

THE EFFECTS OF TEACHER COLLABORATION ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

In recent years, there has been pressure on schools to provide empirical evidence of student achievement through testing. This demand for student achievement has driven schools to analyze the relationship between test results and teachers' pedagogy. Analysis of this relationship shows the correlation between academic achievement and teacher collaboration, which demonstrates a positive trend.ⁱ Teacher collaboration has proven to have a positive performance effect on teachers, and it is an accepted fact that better educators generate better students. Consequently, better students produce better testing results, which requires purposeful teacher collaboration. However, effective teacher collaboration requires a deliberate academic and leadership philosophy.ⁱⁱ Without the proper environment and administrative support, collaboration is not effective in either teacher development or student achievement.

Secondary-level education, middle and high school, is better suited for teacher collaboration than the elementary level, primarily due to scheduling. At the secondary level, students rotate subjects and classrooms, allowing students to switch learning environments and subjects. This is a stark contrast to elementary school, in which teachers are required to teach all core subject matters to a set cohort of students in the same classroom. Historically, teaching started in one-room schoolhouses where collaboration between teachers did not exist because teaching was an independent profession. That ideology of isolation and independence is pervasive in today's culture but is challenged for the betterment of the students and the profession. Teachers have autonomy over their subject matter and continue to be independent in the classroom, using their preferred teaching methods that work best for their students, through trial and error, and modeling teaching styles from their own experience as students.ⁱⁱⁱ However, this approach may leave teachers without the appropriate peer and professional support they need to develop their trade.

School administrations have recognized that collaboration is crucial to the development of their teachers, however, a proven methodology by which to foster this collaboration has only recently been explored by academic analysis. Studies show that only by enforcing a structure in which teachers' offices are located

outside of the classroom is collaboration truly fostered. This deliberate zoning of learning space and teacher working space creates a conducive environment in which teachers are encouraged to exclusively teach within classrooms.^{iv} Meanwhile, all administrative duties such as planning curriculum, prepping, and grading take place in collaborative spaces by which a teacher can choose to work independently or in a group at either their private desk or a communal work space.

By encouraging teachers to perform administrative tasks outside of the classrooms, empirical data through interviews and surveys shows that teachers are not only able to learn from one another, but that collaboration also produces a positive effect on their students. This conclusion can be measured by the effectiveness of teaching on grades as well as the reduction in student-teacher conflicts and student-peer conflicts. As students rotate among multiple teachers at the secondary level, collaborative teaching enables teachers and administrators to better track student achievement as well as share best practices on an individual student basis.^v This positive correlation between teacher collaboration and student achievement has only recently been tracked and documented,^{vi} however, without the support from administration, proper teacher scheduling, and dedicated spaces, the full benefits of teacher collaboration cannot be expected.

Districts that prohibit teachers from “classroom-based offices” are the only districts where any teacher collaboration happens at a meaningful level.^{vii} Artificial collaboration exclusively conducted in teacher lounges or at administrative meetings is insufficient in developing the level of collaboration necessary to drive performance advancements in both teachers and students.^{viii} Another positive effect of reducing teacher classroom ownership is the increase in classroom utilization for learning rather than for teacher breaks and preparation. In turn, schools can be constructed slightly smaller without affecting the learning space. Similarly, schools can be constructed at the same size, and the square footage gain can create other learning environments, such as larger gathering spaces outside the classroom.

Teacher collaboration spaces are not a trend sweeping the nation. The implementation and the study of these spaces started over a decade ago, but have been difficult to take hold. It is only through positive school leadership and the willingness of the administration to encourage change that students and teachers will realize the benefits.

ⁱ Goddard, Yvonne, Roger Goddard, and Megan Tschannen-Moran. "A Theoretical and Empirical Investigation of Teacher Collaboration for School Improvement and Student Achievement in Public Elementary Schools." *Teachers College Record* 109, no. 4 (April 04, 2007): 877–96.

ⁱⁱ Gordon, Douglas. "Teacher Workspaces." *National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities*, October 2010,.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} Goddard, et al., 2007.

^v Ibid.

^{vi} Ibid.

^{vii} Gordon, 2010.

^{viii} "Making Space: The Value of Teacher Collaboration," *Education Digest* 80, no. 2 (October 2014).