

A guide to making meetings intentional

A team meeting should be functional and productive. To do that, administrators or teacher leaders can reference these four pillars, drawn from author Elisa MacDonald's popular professional development books.



Set up the right conditions

Every meeting should have an objective or goal in mind.

The educators in the meeting should discuss what they want to observe in class—for example, focusing on how students are talking about math concepts and how they're making sense of numbers.

Meetings need to be collegial, functional, engaging, and productive.

MacDonald said the most important feature, though, is making sure the meeting leads to something actionable. For example, did students' grades improve because of an intentional practice discussed and applied by the teachers in the meeting?

School leaders can use meeting time to align teachers with the larger school goals.

For instance, if leaders want teachers to use data in making decisions, teachers need to discuss the right type of data in the meetings. For a discussion on why students didn't do well on a multiple-choice assessment, teachers should bring in examples of students' work to assess why they got the questions wrong.

Manage conflict, invite dissent

Meetings should be congenial, but leaders should invite multiple points of view—even when there's consensus about the next steps.

MacDonald suggests introducing an additional data point or piece of evidence to the discussion, so participants can discuss what would happen if they chose another way of doing things.

Leaders need to manage conflict when it flares up.

Conflicts arise when people aren't willing to listen, or they have a point to prove. Leaders need to move their team members from a proving stance to a "learning" stance. Everyone needs to reflect on why they are in conflict, if they're taking it personally, or if they're open to other points of view.

Following a protocol can help: The meeting's facilitator can ask those who disagree with a policy or rule to defend it.

This helps to develop a different point of view, and because it's part of a protocol, team members know how the meeting will unfold in terms of arguments and debates.

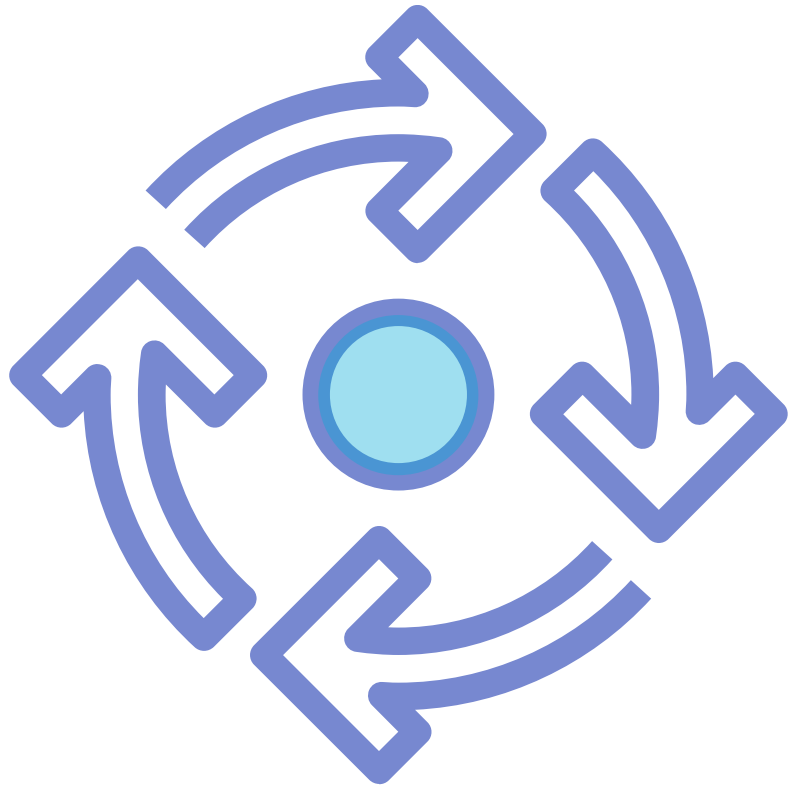
Prepare for prep time

Teachers don't have unlimited time to devote to meetings.

But leaders can ask them to do a little preparation to turn a meeting into a learning space. For instance, reading a chapter from a book or watching a video about a student learning challenge the group is working on beforehand can maximize productivity.

Leaders should distribute the main questions or challenges beforehand and have team members reflect on potential solutions, instead of introducing the challenge during the meeting.

Prep work is dependent on the intended outcome of the meeting. For instance, if a group wants to discuss scoring in a particular subject, teachers can bring in their graded assignments for discussion.



Meetings shouldn't stand alone. They are part of an inquiry cycle

Meetings as learning spaces don't exist in a vacuum.

Leaders should help teachers decide on strategies to solve a challenge with students, and teachers should have time to apply these strategies in their classes.

This work should be a process of constant improvement.

Teachers can observe each other when they use one of the strategies they agreed upon in the meeting. These strategies can change depending on how they're received in the classroom.

Is the strategy working?

The group should decide on some measurable indicators in advance and bring data back to subsequent meetings to check progress.

SOURCE: Education Week interview with Elisa MacDonald