

# Time is of the Essence:

*Finding more time by building stronger collaboration within teams*

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# Background Leading to My Inquiry

## Context

- ◆ Staff of over 60 members
- ◆ Last three years - Replaced ½ of teaching staff
- ◆ New teachers requiring more coaching and problem solving skills
- ◆ 30-40% of day was being devoted to solving issues

## The Issue

- ◆ Many new teachers to support
  - ◇ Teams
  - ◇ Students
  - ◇ Parents
- ◆ Lack of problem solving skills
- ◆ Merge new and veteran teachers on teams

## My Wondering

- ◆ With this purpose, I wondered if I established stronger teaching teams, would it create a culture of support and problem solving that would cause positive ripples far beyond the classroom that would eventually allow me, and other building leaders, to have more time to devote to other priorities?

# My Actions

## Gained Insights

- ◆ Brene Brown - Onboarding - set expectations early
- ◆ Met individually with team members
- ◆ Observed highly functioning grade level teams
- ◆ Observed team meetings of struggling grade level teams

## What I Did

- ◆ One-on-one coaching
  - ◇ Strengths
- ◆ Create agendas for team meetings
- ◆ Establish norms
- ◆ Assign roles
- ◆ Assign mentor teams
- ◆ Create Google Doc for communication
- ◆ Onboarding

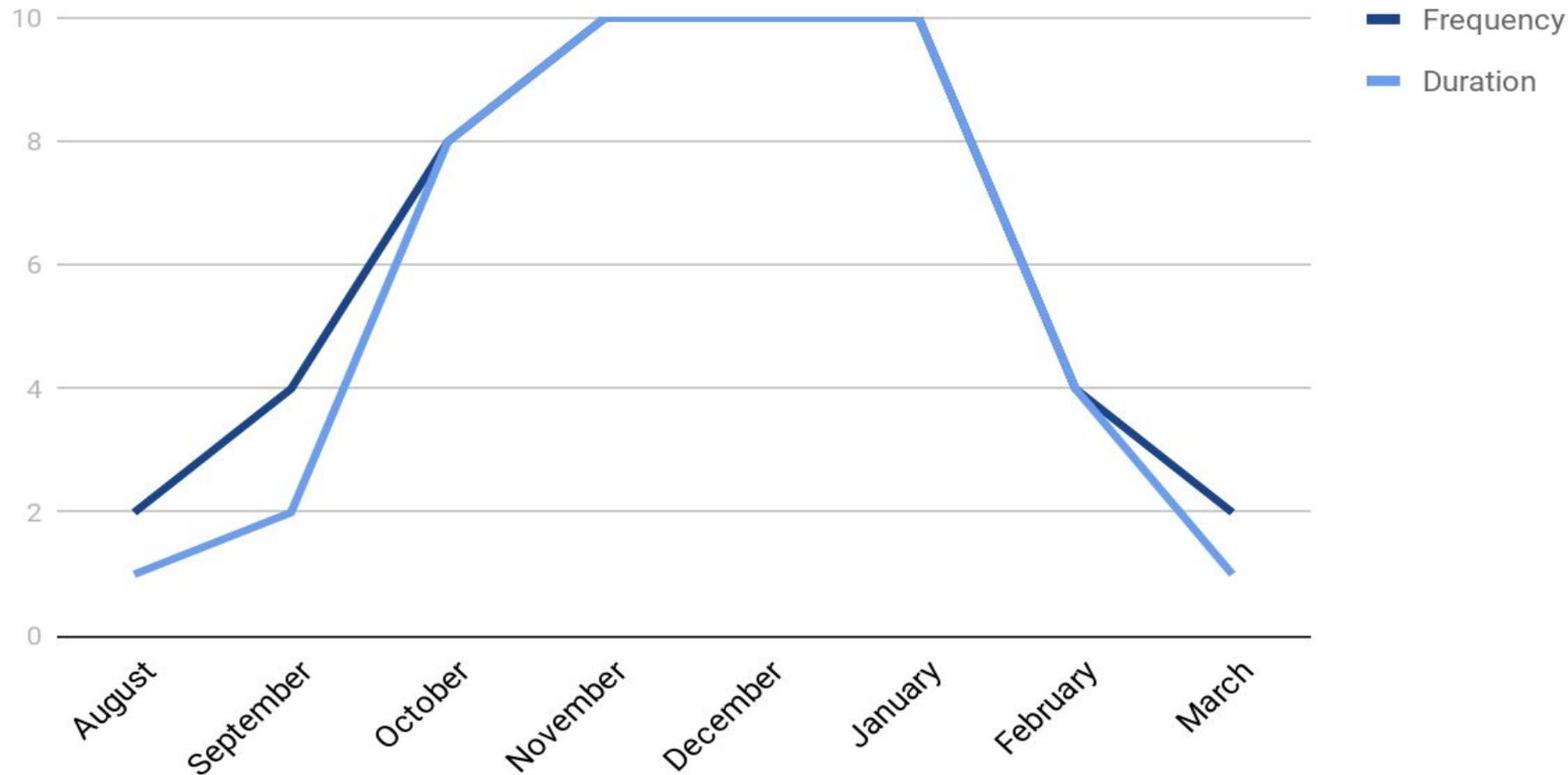
# Data Collection

- ◆ Tracked frequency and duration of individual teacher meetings/contact
  - ◇ Anecdotal notes
- ◆ Feedback
  - ◇ Specific Check-ins
  - ◇ Observations

## My Data

- ◆ At least 10 personnel conflicts a week - approx an hour each
  - ◇ Down to 2 personnel conflicts for a total of one hour per week
- ◆ Observations from grade level / staff meetings
- ◆ Anecdotal records

# Unproductive Time (Hours per Week)



# My Discoveries

- ◆ Teachers, just as students, needed to learn how to solve their own problems with support and direction in order to create collaborative, high-functioning teams.
- ◆ The shared ownership that was developed with the teams created overall stronger teaching teams.
- ◆ More time was freed to work with students, observe teachers, communicate with families and focus on school initiatives.

## Where I am Heading Next

- ◆ More proactive in guiding new teachers on how to be part of a collaborative team
  - ◇ Introductory one-on-one meetings
- ◆ Use this approach with all PLCs
- ◆ Continue to monitor strategies discussed within teams

# Bibliography

- ◆ Brown, B. (2018) *Dare to Lead*. New York, New York: Penguin Random House.
- ◆ Gordon, J. (2018) *The Power of a Positive Team*. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley.
- ◆ Whittaker, T. (2012) *What Great Principals Do Differently*. New York, New York: Routledge.

“ Leaders must either invest a reasonable amount of time attending to fears and feelings or squander an unreasonable amount of time trying to manage ineffective and unproductive behavior. ”

Dr. Brene Brown - *Dare to Lead*



## **Time is of the Essence**

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### **Background Leading to My Inquiry**

Crichfield Elementary School has a total of 580 students and over 60 staff members. Over the last three years, I have had to replace half of my teaching staff due mostly to retirement and a couple of relocations. I have found that new teachers are struggling to function within collaborative teaching teams and require additional coaching with regard to adult problem solving. Additionally, veteran teachers were exhibiting difficulty working with the new teachers. This resulted in 30-40% of my day spent putting out fires and counseling teachers.

### **The Purpose of My Inquiry**

The purpose of my action research was to see if I taught and coached teachers how to work collaboratively if this would increase their problem solving skill set, thus reducing the amount of time I spent putting out fires and ultimately give me more time to work with students, observe teachers, communicate with families and focus on school initiatives.

### **My Wondering**

With this purpose, I wondered if I established stronger teaching teams, would it create a culture of support and problem solving that would cause positive ripples far beyond the classroom that would eventually allow me, and other building leaders, to have more time to devote to other priorities?

### **My Actions**

I enjoy reading, researching and listening to speakers from a variety of areas of expertise. I use what I have learned in my daily practices and refer to them often to provide support for others based on individual perspectives--specifically, Dr. Brene Brown's concept of "onboarding,"

which stresses the importance of being proactive and teaching skills and expectations at the beginning verses dealing with problems throughout the year.

I began my research by finding time for individual coaching for new teachers. This provided me with valuable information, which I used to identify the individual strengths of each teacher. I later used this information to help teaching teams assign roles to each member (meeting jobs and/or curriculum content areas).

As I worked with the teachers, I modeled and discussed the importance of creating meeting agendas, assigning roles within the team and establishing meeting norms. Additionally, I paired up struggling teaching teams with established and productive teaching teams so that they could see a highly functioning team in action.

Teams were encouraged to create weekly Google docs to communicate ideas, lessons and happenings with one another in a blog-type fashion.

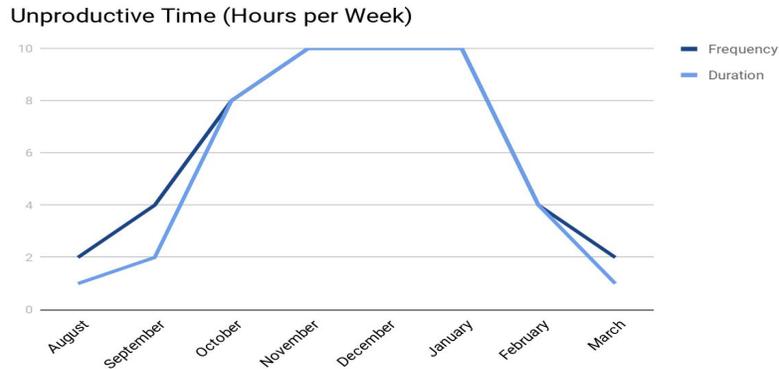
Each of these steps was focused on opening stronger lines of communication between group members, alleviating the need for me to step in and ultimately providing myself with more time.

### **Data Collection**

My data collection began with a review of anecdotal notes, which provided me with information regarding the frequency and duration of unproductive individual meeting time with teachers. Teachers would spend hours in my office each week, expressing concerns about coworkers.

As a result, I scheduled specific check-in times with the individual teachers to reflect on the use of strategies that I shared with each of them. We also continued to discuss plans to improve collaboration. Additionally, I observed their behaviors and use of recommended approaches in large and small group settings with coworkers.

### **My Data**



The beginning of the school year started off with a honeymoon period. Shortly after the wonder of the new year went away, frustrations began to set in, resulting in an increase of teachers requesting to meet with me to discuss issues and concerns. The majority of the concerns pertained to their teaching teams and lack of collaboration and communication. This time began to increase rapidly in frequency (number of visits) and duration (time spent counseling). I knew something had to change, so at that point, I began spending more time with the teachers in need, providing coaching in collaborative strategies. As a result of this time frontloading the expectations, teachers began to take the strategies back to their teams and apply them with success, which was evident throughout my observations.

### My Discoveries

- ❑ Teachers, just as students, needed to learn how to solve their own problems with support and direction in order to create collaborative, high-functioning teams.
- ❑ The shared ownership that was developed with the teams created overall stronger teaching teams.
- ❑ More time was freed to work with students, observe teachers, communicate with families and focus on school initiatives.

Teachers, just as students, needed to learn how to solve their own problems with support and direction in order to create collaborative, high-functioning teams. It's important for all leaders to remember that not everyone has the adequate skills needed to address and work through conflict, and unless that is addressed and taught, little problems become massive barriers to success. The data previously shown demonstrates how once teachers applied the strategies taught and modeled for them, they were able to independently work as collaborative teams, decreasing the amount of time they needed consulting with an administrator. The average counseling time decreased from the peak of ten hours per week to one hour per week.

The shared ownership that was developed with the teams created overall stronger teaching teams. When the lines of communication were opened and people felt heard and valued, team members started to take more shared ownership of the work completed thus increasing trust, strength of teams and success. An example of this would be our whole school professional development day. Each grade level team was presented with the task of updating their

curriculum maps to include STEM projects throughout the school year, plug in community partners to visit their classrooms and enhance their STEM units of instruction. The teams were required to work together to align their curriculum and divide tasks, which included curricular responsibilities and community outreach. 100% of the teaching teams successfully completed the activity cohesively.

More time was freed to work with students, observe teachers, communicate with families and focus on school initiatives. Some of our school initiatives this year included the addition of a food rescue program in the cafeteria, intentionally integrating our curriculum content, providing more community resources within our curriculum and becoming an Indiana STEM Certified School. Each of these initiatives were made possible because I had time to champion these projects.

### **Where I Am Heading Next**

Upon reflection, I have determined that it is necessary for me to be more proactive in guiding new teachers on how to be part of a collaborative team. It can be challenging for new teachers to balance the dynamics of colleagues, students and parents while learning the ropes in their newfound profession. Each of those components are demanding, along with the subcomponents that go along with each one. I will provide more support through establishing one-on-one meetings with new teachers to model and guide them from the start of the school year.

With the establishment of PLC time next school year, I will provide collaborative guidance for all grade teams. This guidance will include the use of agendas and establishing roles and meeting norms for each grade level team, as well as school committees. Ongoing monitoring of teams and committees will take place to ensure strategies are being implemented with fidelity.

### **Bibliography**

Brown, B. (2018) *Dare to Lead*. New York, New York: Penguin Random House.

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