A Guide to Common Planning Time

What is it?

A scheduled time for multiple teachers from different classrooms in the same age group to work together. Typically, common planning meetings last 1-2 hours, and occur monthly, sometimes more frequently.

What is the purpose of common planning?

Common planning time brings teachers together to learn from one another and collaborate on projects that will lead to improvements in lesson quality, instructional effectiveness, and consequently, child outcomes. Generally speaking, these improvements result from (1) the improved coordination and communication that occurs among teachers who meet and talk regularly, (2) the learning, insights, and constructive feedback that occur during professional discussions among teachers, and (3) the lessons, units, materials, and resources that are created or improved when teachers work on them collaboratively.

How is common planning different from teacher planning time?

Common planning time is different from “teacher preparation time” which are times when individual teachers or classroom teachers, typically plan and prepare lessons for the children they teach.

Common planning time can be considered a type of professional learning. It is often associated with professional learning communities, where teachers get together to share expertise and work collaboratively to improve their teaching and child outcomes. Teachers who get together and work collaboratively feel supported professionally and emotionally.

Finally, common planning also contributes to the general goal of ALL teachers seeing themselves as responsible for ALL children and for building the language and literacy foundation all children need in order to benefit from reading instruction later on, leading them to become confident, skilled readers.
What do teachers do during common planning?

While the term suggests that the primary activity of common planning time is “planning,” the time may be devoted to a wide variety of activities. The following are a few examples of general activities that often take place during common planning time:

- **Discuss teacher work:** Teachers may collectively review lesson plans or assessment tools that have been used in a classroom, and then offer feedback and recommendations for improvement.
- **Discuss children’s experiences or responses to activities teachers present:** Teachers may share about children’s experiences or responses to activities they have presented, and then offer recommendations on how lessons or teaching approaches may be modified to improve learning.
- **Discuss child outcomes data:** Teachers may analyze child developmental progress from a class or age group to identify trends—such as which children are not meeting expectations—and collaboratively develop support strategies. By discussing children’s outcomes, teachers can develop a stronger understanding of the specific learning needs and abilities of children, which can then help them coordinate and improve their teaching.
- **Discuss professional literature:** Teachers may select a text to read, such as an article about a specialized instructional practice, and then engage in a focused conversation about the text and how it can help inform or improve their teaching techniques.
- **Create curriculum:** Teachers may collaboratively work on lesson plans, projects, and special activities or events. Teachers may also plan or develop other types of learning experiences, such as portfolios.
- **Review videos:** Teachers can review videos of each other engaging with children using a particular practice, e.g., read aloud, and then offer feedback.

Who leads common planning meetings?

An instructional coach or another designated person can lead common planning meetings and plans the agenda. Teachers who are willing to take on this leading role are encouraged to do so.

Note: While this is it NOT an essential ecosystem element, it is an important infrastructure component supporting various elements, e.g., planning around anchor book and progress monitoring.