

# Teacher Collaboration: Perceptions and Suggestions

## The Problem

A better and more effective collaboration experience for teachers benefits all stakeholders in education, and this study sought to illuminate the perceptions of teachers whose school already provides some of the conditions determined to be advantageous for collaboration. The challenge is to determine what to do next in order to improve upon what already exists.

Though the COVID-19 global pandemic disrupted the long-standing collaboration schedule, the opportunity was present with the teaching staff as participants to explore how they view the collaborative experience and how they can imagine it improved.

The data collected and conclusions drawn can be used to implement positive change at the school site under examination, and though not representative of all teacher experiences, the findings of this study may be of benefit to a broader audience seeking insights into how teachers best utilize collaboration, what conditions they value as compared to others, and what suggestions they have for enhancing the collaborative experience.

## Results

Preliminary analysis of the data suggest a reinforcement of prior literature demonstrating the benefits of collaboration.

The study also gives space for the key actors in the collaborative model- the teachers themselves- to articulate their perceptions of present conditions and to contribute ideas for further improvements.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological qualitative study was to elicit staff perceptions of teacher collaboration, their experiences with it, as well as garner feedback from participants as to how the conditions for collaboration could be improved.

A more effective collaborative experience can ultimately benefit more than just the teachers themselves; effective teacher collaboration has been shown to positively impact students, teachers, and whole school organizations (Vangrieken et al., 2015).

The study explored the perceptions of staff collaboration at a small charter high school in Southern California that has historically afforded its teachers structural and cultural conditions conducive to meaningful collaboration.

*Collaboration between teachers can build a support system and camaraderie which is vital in the teaching profession. It also creates a positive learning environment for students. When teachers work together and share strategies, tools, and routines with one another the school begins to build a school culture that can help students succeed in any class. Furthermore, collaboration challenges educators to learn new techniques and reflect on our own teaching. **Teacher F***

*Staff collaboration is essential to having a school which runs as a well-oiled machine! **Teacher E***

## Methodology

Participants of the phenomenological qualitative study completed online surveys regarding their utilization of collaboration time, their perceptions of the school's collaboration model, and suggestions for improving the structural and cultural conditions for collaboration. Several participants were selected for one-on-one, semi-structured interviews.

The researcher wanted to elicit the perceptions and experiences of the participants in relation to collaboration, as well as garner feedback as to how collaboration at the school site could be improved.

A phenomenological qualitative study was designed to collect insights into how individual teachers experience and perceive collaboration, and data from the survey and interviews was analyzed in order to have the broadest and most complete perspective of the participants.

## Implications

Much research has been conducted demonstrating the many benefits teacher collaboration has at the student, teacher, and organizational levels (Vangrieken et al., 2015). Teachers stand at the center of being able to extend benefits down to the students and across a school, district, or broader community.

Effective schools and districts are continuously looking for ways to build teacher capacities to support student achievement and teacher collaboration networks have been shown to benefit teachers and schools as they seek to enhance the achievement of their students (Moolenaar et al., 2012).