

A Maryland High School Revamps Professional Time

In this article in *Principal Leadership*, Maryland assistant principal Jared Wastler contrasts the dreary state of many schools' staff meetings (announcements, policies, superficial presentations, more announcements) with Todd Whitaker's and Annette Breaux's aspirational statement (2013): "One of the most important goals of every faculty meeting should be for all teachers to walk out more excited about teaching and more effective tomorrow than they were today." When a survey at Wastler's school revealed that only 52 percent of faculty members were satisfied with the school's professional learning model, radical change began. Within two years faculty satisfaction hit 99 percent, many staff members were taking on leadership roles, and students had become an active part of the professional learning model. Here are the details:

- *No more all-faculty meetings* – The realization that monthly after-school meetings were inefficient and unnecessary came when a teacher leader asked, "Why is it if I miss the hour-long meeting on Monday I can make it up in three minutes Tuesday morning?" But how would those hours be used? Guided by a desire to promote collaboration and autonomy, the school set up the following:

- *Professional learning communities* – These teams meet monthly to plan curriculum, discuss student results, and find new ways to incorporate ideas into classrooms.

- *Ten-Minute Tuesdays* – Twice a month, teachers convene on a voluntary basis for a very short presentation and discussion of an effective classroom practice. Topics are chosen based on requests or suggestions, and half the staff usually attends. This year, Ten-Minute Tuesday topics have included English-math interdisciplinary lessons, BrainPop, Edmodo, and Discovery Education.

- *Google Hangouts* – Small groups of teachers connect with an expert in another part of the state or country and use this free technology to view a presentation and ask questions. Topics have included flipped classrooms and Common Core implementation. "Ten years ago, such training would have been cumbersome, expensive, and tedious," says Wastler. "Today it is as easy as a tweet, an e-mail, and a click on the screen."

- *FedEx Day* – Inspired by Daniel Pink's description (in his 2009 book, *Drive*) of FedEx's idea of giving employees time to work on projects of their own choosing, the school took an open afternoon and announced two guidelines:

- You must work on something that benefits student learning and achievement.
- You must share your project at the end of the day.

Teams worked on integrating infographics into classroom assessments, improving study skills lessons in the advisory program, developing a direct instructional program for students with special needs, promoting internships and career connections, and finding curriculum links between English and science. The FedEx afternoon was such a success that the school plans to make it a full-day activity twice this year. The school's website has information on its FedEx days: <http://blogs.carrollk12.org/libertyhs180/march-4-pd>.

“Forget Faculty Meetings... Focus on Professional Learning” by Jared Wastler in *Principal Leadership*, March 2014 (Vol. 14, #7, p. 22-26), www.aasa.com; Wastler can be reached at jwastl@carrollk12.org.