

SPCSA Best Practices

Newsletter

October Edition by The Honors Academy of Literature

In 2015 we changed the way we did business when it came to meetings. We had done the usual weekly staff meeting since 2012 when we opened, and it wasn't until hearing a presentation by Elizabeth City and estimating the cost of one of those staff meetings that my mind began to change about the value of those meetings. I remember sitting there listening to Dr. City and scribbling some rough calculations in my notebook, and having one of those practice changing ah-ha moments... When I got home from that trip to Harvard, my way of thinking changed. I moved beyond the figured worlds of school where staff meetings and group emails were the primary means of communication, and started looking into what else was out there for us to utilize. If weekly staff meetings weren't a good value, how were we going to get info out to teachers and staff efficiently?

Why Meetings Matter

By Kathryn Parker Boudett and Elizabeth City Volume 30, Number 4 July/ August 2014 Harvard Education Letter

Every day, millions of people gather in classrooms, faculty rooms, boardrooms, and (sometimes virtual) conference rooms to tackle problems that are so big that no individual can solve them alone. How to prepare students to thrive in a knowledge economy and rapidly developing world, how to support teachers in transforming their practice, how to create policy that drives opportunity and access for every learner—addressing each of these would truly make a big difference in learning and teaching. But although some of the meetings that could take on these issues are stimulating opportunities for generating ideas and creating solutions, many are not.

The fact is, meetings matter.

When we ask people what gets in the way of improving learning and teaching, “time” is consistently one of the top three responses. Specifically, not enough time. The two of us feel that same pinch of time and that same wistful “If we just had more time, we could . . .” We often wish for a mythical day between Tuesday and Wednesday or the ability to bend the space-time continuum like the characters in Madeleine L'Engle's *Wrinkle in Time*. However, we haven't found a tesseract yet, and so we start with the time we have.

Time—especially time for adults to learn together—is a precious resource, and in lots of schools and conference rooms, time is being wasted. While the research base on the use of time is not deep, one finding is clear: quality matters more than quantity.

This is not to say that quantity doesn't matter. It does, and you need a baseline amount of time in order to do high-quality work and learning. What that amount is will depend on context and what kind of work and learning is required. Fifteen minutes once a week, which is what teachers have in one school Liz visited, is not going to be enough for deep learning, no matter how strategically those fifteen minutes are used.

In most situations, though, the important question is not “Do we have enough time?” but “Are we making the best use of the time we already have?”

Our colleague Richard Elmore refers to time as “money you've already spent,” which acknowledges that when you're paying people salaries, you're essentially paying them for their time. If you think about a meeting not as “60 minutes,” but as “\$1,000” (for example, 25 people × 1 hour × \$40/hour), all of a sudden the meeting feels a little different. Our experience is that many organizations have at least \$100,000 worth of people hours (and often many orders of magnitude more) being underutilized in any given year. In fact, many school systems will spend at least that much in a single day of professional development.



Meetings as Powerful Learning Spaces

Improvement in student achievement—and most other outcomes worth caring about—depends critically on whether the adults in schools can continually and productively learn together. Indeed, one of the most powerful practices in support of organizational learning is consistently having great meetings. But that begs the question: what makes a meeting great?

Great meetings are invigorating. The purpose is clear, and achieving it is important to everyone involved. There is an agenda, often set with collaborative input, and the group moves through the agenda—not too fast and not too slow, adjusting as needed, with purpose in mind. Everyone participates in and contributes to the meeting. Even when the work itself is extremely challenging, in a great meeting there are often some number of minutes during which the group is in a state of “flow,” experiencing a timelessness that brings deep creativity and connection.⁴ And, at the most basic level, *great meetings are fun*.

If every meeting is a potentially rich opportunity for adult learning, then it makes sense that great meetings have a lot in common with great classrooms. In both, participants are actively engaged in challenging tasks, using their minds, solving problems, and communicating. In meetings, the facilitator is like a skillful teacher who plays different kinds of roles, sharing the work and meaning-making with the participants the way teachers actively engage students. And in both, all participants know the norms of behavior that they are expected to follow, and each encounter is set up to help reinforce those norms.

A meeting agenda lays out the facilitator’s map for how a group will use a particular meeting to take a few steps toward a shared but often distant goal. This is analogous to the way an individual lesson plan helps students take one step of many toward desired outcomes, like building the knowledge and skills needed for mastery. Wise facilitators use agendas not as straitjackets but as guides to be adapted as needs arise, just as teachers often adjust their lesson plans in the moment to take into account circumstances as they unfold.

In meetings that are truly in the service of improvement, either learning needs to be taking place in the meeting, or it must be made clear how this meeting connects to learning. Examples include an intervention team working with a parent to design a student support plan, a teacher team looking at student work to assess the effectiveness of a lesson, an operations team figuring out how to make the buses run on time, or a district team discussing how to make rich out-of-school experiences widely available. In each case, to make real progress, adults need to think or act differently, and it’s easy to draw a line from the purpose of the meeting to improving learning.

If the connection between a meeting and learning is not immediately obvious, it’s worth asking if a meeting is even needed in the first place. In this world of instant information sharing, could the business be addressed in another way? After all, not everything warrants a meeting!

When people will sit through a meeting in which they're being talked at for more than thirty minutes and not protest at all, that's evidence that there's a culture of acceptance of meetings as endurance activities rather than learning opportunities. If you can't tell a compelling story that explains why spending precious time convening a group of adults on a particular issue will ultimately serve learning and teaching, don't meet. Or if you do meet, change the meeting experience.

Four Things to Consider

For the last several years, we have worked with educators from across the education sector to identify the most important things to consider when planning a meeting. We have developed a Meeting Wise Checklist with 12 questions to plan all the ingredients for a successful meeting. The questions on the checklist are grouped into categories that capture the four aspects of any meeting:

Purpose. The single most effective thing you can do to have a good meeting is to get crystal clear about *why* you are meeting and what you hope to accomplish.

Process. It is essential to be clear about *what* needs to get done at the meeting. But it is also critical to be thoughtful about *how* to engage the group in working toward the stated objectives.

Preparation. Consider what else the facilitator and participants could do in advance to make sure the meeting goes smoothly.

Pacing. Before finalizing your agenda, dive into the details and confirm that your minutes add up and that you are spending them in the right places. Then pull back to see the big picture and ensure that you feel well poised to have the meeting you truly want to have.

A good meeting, like a good classroom experience, has a clear purpose, a thoughtful strategy for achieving it, and a group working together to achieve that purpose.

None of us became educators because we wanted to become champion meeting planners, facilitators, or participants—but wise meetings will help deliver on a determination to improving learning and teaching for all the students in our care.

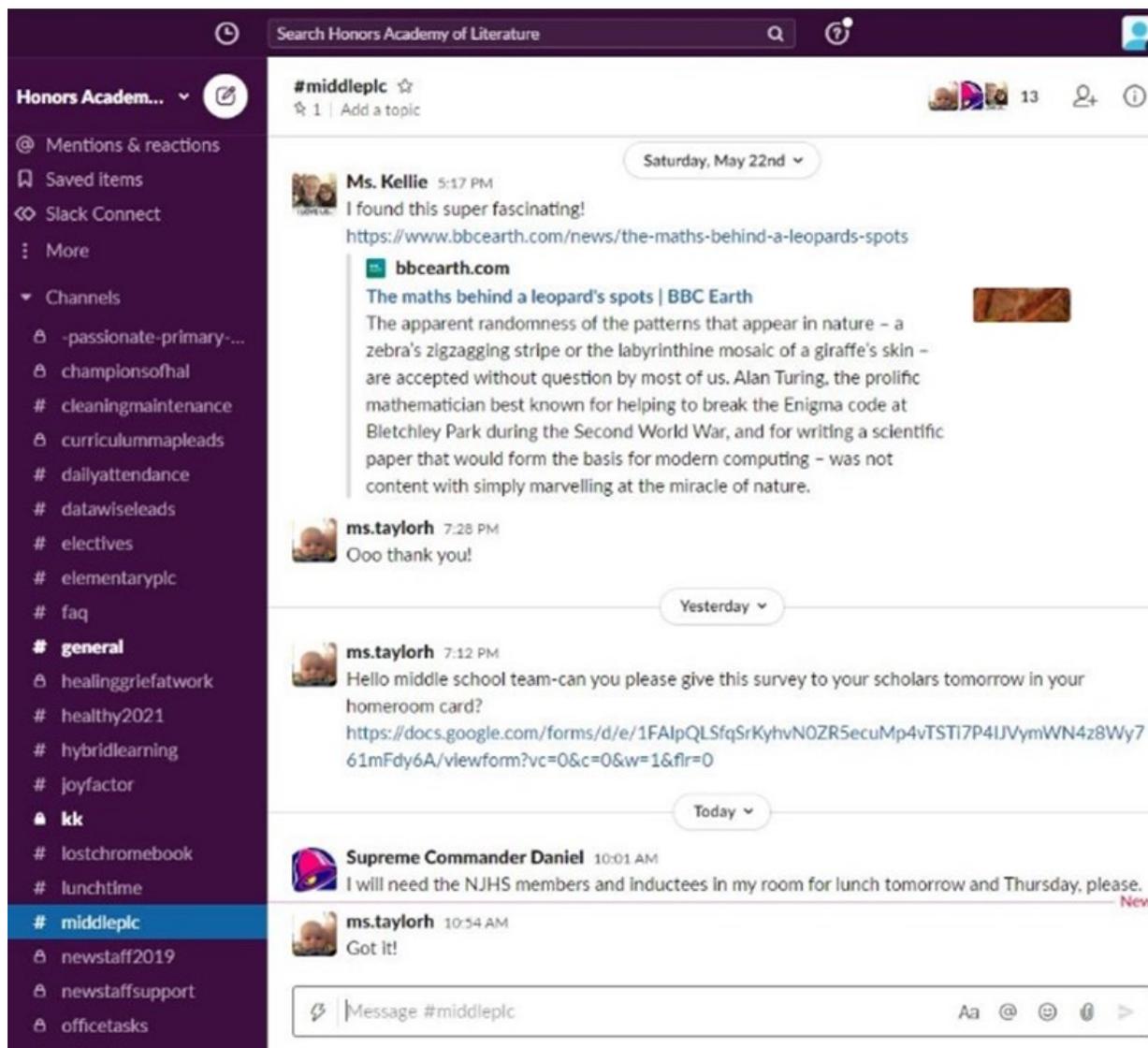
Adapted from [Meeting Wise: Making the Most of Collaborative Time for Educators](#) (Harvard Education Press 2014) by Kathryn Parker Boudett and Elizabeth A. City. Kathryn Parker Boudett is Lecturer on Education and the Director of the Data Wise Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Elizabeth A. City is Lecturer on Education and Director of the Doctor of Education Leadership Program at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.
https://www.hepg.org/hel-home/issues/30_4/helarticle/why-meetings-matter



We decided that staff meetings were no longer a good value, but we still needed a way to share logistical information out quickly and efficiently with all staff... enter Slack. When we started, Slack was new to the scene, and so we have really grown with Slack. If you are new to Slack, here is an intro:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EYqxQGmQkVw>

We are able to use Slack channels to target information to exactly the staff who needs it, share files, and control access to sensitive information by the use of our public and private channels. Here are some examples of our public channels (meaning all staff has access to join these channels: #dailyattendance, general, hybridlearning, #thinktank, #joyfactor, #elementaryplc, #middleplc, #primartplc, #faq, #teacher, #upcomingmeetings, #teacher-to-do, #morningannouncements. We also have private channels that staff members need to be invited to join. Some examples of private channels are: #specialized, readbygrade3, #student, #newstaffsupport, #reopeningplan, #testing. When we set up a channel, we establish in the channel purpose if it is a conversation channel or an information push out channel. We are also able to use the Direct Message function to keep all of our communication on one platform. I also love the staff can manage their notifications so they are able to turn them off when they are away to promote work/home balance. Here are some screenshots from our Slack platform:



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Honors Academ...

More unreads

- # lunchtime
- # middleplc
- # newstaff2019
- # newstaffsupport
- # officetasks
- # plcleads
- # primaryplc
- # productive-math-str...
- # readbygrade3
- # reopen
- # shirtsurprise
- # snaps
- # speaclead
- # student
- # sxsxw
- # teacher**
- # teacher-to-do
- # testing
- # thewayitis
- # thinktank
- # unbirthdays
- # upcomingmeetings
- # urgent
- # virtuallessonsupportr...
- # aides

#teacher 8 | Add a topic

Yesterday

Ms. Kellie 3:01 PM
Anyone wanting to set up accommodations for their students in MAP, meet me in the purple room after school today and I will show you how.

Here is the spreadsheet that showed which of the distance scholars showed up in my Zoom MAP today. If you had a student in person, please mark that on the sheet. If the student wasn't in-person, please remind them today to attend tomorrow. If you need to add someone to the list, please do so then let me know so I can add them to my testing group tomorrow.

G Suite Spreadsheet

Spring-21 MAP distance learners
Spreadsheet from Google Drive

ms.taylorh 7:23 PM
What time are we out next week each day? ??

ms.andi 7:24 PM
Yes

ms.taylorh 7:24 PM
Thanks!

Today

Message #teacher

And did I mention ... it is free! We used the free version for over 3 years. We only moved to the paid version a couple of years ago when we added all of our families to the platform to be able to use it for our pick up process. On the paid version, which gives us full access and app integration, we pay \$ 350.00 per year.

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More unreads

- # upcomingmeetings
- # urgent
- # virtuallessonsupportr...
- # aides
- # morningannounceme...
- # pickup
- + Add channels

Direct messages

- Slackbot
- ms.andi you
- Josh guest
- Kari guest
- Liliana Igmen
- Liliana Igmen, mr.ben...
- Liliana Igmen, Ms. Ni...
- Liliana Igmen, Ms. Ro...
- Liliana Igmen, ms.jo
- Miss Trish
- Miss Trish, ms.sheree
- mr.ben
- mr.ben, Ms. Nicole, ...
- mr.ben, Ms. Nicole, ...
- ms bree guest
- Ms. Kellie
- Ms. Nicole

#joyfactor Add a topic

Wednesday, May 19th

5 3

3 replies Last reply 6 days ago

mr.ben 10:07 PM
IMG_20210519_220657.jpg

Electric Art Projects at the Generator!

4

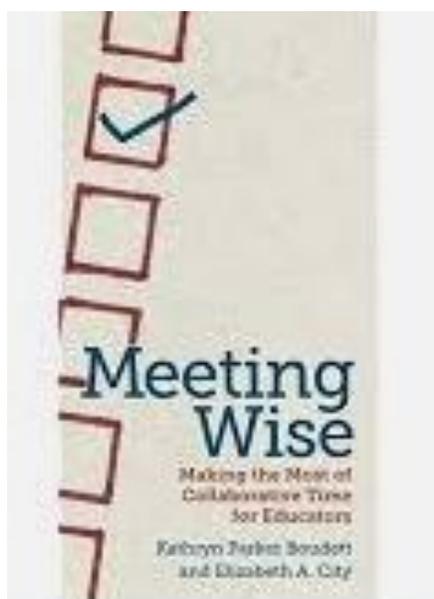
Message #joyfactor

Resources

⇒ Copy your own Meeting Wise Agenda Here:

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1rj5T8pFFrqwrSaYSKIfWOZod2nAxxu51Lp6ZVObdIxE/copy>

⇒ Download Slack Here: <https://slack.com/>



If you have questions or want to know more about how this works at our site, please feel free to contact us:

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