

TEACHERS' TIME: COLLABORATING
FOR LEARNING, TEACHING, AND LEADING

**Pagosa Springs Elementary School:
A Study of Teachers' Collaborative Use of Time**

By Mary Jo Reinhard





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Introduction

Schools today face unprecedented demands to improve teaching and learning amidst a backdrop of federal and state policy initiatives that demand greater levels of performance and accountability from schools. In order to meet these demands, many schools and districts are striving to become learning organizations (Senge, 1990). Learning organizations are characterized by individual and collective learning within the organization. In the case of schools, this could mean instituting processes designed to promote collaborative and meaningful learning for teachers.

Indeed, research from high performing international school systems, such as Singapore and Finland, suggest that investing key resources toward developing teacher capacity is essential for improving teaching quality (Darling-Hammond, Burns, Campbell, Goodwin, Hammerness, et al., 2017). Specifically, these high-achieving systems allocate time for teachers to learn from and with each other around problems of practice such that teacher professional learning is thoroughly integrated within the system and becomes a part of their daily life in schools (Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, & Hunter, 2016). Other research has shown that when teachers work in collegial environments, they become more effective over time (Kraft & Papay, 2014) and that opportunities for peer learning among teachers are a powerful predictor of improvements in student achievement (Goddard, Goddard, & Tschannen-Moran, 2007). Thus, organizing teachers' work and time to allow for teacher professional collaboration appears to be an important factor in high-quality teaching.

This report is designed to help both educators and policymakers understand the teaching and learning implications of structuring time differently in schools. The report details how an elementary school in rural Colorado supports ongoing teacher learning through the reorganization of teacher time. The Pagosa Springs Elementary School experience explicates:

1. The organization of the teachers' work, the scheduling and structure of the core activities, and the enabling conditions.
2. The structure and organization of teacher learning, the learning resources and opportunities, and the use of teacher time in support of the development of knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
3. The interaction of teacher learning with student learning.

Methods

To inform this case study, eighteen interviews were conducted with Pagosa Springs Elementary School staff members including the two school administrators, fifteen of the total of nineteen grade level teachers, and the one school counselor (see Table 1).

The redesign of time at Pagosa Springs Elementary School was initiated and implemented under the leadership of the former principal. This principal was also interviewed to provide background and rationale for the school redesign of time. Interviews took place primarily in December, 2016. In addition to the interviews, the researcher observed and documented five collaborative teacher team meetings and collected data on additional collaborative practices occurring in the school.

As represented in Table 1, the first and second grade teachers instruct in self-contained classrooms whereas the teachers in grades three and four team teach and share students. Of the interviewed teachers at Pagosa Springs, they represent a seasoned workforce, with only three teachers having less than three years of teaching experience. However, 10 of the 15 participating teachers had less than five years of experience teaching at Pagosa Springs Elementary School indicating that the staff is relatively new at the school.

The principal, assistant principal and the school counselor of Pagosa Springs Elementary School were also interviewed. Both administrators are relatively new to the school as well as they were three months into their second year as school leaders at the time of the study. The counselor has been a member of the staff for the last five years.

The researcher also observed teachers engaged in collaborative learning experiences. Table 2 shares the grade level of the participants, the number of minutes observed, the number of participants, and the purpose of the collaborative learning meetings.

TABLE 1. INTERVIEWED TEACHERS' DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

GRADE LEVEL TAUGHT	1 st	2 nd	3 rd	4 th	ALL
NUMBER INTERVIEWED	3	5	4	3	15
SUBJECTS TAUGHT	Self-Contained	Self-Contained	2 ELA/SS 2 Math/Science	2 ELA/SS 1 Math/Science	
GENDER	3 females	5 females	3 females 1 male	2 females 1 male	13 females 2 males
ETHNICITY	3 Caucasian	4 Caucasian 1 No Answer	4 Caucasian	2 Caucasian 1 Latina	13 Caucasian 1 Latina 1 No Answer
YEARS OF EXPERIENCE	3, 20, 30	2, 6, 12, 17, 21	3, 12, 14, 24	13, 25, 30	Mean 15.47
YEARS AT PSES	3, 19, 30	1, 1, 1, 4, 5	1, 2, 3, 18,	.5, 20, 21	Mean 7.43
HIGHEST DEGREE	1 BA/BS 2 MS/MA	2 BA/BS 3 MS/MA (1 Specialist)	2 BA/BS 2 MS/MA	3 BA/BS	8 BA/BS 7 MS/MA (1 Specialist)

Source: Teacher Demographic Information Questionnaire forms completed by interviewed teachers.

TABLE 2: COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE MEETINGS OBSERVED

GRADE LEVEL	NUMBER OF MINUTES OBSERVED	NUMBER OF TEACHERS	PURPOSE
1	45	5	Professional Learning Community
2	60	5 and Title I	Professional Learning Community
3	30	2	Content: ELA
3	15	2	Content: Math/Science
4	35	4	Professional Learning Community

Source: Observational Field Notes Protocols

School Background/History

Pagosa Springs Elementary School is part of Archuleta School District 50 Joint located in the Town of Pagosa Springs, in the county of Archuleta, in the state of Colorado. Archuleta County is one of the 64 counties in the U.S. state of Colorado and is located in the southwest part of the state. According to the Archuleta County Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy [CEDS] Update (2011), the county is comprised of 1,355 square miles of which only 31% is in private ownership. Tribal lands comprise 14% of the county and 49% of the country is within the San Juan National Forest and is under the management of the U.S. Forest Service. Pagosa Springs is the county seat and the only incorporated municipality in the county. As of the 2010 census, the population was 12,084 with the estimated population for 2015 to be 12,352. Seventy-five percent of the households are families with children in the home. From 1990 to 2000, the population of Archuleta County grew by 8.5 percent annually but since then the estimated annual rate of growth has slowed down to about 2 percent. Most of the county's population is concentrated within the Town of Pagosa Springs and its surrounding subdivisions and is expected to continue its moderate growth rate through 2030. In 2005-2009, 15 percent of the population lived in poverty. Twenty percent of related children under 18 were below the poverty level, compared with 8 percent of the population 65 years of age or older. Eight percent of all families and 64 percent of families with a female householder and no spouse present had incomes below the poverty level (Archuleta County CEDS Update, 2011). According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), in 2015 76.7% of people in the county were considered White, not Hispanic or Latino, and 18.8% of the people were considered Hispanic or Latino.

According to the Archuleta School District 50 Joint website (2016), the district was consolidated in 1950 from numerous small school districts throughout Archuleta County. The school district includes all of Archuleta county and crosses into the counties of Hinsdale and Mineral. Archuleta School District 50 Joint is comprised of three campuses: Pagosa Springs Elementary School, Pagosa Springs Middle School, and Pagosa Springs High School.

Pagosa Springs Elementary prides itself in being a vibrant learning community of students. The school serves students kindergarten through fourth grade and has an enrollment of 585 students for the 2016–17 school year. The school places an emphasis on the whole child, nurturing intellectual, social-emotional, physical, and artistic aspects of each child. During the 2016–2017 school year, students are taught art, music, Spanish, daily physical education or fitness, health, library, and technology in addition to the academic subjects. For social-emotional development, students are also scheduled into a 25-minute period Advisory class using curriculum such as MindUP and 7 Habits of Happy Kids-The Leader In Me. Students chart their growth towards their personal and academic goals and do monthly civic service

projects in Advisory class. Per the assistant principal, after-school programs include tutoring, Spanish, art, choir, music, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, Girl Scouts, two religious groups, Safe Routes to School, and the grant-funded Coordinated Approach To Child Health or CATCH, an evidence-based program for fourth graders designed to promote physical activity, healthy food choices, and prevent tobacco use among elementary school-aged children.

The Colorado Department of Education (2016) assigns to each school one of four plan types depending on its performance:

Performance Plan —The school meets or exceeds statewide attainment on the performance indicators and is required to adopt and implement a Performance Plan;

Improvement Plan —The school is required to adopt and implement an Improvement Plan;

Priority Improvement Plan —The school is required to adopt and implement a Priority Improvement Plan; or

Turnaround Plan —The school is required to adopt and implement a Turnaround Plan.

For the last five years, Pagosa Springs Elementary has been directed by the Colorado Department of Education to adopt and implement an Improvement Plan with the goal of meeting or exceeding statewide attainment on the performance indicators.

The school year of Pagosa Springs Elementary School is 167 days or 978 hours of student school attendance. Per the Colorado Department of Education (2016), a school may have no fewer than 968 hours of instructional time in an elementary school.

According to the former principal, during the 2013–2014 school year, the staff members of Pagosa Springs Elementary School were implementing innovative programming. However, she said it was “piecemeal and inconsistent.” The classes and programs “were slammed into a traditional schedule.” In addition, the teachers were exhausted resulting in them not using effectively what little collaborative time they had in the current schedule. She stated, “We had grappled with it for three years with a great deal of turf wars. Everyone wanted more planning time but we didn’t have a process to reach this goal.” Both Pagosa Springs Middle and High Schools were undergoing redesign that school year supported by a Colorado Education Initiative grant. The principal of Pagosa Springs Elementary School was looking for a way for the elementary school schedule to be transformed as well. In early 2014, she had the opportunity to attend a workshop on *Time, Talent, and Resources* con-

ducted by Generation Schools Network (2017), a nonprofit that promotes student-focused public-school transformation. At the workshop, said that she felt she had found a partner in Generation Schools Network.

In March of 2014, Archuleta School District 50 contracted with Generation Schools Network to provide Pagosa Springs Elementary School assistance with Whole School Redesign and Learning and Teaching. The technical assistance provided a review of the current schedule, staff, and space opportunities and constraints toward creating a sustainable plan for more and better learning time. More specifically, the review sought to find opportunities for greater periods of uninterrupted learning time for all students, greater focus on daily collaborative time for all teachers, and allow for enhanced Advocacy programs, Global Exploration Intensives and Blended Learning opportunities for all teachers. The school staff narrowed down their wants and needs for the redesign into three main goals:

1. More uninterrupted learning time for all students
2. More collaboration time for teachers
3. A continued focus on health and wellness

The Archuleta School District funded the contract with Generation Schools Network for approximately \$15,000.

Generation Schools Network drafted the possible schedules for the staff members to consider and the Professional Learning Team, consisting of grade level teachers, specials teachers, Title I teachers, aides, and school leadership selected the final schedule. The chosen schedule provided for the following:

1. Every child participating in physical education or fitness every day (a week of physical education alternating with a week of fitness)
2. Grade level teachers team teaching: English Language Arts and Social Studies; Math and Science. (Originally, all grade levels team taught; Grades 1 and 2 are now self-contained.)
3. Every child participating in two specials per day providing 90 minutes of planning time for the same grade level teachers Monday through Thursday; 60 minutes on Fridays (The specials rotating between music, art, computer lab, health and wellness in addition to the daily physical education or fitness).
4. Larger blocks of academic instructional time

5. Twenty-five minutes of Social Emotional Learning daily (Advisory) taught by Grade 1-4 and Special Education teachers
6. Pull-out interventions for students to be done during specials rather than academic instructional time

For the three main goals to be met, specials teachers had to take on a greater load and an aide transitioned into teaching fitness. No additional Full Time Equivalent Teachers were hired. The assistant principal related that the schedule is “great” for grade level teachers. She stated that the specials teachers make the schedule work as it “may be on their backs — to their detriment.”

During the 2016–2017 school year, Pagosa Springs Elementary School had eight specials teachers, five Kindergarten teachers, six Title I/English Language Arts Teachers, five special education teachers, and nineteen grade-level teachers: five at Grade 1; five at Grade 2; four at Grade 3; and five at Grade 4 for a total of forty-three full time equivalency teachers plus two administrators and one counselor.

Pagosa Springs Elementary School implemented the new schedule during the 2014–15 school year under the leadership of the former principal and assistant principal. During that year, the staff learned to see problems as opportunities and collaboratively created solutions per the former principal. In the following school year, 2015–2016, there was a school leadership transition and the school hired a new principal and assistant principal. In this second year of implementation, the school changed the original schedule in response to the request of the first and second grade teachers: after one year of team teaching, the first and second grade teachers concluded that returning to self-contained classrooms would better serve the needs of their students. In the third year of implementation, the 2016–2017 school year, other tweaks to the schedule were made to include: 1) an afternoon recess to provide free play time for the students, 2) math intervention and enrichment, 3) literacy intervention and enrichment, 4) kindergarten teacher collaborative practice time, 5) preparation time for physical education, 6) a Title I teacher assigned to each grade level to be part of the collaborative grade-level team, 7) a Spanish class as a special, and 8) assigned duties for teachers to insure the safety of the students. These adjustments to the master schedule did not affect the amount of time designated for individual planning and collaborative practice for the grade-level teachers.

The Organization of Teacher Time and Work

The Master Schedule for Pagosa Springs Elementary School for the 2016–2017 school year has been changed minimally since the original redesign developed during the spring of 2014. As an example, Table 3 shows the daily schedule for the Grade 2 teachers. Table 4 shows that Fridays have a unique schedule because the students are released at 1:25pm rather than 3:40pm.

The key features of the Pagosa Springs teacher schedule include:

1. large blocks of uninterrupted instructional time
2. team teaching in Grade 3 and Grade 4: one teacher instructs English/Language Arts and Social Studies to two classes of students; another teacher instructs Science and Math or STEM
3. the 7:40am to 7:55am assigned duty, e.g., bus, drop-off, playground, is once per week with the other four days allocated for individual planning
4. a 90-minute block of planning time daily Monday through Thursday (60 minutes on Fridays) that is common to all teachers in the same grade level
5. two hours and fifteen minutes of whole school collaborative practice time every Friday afternoon with early release of students at 1:25pm
6. 25 minutes of Advisory daily for Social-Emotional Learning
7. a daily 45-minute physical education or fitness class for every student¹
8. an additional 45-minute daily specials class for every student that rotates between art, music, Spanish, and health

The grade level teachers teach classes of students ranging in number from 21 to 31. There are five teachers per grade level except for Grade 3 which has four teachers and the higher number of students per classroom. Teachers instruct students in classes for approximately 21-22 hours per week, depending on the grade level, all

¹ The two specials are scheduled back-to-back for the students to give the grade-level teachers 90 minutes of planning time.

■ Direct Contact with Students
 ■ Collaboration Time
 ■ Individual Teacher Time

TABLE 3: PAGOSA SPRINGS, 2016–17 MASTER SCHEDULE FOR GRADE 2 TEACHERS, MONDAY THROUGH THURSDAY

HOUR	TIME	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY
—	7:40-7:55	Duty	Individual Planning	Individual Planning	Individual Planning
0	7:55-8:10	Check in/ Announcements	Check in/ Announcements	Check in/ Announcements	Check in/ Announcements
1	8:10-9:15	Leveled Literacy	Leveled Literacy	Leveled Literacy	Leveled Literacy
—	9:15-9:35	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
2	9:40-11:10	Math	Math	Math	Math
—	11:10-11:30	Recess	Recess	Recess	Recess
—	11:30-11:50	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch	Lunch
—	11:50-12:15	Advisory	Advisory	Advisory	Advisory
3	12:15-1:35	Team Planning	Content Team Planning	Team Planning	Individual Planning
4	1:40-2:45	CKLA Skills ¹	CKLA Skills	CKLA Skills	CKLA Skills
	2:45-3:20	Social Studies/ Science	Social Studies/ Science	Social Studies/ Science	Social Studies/ Science
5	3:20-3:25	Announcements	Announcements	Announcements	Announcements
—	3:25-3:40	Individual Planning	Individual Planning	Individual Planning	Duty

TABLE 4: PAGOSA SPRINGS, 2016–17 MASTER SCHEDULE FOR GRADE 2 TEACHERS, FRIDAY

HOUR	TIME	MONDAY
—	7:40-7:55	Individual Planning
0	7:55-8:10	Check in/Announcements
1	8:10-9:10	Leveled literacy
—	9:10-9:25	Recess
2	9:25-10:10	Math
3	10:15-11:10	Individual Planning
—	11:10-11:30	Recess
—	11:30-11:50	Lunch
—	11:50-12:15	Advisory
4	12:15-1:15	CKLA Skills ¹
5	1:15-1:25	Announcements
—	1:25-3:40	Prof. Learning Community

¹ Core Knowledge Language Arts [CKLA] (2017) is a comprehensive Preschool-Grade 5 program for teaching skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking. It also builds students' knowledge and vocabulary in literature, history, geography, and science.

with the whole class except for a daily 25-minute Advisory Class. The total number of students in each grade-level are randomly divided into advisory classes instructed by their own grade level teachers plus five special education teachers to reduce the number of students in each Advisory group. Per the Pagosa Springs Elementary School Handbook (2016), the purposes of the Advisory program are as follows:

- To provide an organizational structure in which one small group of students identifies with and belongs to one educator, who nurtures, advocates for, mentors, communicates with, and shepherds through school the individuals in that group;
- To make it possible for students to belong, meet their need to affiliate with a group, and make caring manageable for a teacher, enabling the teacher to express concern in a personally satisfying way to a small number of individuals and parents;
- To provide structured time when items of importance, sometimes unexpected, can be discussed thoroughly by small groups with a higher level of trust and concern than is found in the regular classroom;
- To monitor each advisee's academic, attendance and social/emotional progress through the duration of the school year;
- To foster and facilitate formal and informal communication between parents and the school, including conducting parent-teacher conferences;
- To foster rapport, trust, friendship and team building within the advisee group.

The counselor provides weekly agendas, lesson plans and resources such as *MindUP* and *7 Habits of Happy Kids-The Leader In Me* to teachers for Advisory. There is an emphasis on teambuilding at the beginning of the year. Normally, one day per week focuses on the social/emotional development of the student and the rest of the week focuses on academic advisory, Leadership Notebook maintenance, and leadership activities. Advisors are expected to meet with all students individually on a weekly basis for academic advisement regarding their academic progress through the school year. Student-led conferences are conducted twice a year. Monthly civic service projects are also completed in Advisory.

Each daily 90-minute planning period (60-minute on Friday) has a directed purpose: three planning periods per week are designated for collaborative planning (team, content and professional learning community) and two planning periods per week are designated for individual planning. Most teachers plan, grade papers, and make calls to parents during their scheduled in-school preparation time; however, many still use weekends and after-school to finish their planning and preparation. Teachers also are assigned duties: once a week during the 7:35am–7:55am time block, during their students’ two 15–20-minute recess times, and 15–20 minutes after school. In addition to their teaching, planning, and administrative work, many teachers tutor or coach after school for a stipend. Two Family Nights usually with a Book Fair, a meal and games are held each year. Teachers volunteer for one of the Family Nights to serve the meal made by the cafeteria workers.

When asked how they would change the way their time is used if they could, *not one teacher stated that they would change the amount of planning time in their schedule.* In fact, one teacher stated, the “planning time is golden.” Another teacher stated, the “planning time is sacred.” Most comments regarding possible changes concerned shifting time during the academic teaching time from one program or subject to another, the CKLA curriculum, too many duties, and large class sizes in Grade 3.

When asked if they thought their school was unique in the way it structures teacher time and work, all but one teacher answered in the affirmative or assumed that to be true regarding the amount of planning time they had. One teacher stated that Pagosa Springs Elementary School was “unique to the planning period.” Regarding the uniqueness of the scheduled collaborative planning time, another teacher stated, “Yes...I like it. My previous school met after school.”

At Pagosa Springs Elementary School, the principal noted that there was no need for a change in policy to allow the school to organize teachers’ time differently. The existing district policy requires a minimum of one period (approximately 45 minutes) of planning time daily. Prior to the redesign, however, the planning time was not necessarily scheduled to be common to the other same grade-level teachers; therefore, it was not collaborative in nature. Per the school principal, the Teachers Union in Archuleta School District is very small and not particularly active. Rather, a District Review Committee created in 1979 represents all staff members from the three campuses and works strictly on policy regarding personnel and the work place, benefits, etc. Therefore, the District Review Committee approved the new schedule and Teachers Union opposition was not a challenge to redesigning how teacher time and work is organized. The length of the school day, 7:55am–3:25pm, is not typical of an elementary school. Per the assistant principal, the longer school day was in existence prior to the redesign and is district driven to accommodate district-wide busing. Although the longer school day is challenging for students and staff members, it did enable the redesign to meet all of the desired objectives, including collaborative practice time.

Only the grade level teachers have the large blocks of planning time in their schedules. Specials teachers must take on more responsibility to make this schedule work: the specials teacher walks the students from their classroom to the next specials class which allows the grade level teachers who would normally supervise their students from one class to another to continue in their uninterrupted collaborative practice or planning time. In addition, some specials teachers are on their own with resource students while grade-level teachers have the support of Title 1 teachers in their classrooms. When the budget would not allow for the hiring of more teachers to realize the goal of daily physical education or fitness, an aide with a fitness background willingly agreed to instruct fitness once it was deemed acceptable by the Colorado Department of Education.

Teacher Learning

Pagosa Springs Elementary School teachers have multiple ways to continue their professional learning: special trainings, conference attendance, district professional development days, school professional development days, whole school Professional Learning Communities, and during planning time.

Teachers may be directed by district or school leadership to attend special trainings during the school year that usually focus on curriculum taught by that teacher. In addition, teachers may request to attend a specific conference to further their own professional development; however, approval to attend is dependent on available funds.

Archuleta School District 50 Joint identifies two days of professional development for all educators on the school calendar. The focus of the professional development is generally the introduction and/or mastery of new curriculum instructed by the vendor trainer. Pagosa Springs Elementary School also has two days of professional development on the calendar. The principal directs this professional development based on input from the teachers and aides concerning their needs. During the two-day professional development of the 2016-2017 school year, all teachers participated in curriculum mapping activities and peer coaching. Sessions were also devoted to specific content activities, such as Lego Robotics for the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math [STEM] teachers, fitness activities for the fitness and kinder aides, Core Knowledge Language Arts mapping for the English language arts teachers.

The students are released at 1:25pm on Friday afternoons to allow the teachers to meet as a whole-school Professional Learning Community from 1:25pm until 3:40pm. Every other week, the topic of discussion is district directed: new curriculum or mandatory safety procedures. On the alternate Fridays, the principal facilitates an instruction-based Professional Learning Community staff meeting framed by the three questions put forth by R. DuFour, B. DuFour and Eaker (1998) in *Professional Learning Communities at Work: Best Practices for Enhancing Student Achievement*:

1. What is it we want students to know? (Goals/Expectations)
2. How will we know they know it? (Assessments)
3. And finally, what will we do if they don't? (Intervention)

Instructional decisions that have been made or are works in progress include no testing for kindergarteners, opting out of Social Studies State Testing, embedding Cognitive Coaching concepts into their practice, Peer-Coaching, and curriculum mapping.

These whole school Professional Learning Community meetings and the 90-minute block of planning time scheduled daily (60-minutes on Fridays) for all grade-level teachers allow for collaborative learning to occur at Pagosa Springs Elementary School while maintaining the district required individual planning time for each teacher. During the 90-minute planning block identified in the Master Schedule, individual planning occurs 90 minutes one day per week and 60 minutes on Fridays added to 15 minute blocks at the beginning and end of school four days per week for a total of 270 minutes of individual planning time per week for an average of approximately 54 minutes per day. This time is used for planning, preparation, grading, contacting parents, independent professional learning, and occasionally, providing extra instruction to a student. Individual planning time can also become collaborative practice time at the need and discretion of the teachers.

The remaining 90-minute planning blocks in the Master Schedule, three days per week for a total of 270 minutes per week is designated as collaborative practice time with a specific focus to each meeting: Professional Learning Communities [PLC]—teachers in the same grade-level, Content — teachers instructing the same subject, and Team-teachers sharing the same students. Per the principal and the Pagosa Springs Elementary School Handbook (2016), the staff members highly value and closely follow the Professional Learning Communities model as described by R. DuFour, B. DuFour, and Eaker (1998) for their collaborative practice.

The purpose of the grade-level PLC is for all same grade-level teachers to meet to receive/send communications to/from their Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) member, have discussion, provide feedback, and communicate needs and concerns to/from the monthly school-wide ILT.² One discussion observed by the researcher regarded an item on the next school-wide Instructional Leadership Team agenda: purchased curriculum provides pacing but has flexibility in delivery; mixed messages are being received by the staff members. A teacher said that, “if the canned curriculum is not adhered to – students are not getting the same [instruction].” The Title I teacher who participates in the grade-level PLC meetings stated, “I get to observe and all the 2nd grade teachers are aligned [to each other].” However, another teacher stated that there is “a lack of cohesion in vertical curriculum alignment.” Discussion followed about the pros and cons of the Engage NY curriculum, the “canned curriculum” that has been used for the last three years in Math, and ended with a recommendation to refer this concern to the ILT.

Another school-wide ILT agenda item was discussed by a different grade-level PLC: lesson plan templates. The discussion that followed included concerns regarding

² The Instructional Leadership Team consists of elected representatives from Kindergarten, grade levels 1-4, specials, and the administrative team. Per the Pagosa Springs Elementary School Handbook (2016), the purpose of the ILT is to review suggestions from staff members regarding instruction; i.e., homework policy, master schedule, evaluation, coaching, best practices, lesson-planning, etc.

the time commitment, especially for grade-level 1 and 2 teachers, if lesson plans would be required in every subject area and the reasoning behind the request. One teacher asked, “Why do [lesson plans] if we have canned curriculum?” Several other teachers nodded their heads in agreement. Another discussion centered on an assessment that had been eliminated by the district. A teacher voiced her concern that the assessment provided “consistent, longitudinal data.” Another stated that she “understands that the upper grades may feel that the assessment is not needed” but she “sees the need for a winter benchmark.” The Instructional Leadership Team members of each PLC agreed to voice the collective questions and concerns regarding these items at the next ILT meeting. School-wide ILT recommendations could potentially move up to the district level for discussion and action. Ultimately any proposed changes must be approved by the Archuleta School Board.

In the weekly PLC meeting, teachers also share differentiation and engagement strategies. One grade-level PLC discussed Math Response to Intervention (RtI). The teachers shared different RtI methods and times of instruction for the differentiated groups of students. One teacher was working with three groups of low achieving students with the basics in word problems. A colleague reinforced her work with the comment, “You’re doing an important thing — giving those basics!” One teacher shared that parents feel disengaged with math; however, sending word problems home has helped. Her colleague said, “Really? Hmm,” and made a note for herself about this practice.

Grade-level teachers also plan for their Civic Service Project and Advisory lessons during PLC. Per the Pagosa Springs Elementary School Handbook, the school-wide service project is Empty Bowls, a project of a non-profit organization that is a grass-roots effort to end hunger. Each grade level is assigned a task: making soup (K), placemats (1st), centerpieces (2nd), posters (3rd), bowls (4th), or providing entertainment (after school group). Pagosa Springs Elementary School has a sister school in Haiti. Opportunities to support the sister school occur throughout the school year. Each grade level will complete one major service project during the year. Examples include: singing to community groups, reading to preschool students, town parks clean-up, and Humane Society Animal Care.

Housekeeping items are also tended to during PLC: shared resources (e.g., computer lab set-up, computer cart, library use), plan grade level activities (e.g., field trips, projects) and events (e.g., holiday celebrations), create the digital newsletter (one team member writes it with input from the rest of the team regarding spelling words and math problems to include), and prepare report cards. Monthly, the assistant principal joins each grade-level PLC for Roll Call, a discussion of the behavior of individual students. The Title I teacher may join this meeting as well.

Teachers also meet in collaborative Content teams one or more days per week for up to 90 minutes. Grade 3 and 4 teachers are departmental meaning each teacher instructs the same content to two classes of same grade students. The two teachers instructing the same content in the same grade level meet. Since grade 1 and 2 classrooms are self-contained, all teachers instructing the same grade level meet to discuss any content area at least one day per week for up to 90 minutes during the collaborative planning period. The Title I teacher may join these meetings.

Regarding Common/Formative Assessments, the Pagosa Springs Elementary School Handbook (2016) states:

A common/formative assessment is an assessment given to all students with the intention of collaboratively examining the results for shared learning, intervention planning, assessment modifications, and lesson planning. Through the design, implementation, and analysis of the results, educators collectively become more skilled and focused at assessing, disaggregating, and using student achievement as a tool for ongoing improvement and lesson planning. A major component of the Friday Whole School Professional Learning Community time, and the Content Team Time during the week will be dedicated to collaboratively analyzing common/formative assessment data and generating lesson plans to address deficiencies. All elementary school classes are expected to administer common/formative assessments.

Content collaborative meetings are a time for sharing instructional delivery ideas, aligning curriculum pacing, developing common assessments, and overcoming obstacles. In a departmental content meeting, two teachers were observed problem-solving low spelling test scores. One stated, there is a “50% failure rate and the others are not great. Do you think we should talk to [the principal]?” They discussed the difficulty of the spelling curriculum and options to present to the principal which included to shorten the list and not have rule breaking words but keep the content words. One of the teachers said that the students were “not getting enough writing in the curriculum.” The other teacher shared how she incorporates more writing into instruction by giving a creative writing prompt on a Friday and through a three-week process of writing, self-editing, and peer editing, the students produce a finished product and have fun doing it. The first teacher took notes as her partner shared the instructional practice and said, “I like the idea of more writing.” These teachers also discussed a Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) Benchmark Assessment, asking “Have you done this? Did you see that you can adjust the grade level?” They also discussed the pacing of instruction and the students level of understanding of the readings. They reviewed the schedule for the upcoming assessment. These two teachers interacted in a friendly manner that included dosages of humor.

Another set of departmental teachers was observed in a Content meeting. They discussed alignment of content, “What are you doing for science this week?” and a possible extension activity. For math, they shared fun techniques to remember formulas and how to assist students having difficulty with rounding including the use of visuals and providing a rationale.

In a Content discussion among the grade-level 1 and 2 teachers in self-contained classrooms, the teachers were observed collaborating on many aspects of their instruction from how to put more emphasis on social studies and science, to parent concerns, to scheduling a math intervention, to sharing resources. The teachers brainstormed ideas for Project-Based-Learning integrating social studies and science. Ideas included a Night of Looking at the Stars with an astrologist, a guest speaker on gemstones, and a more involved project that would require one hour a day for three weeks. The teachers requested more information about the project from the teachers presenting the ideas before deciding. A parent concern regarding the nonexistence of cursive writing in the curriculum was raised and discussed. It was decided to refer this concern to the school-wide ILT as it is a district issue. There was a Walk to Math³ update with a discussion of how to differentiate and the sharing of game activities with number cards and dice. One teacher asked, “When shall we start Walk to Math?” The teachers discussed the question and scheduled the practice to begin after winter vacation. In response to the statement, “I feel that I’m not hitting science very much,” others shared the excitement and engagement the students had with *Mystery Science.com* and *Inspire Science*. One teacher shared her password to the on-line resource and discussion followed to ensure that all teachers would be at the same place in all content areas when leaving for winter break. After a 60-minute collaborative meeting concluded, a teacher asked another as she walked out of the room with her colleague, “What do you use for...?” The collaboration about instructional content continued informally.

During Content collaborative time in past school years, grade-level teachers have observed a teacher one grade above or below that which they teach to improve their own instruction. Per the Pagosa Springs Elementary School Handbook (2016), the structure of these Learning Walks or Peer Coaching are to be revised this school year by building leadership based on ITL recommendations. All teaching staff will be expected to complete one Learning Walk per quarter. One teacher shared with the researcher that this practice was a type of teacher learning. She said it was an “opportunity to improve our own teaching” and that it had not occurred yet in the present school year.

³ Per Volk, (2014), Walk to Math is the use of grouping students according to their ability and having them walk to the teacher instructing their level.

In Grades 3 and 4, an English Language Arts/social studies teacher is paired with a math/science teacher and shares two classes of students. The paired teachers in the same grade level form a team and meet one or more days per week for up to 90 minutes. Since grade 1 and 2 classrooms are self-contained, all teachers instructing the same grade level meet to discuss the students at least one day per week for up to 90 minutes during the collaborative planning period. Even though they do not share the same students, similar conversations can occur. The Title I teacher may join these meetings.

Per the teachers interviewed, this time is used to discuss the academic growth, behavior, and concerns of their shared students including family issues. They share classroom management techniques with each other and agree on non-negotiables for behavior. In one meeting, the teachers were observed discussing an ongoing student behavioral issue. A teacher stated her belief that it was a “cry for help.” Possible solutions were discussed including the use of student sign-out sheets when leaving the room, additional support by the student’s advisory teacher, and referral of this student to the school counselor. “Is there any student we should discuss? How is [student] doing?” was asked by another teacher. The teachers reported on the student and how a new seating chart has improved the student’s behavior. A teacher said, “He likes school — maybe for the first time in his life.” Another said of the same student, “[The student] is doing great. Remember last year?”

The collaborative time at Pagosa Springs Elementary School, however, is somewhat more fluid than what the schedule might indicate. The teachers may meet more often as needed or they may shorten a meeting when it is perceived that there is nothing to discuss. Six of the fifteen teachers interviewed mentioned that informal collaboration occurs during the day, before or after school as is common in the teaching profession.

Collaboration occurs also at the district and school level. Representatives from the staff of Pagosa Springs Elementary School participate on eleven different district teams. At the school level, collaborative teams are the: Instructional Leadership Team, the Administrative Team, the Student Success Team with grade-level representation, the Response to Intervention Team, and the all staff Professional Learning Communities that meet on alternate Friday afternoons.

Benefits of collaboration. The teachers interviewed felt they derived many benefits from meeting collaboratively. Thirteen of the fifteen teachers interviewed mentioned the opportunity to learn from each other or as one teacher said, “teach each other.” They learn from others with different backgrounds and levels of experience. The collaborative practice builds community, a common culture, moral support and trust. One teacher said, “Someone is there to help.” Another said that other teachers “have your back” and another said, “you never feel like you’re on your own.” One veteran teacher said that collaborative practice is “terrific for the kids and for me to

be sane.” Same content teachers saw benefits in aligning their pacing and delivery, bouncing ideas off each other, and sharing different approaches. One teacher saw a benefit in being “on the same page on content.” Another teacher stated, “The plan is better with different perspectives.”

Challenges to collaboration. While collaborative practice amongst teachers yields many benefits, it can also have its challenges. For example a teacher at Pagosa Springs Elementary School said whether collaborative learning is beneficial or not depends on who you are learning with since collaborating can be very stressful. Teachers differ in their experience, age, and teaching philosophies as another pointed out. When asked about the challenges of collaboration, one said “not all agree;” another said, the “complaining.” The latter also stated that some teachers can be “territorial and catty” and recommended that the team members create opportunities to bond on a personal level — like “go to lunch weekly.” Another teacher said that it is a hard year when challenged to “bring along” a new teacher. So, there are challenges to collaborative learning as well. Teachers suggested that their collaborative practice could be made more effective by revisiting the norms, using PLC time to discuss and plan Advisory, the use of protocols, and doing a “better job of looking at data.”

Ten of the fifteen teachers interviewed were staff members at the school when the school redesign occurred. Three teachers voiced their frustrations at how quickly the change process occurred and felt that the new schedule — especially team teaching — was forced upon them with the kinks not worked out. One teacher stated that there was “a lot of frustration and animosity” because the schedule was not ready when the school year started. There was “a week of chaos.” Another stated that the response to objections to team teaching was “deal with it.” Most of the teachers interviewed understood the felt needs that drove the redesign and the process itself as described by the former principal previously. However, they agreed that the process could have been smoother. From the administration’s perspective, the district superintendent stated:

I think Generation Schools provided an outside perspective through the re-organization process at Pagosa Springs Elementary School, something that can be very powerful for a school that has been resistant to internal suggestions regarding change...I don’t think that the leadership at Pagosa Springs Elementary School could have accomplished the re-design without the outside help.

The former principal stated, “Having an outside facilitator support and guide the process helped Pagosa Springs Elementary School staff get out of their individual lenses and look outside of the box. The Generation Schools Network process created a staff of problem solvers.” The school counselor who was part of the leadership team during the redesign stated:

I feel like having an outside agency, like Generation Schools, was quite necessary. The reason being, we needed an outside lens looking at the issues we were having to help us move past the place where we were stuck. It's hard to see solutions, at times, when you're swallowed up in it.

To plan for a smoother transition to a redesigned schedule, the school counselor advised administrators in other schools who would like to structure teachers' time and work innovatively to: 1) plan for the entire redesign process to take 18-24 months to garner staff member input and support to alleviate angst, 2) communication should come directly from the administrative team to the staff members and not rely solely on intermediaries such as the Instructional Leadership Team Leaders to convey the information, and 3) discuss the decision-making process with all staff members so that it is completely transparent. If some decisions will be made by the administrative team, let it be known to all. The assistant principal advised to recognize teachers as professionals and to limit duties. The school principal advised using mechanisms like a Building Leadership Team to get all staff members involved, address the questions of "What is going well? What could be better?" and from the responses build a framework based on the mission statement and values of the school. The principal said, "If you value it, put it into your schedule."

The principal acknowledged that improvements could be made in the collaborative learning opportunities at Pagosa Springs Elementary School. Again, the 2016-2017 school year was his second year as principal at the school. He believes it will take at least three years to meet with success. Last year, his first as principal, was spent in observation and analysis. Minor scheduling and program changes were made for this school year – mostly at the teachers' request. Next year, he believes that all will come together. The principal has observed and analyzed the current collaborative practice at Pagosa Springs Elementary School as well. Based on his training and readings in collaborative practice and the recommendations of the adopted Professional Learning Communities model (DuFour, et al, 1998), he intends to do the following next school year:

- become more engaged in the collaborative practice meetings to "kick things up a notch"
- require notes to be recorded and sent to him via Google Docs allowing him to respond to questions
- garner a firm commitment to norms
- garner a firm commitment to the adopted curriculum
- propose a deeper focus on data

The school counselor agrees with the principal on the last point that a deeper focus on data is needed. She stated that the reinstatement of the practice, “Name and Claim” would be beneficial. The former principal explained that Name and Claim is the practice of collaboratively identifying at-risk students based on their achievement data and having each teacher assume more responsibility for individual students’ progress. The assistant principal and the school counselor also stated that the use of protocols to look at student work would be of value. Two of the three school leadership team members stated that most of the teachers are using collaborative practice time effectively. The school counselor stated, “The majority are using collaborative time well.” The assistant principal deemed collaborative learning at Pagosa Springs Elementary School as “worthwhile.”

Interaction of Teacher and Student Learning

Thirteen of the fifteen teachers interviewed noted that the students benefit from teachers engaging in collaborative practice. Five of the seven Grade 3 and 4 teachers interviewed felt that the students benefit from the team teaching and the same content meetings; that the planning and delivery of instruction is better because of the collaborative sharing of perspectives and ideas. A Grade 4 teacher stated, “Better communication results in new ideas which results in better learning.” Even in the self-contained, Grade 1 and 2 classrooms, teachers felt that collaborative learning gives teachers the confidence to deliver a better lesson. One teacher stated that students are provided an “optimal learning experience.” When asked if what gets discussed during the teacher collaboration time translates into learning opportunities for students, a veteran teacher stated, “Sharing for what works — huge!” Teachers discuss each student’s behavior, growth, and development in collaborative practice devising plans of action for assistance. They identify students in need of intervention and schedule them for the appropriate assistance. In fact, after one year of implementation of the redesigned schedule, office referrals for negative student behavior decreased by 30 percent per the former principal and Pagosa Springs Elementary School was recognized as a 2015 Healthy School Champion by the Colorado Education Initiative (2016). The Healthy School Champion recognition continued for school years 2016 and 2017. The current principal stated that he is a “big believer in teacher collaboration to contribute to student learning.” The consensus is that if the collaborative practice is effective, the students reap the rewards.

Enabling Conditions that Facilitate the School's Use of Time for Teachers' Work

Pagosa Springs Elementary School has successfully organized teachers' time and work to meet the stated collaborative goals: more uninterrupted learning time for all students, more collaboration time for teachers, and a continued focus on health and wellness. The school's innovative use of time is supported by the following enabling conditions: support from the district office, strong leadership, shared decision-making, and teacher flexibility.

Support from the District Office. Support from the district office was found in existing policies, in their recognition of the school's need of outside agency assistance, and the funding of that need.

Two district policies in existence prior to the reorganization of teachers' time and work provided guidelines for the reorganization. One policy requires a minimum of one period (approximately 45 minutes) of individual planning time daily per teacher. The total per week of required individual planning time is approximately 225 minutes. In the innovative Master Schedule, teachers have 90 minutes of individual planning time scheduled once during the first four days of the week and 60 minutes on Friday for a total of 150 scheduled minutes of individual planning time. The remaining district guaranteed 75 minutes of individual planning time plus additional minutes are scheduled in 15 minute blocks before and after school four days per week (a duty is scheduled the fifth day). Collaborative planning time is scheduled for three, 90 minute blocks per week, each with a designated purpose. If the collaborative planning does not last for the entire 90 minutes, the teachers can use the remaining time for individual planning.

The other district policy in existence prior to the reorganization of teachers' time and work is the length of the elementary school day set from 7:55am until 3:25pm to accommodate district-wide busing. The 7.5-hour school day is longer than the typical length of day at most elementary schools. This policy gave adequate time in the school day for the goals of the reorganization to be met.

The district and school leadership recognized that the staff members of the school were resistant to internal suggestions regarding change when it came to reorganizing teachers' time and work and needed outside assistance. The staff members had implemented innovative programming; but shoved into a traditional schedule with little collaborative time. The staff members had grappled with the schedule for three years previously with many turf wars according to the former principal. The district recognized the need of the staff members and contracted with an outside technical assistance provider to facilitate the change process; thereby assisting in the establishment of a collaborative school culture.

Strong Leadership. Strong school leadership enabled the school to plan for the reorganization of teachers' time and work and to continue to improve the schedule and collaborative practices.

The former leadership of the school worked alongside her staff members for years to solve the scheduling difficulties and turf wars preventing the accomplishment of their goals. Her initiative in seeking outside guidance led to the technical assistance provider being contracted by the district to facilitate the change process.

The current leadership of the school highly values and closely follows a collaborative practice model about which resources are available in the professional library for current and new staff members. This model serves as a foundation to all staff members and new staff members in their collaborative practice. The school handbook states the expectations for collaborative practice regarding the driving questions that guide all collaborative practice, the expected processes, and required norms. The current leadership continues to monitor the teachers' collaborative practice, facilitates the entire school collaborative team meetings, and sets the vision for improvement based on input from the teachers.

Shared Decision-Making. Shared decision-making enabled the reorganization of teachers' time and work; but not without some stumbling blocks.

As stated previously, the staff members struggled for several years in their attempts to increase their collaborative planning time in the Master Schedule while addressing additional objectives. It took the intervention of a technical assistance provider to facilitate the change process while simultaneously laying the ground work for a collaborative culture in the school. Professional development in the collaborative practice model assisted in the development of a school practice of shared decision-making. Collaborative decision-making was utilized to determine the goals of the redesign while understanding the necessity of change in teachers' work and roles for its successful implementation. Shared decision-making continues to be the method by which decisions are made in all teams, including the collaborative teacher teams, the whole school Professional Learning Community and the Instructional Learning Team.

Teacher Flexibility. The flexibility and agreeability of the teachers has enabled the reorganization of teachers' time and work.

The District Review Committee comprised of staff members from all three school campuses approved the new schedule and teachers agreed to several changes to their roles and work to meet the stated goals of the reorganization. One change agreed upon by all teachers was the reorganization of individual planning time as discussed previously. Another change agreed upon by the specials teachers was the assumption of the responsibility of supervising students as they move from one special to another — a responsibility formerly of the grade-level teachers. Without specific aides agreeing to instruct specials classes where permitted under state guidelines, the reorganization of the Master Schedule would not have occurred unless additional teachers were hired.

Conclusion

Although Pagosa Springs Elementary School completed the process to reorganize teacher time and work in the spring of 2014 and the staff members are presently in the third school year of implementation of the redesigned schedule, it must be remembered that the current principal and assistant principal assumed their roles during the second year of implementation. Changes in leadership can stall forward movement. At Pagosa Elementary School, the innovative scheduling of teachers' work and learning is still operative and plans are underway to improve the teachers' collaborative practice for the 2017–2018 school year. In the meantime, teachers and students are reaping the benefits of collaborative practice. With reflection on their practice, there is reason to believe the teachers' collaborative practice will become even more effective in improving their teaching quality and student learning.

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