



Instructional Planning Time for Teachers

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To be effective, South Carolina teachers need the involvement of a supportive administrative staff, instructional leadership, student behavior, adequate resources, parental involvement, a safe school, and sufficient time for instructional planning. Teachers depend on the state of South Carolina and local school districts to meet these needs.

There are three different scenarios related to instructional planning time that need attention. Some teachers do not have planning time; some teachers have an insufficient amount of planning time; and some administrators require teachers use their planning time for other purposes.

The lack of sufficient instructional planning time for teachers is not a new or recent problem. This suggests that school districts do not see a connection between planning time and teacher morale and turnover, or recognize the corresponding impact of teacher turnover on student achievement.

Researchers for the 2006 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*¹ found that one in every 11 teachers is dissatisfied with teaching and that 25 percent of teachers want to leave teaching in the next five years.

The survey listed the factors that lead to job satisfaction for teachers. Here are a few:

- Teacher feels that his/her salary is fair for the work done.
- Teacher has enough time for planning and grading.
- School does not have problems with threats to teachers or staff by students.
- School does not have problems with disorderly student behavior.
- Teacher is treated as a professional by community.
- Teacher has adequate involvement in team building and problem-solving.
- Teacher has adequate ability to influence policies that affect him/her.\
- Teacher has adequate time for classroom instruction.

A closer look at the problem:

Schools operate on a set schedule that usually begins no less than thirty minutes prior to the arrival of students. Teachers are required to be at school, in place, and engaged in assigned duties

¹ <http://www.eric.ed.gov/PDFS/ED496558.pdf>

during that thirty-minute period and therefore, that time provides no opportunity for planning. After the release of students in the afternoon, school schedules vary. Teachers may be in required duties and meetings, parent conferences, and so forth. One can drive by most schools in South Carolina and see that teachers are still working well into the evening.

Protected planning time provides teachers with time for the following:

- prepare lessons
- contact parents
- handle discipline
- meet with administration
- meet with academic teams
- attend to personal needs
- handle mail, copies, and phone calls
- I.E.P. meetings
- parent conferences
- work related to ADEPT

How will teachers who do not have sufficient planning time get this work done? Placing the burden on teachers to work evenings, weekends, holidays and summers is not the answer. Teachers forced to choose between their jobs, their personal well-being and their families are in an impossible situation. Making the best decision they can, may not be accepted, understood, or forgiven, if it short-changes instruction.

Without sufficient planning, instruction is affected and teacher well-being may be jeopardized by 190 days of physical and mental stress.

We must not talk about what is best for students without regard for what is best for teachers. These two goals are not mutually exclusive. When teachers are not successful, whether they leave the profession or stay in and struggle, there is a monetary and human cost to school districts, students and ultimately the community. There is a ripple effect and everyone pays a price.

The SCEA supports state legislation and local school district policies that provide sufficient instructional planning time for teachers.

These policies should include the following provisions:

1. Teachers shall be provided instructional planning time during each workday equal to the length of a regular class period. In schools where planning times vary, a minimum of no less than forty-five minutes shall be provided.
2. Instructional planning time shall be free of assigned duties or tasks.
3. If a teacher is requested to perform other tasks during instructional planning time, the teacher shall be compensated in an amount equal to the teacher's pro rata hourly rate for each hour of planning time lost.

For more information, contact Jackie Hicks, The SCEA President, jhicks@thescea.org.