Three Keys to Managing Impact* — Michael Fullan
- *How Principals Affect Students and Schools* — The Wallace Foundation



## Words of wisdom

Think strategically with every meeting, say veteran principals.

- “Determine the overarching issues and challenges that must be addressed in order for high-quality teaching and learning to take place. From there, gather voices that are needed at the table in order to problem-solve and keep the building moving forward.” —*Howard Fields, assistant superintendent of human resources, Kirkwood School District, Missouri*
- “You want to keep it exciting and engaging, so people look forward. They don’t say, ‘Ohhhh, another staff meeting.’ They say, ‘Oh, another staff meeting!’” —*Michael Chirochello, consultant, Leadership Matters LLC*
- “It has to be centered and focused so it doesn’t turn into a complaint session. Those meetings are designed for building professional capacity and coaching.” —*Denise Michelle Gamble, education consultant, NAESP Race and Equity Task Force member*
- “A staff meeting is where the magic happens. It’s about making sure everybody understands the whole school perspective, hearing the teachers’ voices, and bringing everyone together to move in the same direction.” —*Shauna Kauffman, principal, Arnold Elementary School, Anne Arundel County Public Schools, Annapolis, Maryland*
- “Staff meetings must be productive. There should be a learning element, and that learning element should model what we expect in the classroom.” —*Christopher Bailey, Principal, Clack Middle School, Abilene, Texas*

## Keys to success

**Purpose + outcomes = productive meetings.**

- **Invite selectively.** Select participants to fill a need, not seats.
- **Break the mold.** Assign small groups to make up skits or jingles. Bring props. Rearrange seating.
- **Call the gathering “staff collaboration time”** to convey purpose, or have fun with incorporating the school mascot or name.
- **Let the group establish ground rules for difficult conversations.**



## Make it engaging: 6 steps

Strong scheduling processes embrace the needs of students.

1. Start on time. End at the predetermined time, whether or not you’re finished.
2. Stock a playlist with each teacher’s favorite song and play it as the meeting convenes and breaks up.
3. Fill the agenda with discussion items. No reading out loud. Rebuild the human connections lost to communications via technology.
4. Begin with a wellness moment of meditation or by having everyone share something interesting happening in their lives.
5. Open and end on a positive note. Share something wonderful you witnessed in school recently.
6. Solicit feedback before adjourning. What did staff like or not like about that meeting?

