

Top Teaming Practices of Successful Teams

Prepared by Nancy Doda, Ph. D.,

www.teacher-to-teacher.com

1. Best teams build a team community through a host of practices including but not limited to: using the first week of school to create a sense of belonging, a team identity, a Team constitution, or set of “team agreements. Moreover, teams work to develop a positive peer culture characterized by respectful and caring peer relationships through team building activities, team special events, team days, team town meetings, and the use of steady team rituals. An Advisory program, if present can likewise serve to support community building within the Team.
2. Best teams plan for effective team meetings with some degree of formality. Agendas, record keeping, labor distribution, and other effective meeting tools are applied. Moreover, teams work to be sure that Team meetings allow time for work on curriculum and instruction so as not to be inundated in kid talk and parent meetings.
3. Best teams engage students as active participants in many aspects of team life including but not limited to: developing the team norms to live by, assisting with planning special events, assisting with team recognition, helping discuss problems encountered in team life, working to design rubrics, and even assisting in brainstorming viable projects and developing themes of units to study.
4. Best teams work hard to safeguard the feelings of all team members. This means teams regularly “check-in” on the emotional status of team teachers/members, seeking to ascertain how everyone is coping with school and team life. Team members agree on “ground rules” they try to honor during meetings. This can be a protective measure.
5. Best teams plan interdisciplinary lessons and units of personal and social significance and are always asking, “will students see this as meaningful, relevant and interesting?”
6. Best teams rotate roles and responsibilities to insure no one team member is taxed unfairly.
7. Best teams use their teaching time creatively and strategically to best deliver the curriculum. This may mean that they group and regroup students at times to respond to needs. It may also mean that large group team activities are conducted at times by dropping one class for a day and addressing that content area in the large group team session or in another way.
8. Best teams do not drown in either “student talk” nor parent conferences but set aside days of the week in balanced ways insuring that no less than one day per week of Team Planning time is devoted to Curriculum and Instruction.
9. Best teams use a streamlined format for conducting Team Parent Conferences in which one teacher member summarizes the state of affairs and concerns leaving a substantial amount of time to delineate a reparative plan of action.

Mistakes to Avoid in Organizing Effective Teaching Teams

Prepared by Nancy Doda, Ph.D.,

1. Failing to place team organization as the top scheduling priority so that all else revolves around it – and not the other way around.
2. Failing to understand that teams must remain in tact for years to evolve and grow over time.
3. Failing to consider personalities and interpersonal variables when staffing teaching teams and planning for staff development. It is helpful when replacing a team member that the team can share in the interview experience and decision-making.
4. Attempting to team without creating a plan for the participation of all faculty in the exploratory, physical education, special education, unified arts and foreign language areas, which must include plans for regular communication between teamed teachers and those who do not teach on a team.
5. Failing to organize teams so that they are comprised of teachers who share a common planning period, common students, a common schedule, and, a common area of the building.
6. Failing to understand the significance of team identity and sense of community, and the power of symbols, ritual, and ceremony in the life of the team.
7. Failing to balance the student populations on teams to insure that no one team has a disproportionate number of students in any one category (eg; high ability, special needs, remedial, etc.)
8. Failing to nurture the whole faculty esprit de corps to sustain helpful connections within and outside of teams.
9. Failing to set and monitor goals for the growth and development of teams.
10. Failing to appreciate that the interdisciplinary team organization is different from departmentalization. The Interdisciplinary arrangement is intended to maximize the Interdisciplinary opportunities it affords.

Source: Erb, Thomas O. and Doda, Nancy M., *Team Organization: Promise, practice, and possibilities* (1998) Washington, DC: National Education Association. Pp. 116-122.