

Principal Andrew Serrao  
Lewis Fox Middle School  
305 Greenfield Street  
Hartford, CT 06112

November 27, 2006

Dear Principal Serrao:

We are students at Trinity College in a Child Development class working on a public policy project. We have been investigating improvements that could be made to the mandatory team teaching program in Hartford middle schools. All Hartford middle schools are supposed to be using a team teaching program in which a group of teachers meets once a week to discuss issues with the curriculum, students, and teachers. Unfortunately, the one-hour block allotted to team meetings every week is insufficient for teachers to meet and discuss the problems they have encountered. Team teaching cannot be effective unless teachers are constantly in contact with one another. Furthermore, teachers are not given any guidance as to what should be discussed in meetings, and team leaders are not told how to lead a productive meeting. As a result, according to a team leader at a Hartford middle school, teachers often end up using this period to plan their lessons for the next day, rather than engaging in the discussion of students and curriculum. The focus of our investigation has been on understanding how and why team teaching is effective. We understand that team teaching is defined as a group of teachers that work with the same students and meet regularly to encourage discussion of issues with their students and within the team. Team teaching is vital to student academic success and well-being, as well as to creating a less-stressful teaching environment. Through our proposal, we hope to improve communication between teachers by creating teams that work well together and that develop set guidelines to make the most of their meeting time. Schools with effective team teaching programs have higher test scores on the Connecticut Mastery Test, as well as a positive working environment for students and faculty.

In our study, we examined CMT scores from all Hartford Middle Schools and found that the highest performing middle school was Hartford Magnet Middle, while Lewis Fox had some of the lowest scores. We met with teachers at Hartford Magnet Middle and at your school to discuss the two different team teaching programs, and found that the differences lay in how well the teams worked together and how well the teachers got along. From this we concluded that team teaching is most effective when all members of the team are able to cooperate with one another and work productively as a team. Teachers accomplish the most when they form close ties with their teammates and are able to discuss any problems that might arise without having to wait until the designated meeting time. Creating teams that work well together encourages communication within teams both during and outside of the one-hour meeting block, which makes teachers better able to correct problems early on.

Our proposal contains two suggestions. First, we propose that teachers be allowed to form their own teams so that they will have a more active role in the team building process and will work towards creating more cohesive groups. One way to implement this process is to have teachers create their “dream team” by filling out a request form that lists which teachers they would like to work with. The administration can then arrange the teams to create the most effective groups, comprised of people who have indicated that they would like to work with one another due to their similar goals. We have created a request form that enables teachers to create their ideal team and aides the administration in placing like-minded individuals together. We hope this form can facilitate the creation of more cohesive teams and encourage communication.

We have also created a plan for what teachers should be discussing during their meeting time, and how the meeting should be led. This meeting plan should be given to every teacher in every classroom in order to raise awareness of the goals of team teaching and the importance of a well-organized meeting structure.

We hope that our proposal will be distributed throughout the school and will result in more effective team teaching groups and practices.

Sincerely,

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## Sample Team Teaching Request Form

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Department \_\_\_\_\_

What are your goals as an educator at this school? -

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What are your goals for your team at this school? -

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What qualities are important to you in a fellow team member?

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Who would you recommend we put in each of the following department positions on your team?

English \_\_\_\_\_

Math \_\_\_\_\_

Social Studies \_\_\_\_\_

Science \_\_\_\_\_

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Out of the names you listed above, which person do you feel that it is the most necessary that you work with and why? \_\_\_\_\_

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# **Team Teaching Guide**

## **Definition of Team Teaching**

A group of teachers who work with an assigned set of students. The teachers meet regularly to discuss issues students face, examine the effectiveness of the curriculum, and offer each other support. In this way, teachers are constantly in communication with one another and are better able to handle problems that arise within the school community.

## **Goal of Team Teaching**

To have teachers who are able to communicate well and work effectively with one another. This will allow problems that arise within the school community to be solved quickly and successfully, which will allow for the development of a positive environment in which levels of student learning will increase. These results will be seen concretely in the improvement of standardized test scores.

## **Components of Effective Team Teaching**

- Teachers who work well together and share similar goals; if possible, teachers should be given a say in who is on their team
- A seminar should be held prior to the start of the school year for teams to meet, learn how to hold effective group discussions, have bonding/icebreaking exercises, and to set a team goal for the year
- There should be at least six teachers in every team. There should one teacher from each level of math, one teacher from each level of English, one teacher from each level of science, one teacher from each level of social studies, one teacher language teacher, and one special education teacher
- Meetings should be held regularly, at least three times weekly, and for one hour at minimum

## **Components of the Meeting:**

- One teacher from each subject area on the team, as well as the principal present, special education teachers and school psychologist if applicable
- Team positions assigned, such as team leader and vice leader, scribe to write down the minutes of the meeting, timekeeper
- An agenda sent out prior to the meeting time comprised of topics team members want to discuss
- At the beginning of the year most of the team meeting time should be spent on team building activities and games to help encourage communication.

## **Sample Format for the Three Weekly Meetings:**

### **First Five Minutes:**

The team leaders will call the meeting to order and everyone will take their seats.

*Thirty Minutes:*

The leader will pick from the teachers presenting the topics on the agenda for discussion. The leader will call on teachers in order of the immediacy of the issue. For example, a teacher discussing a student who was suspended for threatening another student or teacher would be called on before a teacher who wishes to discuss a student who is failing his or her class. After each teacher speaks, other teachers will have five minutes to discuss the issue before moving on. At this time, the teachers will decide whether or not the issue merits a second meeting at another time with all members involved in the issue. (Note: Throughout the meeting, the scribe takes the minutes of the meeting, and the leaders can intervene to keep the meeting on track.)

*Fifteen minutes:*

Any brief announcements that are not on the predetermined list can be made. For example, a teacher can make an announcement about needing an extra volunteer for a field trip or to be the score keeper of the girls' basketball team. Anyone who has an announcement to make will raise his or her hand and the team leader will give that teacher a "speaking object" such as a ball or a feather. After that teacher has made their announcement, they pass the "speaking object" to another teacher with their hand raised.

*Last Ten minutes:*

If there is time, teachers can discuss any possible ideas for projects or field trips. The teachers can give input and advice about particular ideas and decide whether or not to add those ideas to the agenda for the next meeting. The principle will get a chance to make any announcements that he feels are important.

Note: Each meeting should address a specific topic. One meeting should focus on student issues, one should focus on class projects and interdisciplinary issues, and one meeting should focus on any issues with administration.

## **Additional Information about Team Teaching**

Eisen, Mary Jane, and Elizabeth J. Tisdell. "Team Teaching: the Learning Side of the Teaching - Learning Equation." Essays in Teaching Excellence 14 (2003). 5 Dec. 2006

<[http://oira.syr.edu/cstl2/Home/Teaching%20Support/Resources/Subscriptions/POD/TE%20Vol%2014%20\(02-03\)/tevol14n6.html](http://oira.syr.edu/cstl2/Home/Teaching%20Support/Resources/Subscriptions/POD/TE%20Vol%2014%20(02-03)/tevol14n6.html)>.

- This article explains team teaching as being comprised of learning how to negotiate relationships, provide a relevant and integrated curriculum, and to focus on the participants' continual construction of knowledge

Keifer-Barone, S., et. al., "Organize teams of teachers." Journal of Staff Development v. 23 no. 3 (Summer 2002) p. 31-4

<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be3d1c254225d9f09fab264c98ab175b7aad98a3963d879419f&fmt=H>

- This article lays out the benefits of team teaching, such as creating a more positive work environment
- It describes what is involved in team teaching training
- It lays out the characteristics of highly effective teams
- It provides contact information for schools wishing to set up a plan of team teaching

Schmoker, M. "Start Here for Improving Teaching and Learning." School Administrator. v. 61 no. 10 (November 2004) p. 48-9

<http://vnweb.hwwilsonweb.com/hww/jumpstart.jhtml?recid=0bc05f7a67b1790ef8fc999322d46be3ff79c825393986eced0c4967b97e8987c2b64dfc6d537b1b&fmt=H>

- This article discusses the importance of team teaching, as it improves both student learning and teacher morale
- It provides contact information for teachers wishing to learn effective team-teaching techniques