

Budget Cuts and Teacher Planning Time

The Importance of Teacher Planning Time



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[Teacher planning](#) and preparation is a key part of effective teaching. However, this is an area that often faces cuts when dealing with issues like increasing the number of periods in a day, reducing the number of days each week that students come to school, or putting schools on double schedules. It almost appears that there is a lack of concern over the [importance of planning time](#). In school districts across the nation, many teachers already get too little time to accomplish too many tasks before any cuts are made.

Educational policy makers fail to see why more than a few minutes of before-class preparation is necessary. The general lack of concern for teacher preparation time is probably due to misconceptions about what goes on during class and planning periods. Educational policy makers, who were in high school 20-30 years ago, remember a classroom that no longer exists--one with students quietly reading while the English teacher grades essays and one with students checking each others' math papers while abiding by the honor system.

A Teacher's Changing Role

Today, instruction is more active with increased focus on problem solving and teamwork. The teacher's role has transformed into one of facilitating learning as opposed to presenting knowledge. Further, teachers are no longer able to grade papers while students read textbooks. In some school districts, teachers can no longer allow students to check each others' papers due to parents' complaints.

In addition, because so many of today's students are unwilling to work without getting credit, the number of papers per student has increased dramatically. Thus, papers that were once graded during class now proliferate into rapidly growing piles which must be dealt with after class.

The amount of work to be graded is also impacted by class size.

Given a teaching load of five classes of 35 students, a one-hour writing assignment requires almost nine hours of grading if the teacher averages three minutes each. Even grading assignments that take only one minute may be difficult to manage since just under 3 hours would be needed to grade one per student, and other tasks must also be accomplished during the planning period.

Another likely cause of widespread disregard for planning time is that the teacher's planning activities vary from day to day making it difficult to explain what they do, and why the time is insufficient. To clarify this point, I have provided five unremarkable planning period examples.

What the Sample Planning Periods Show

These real-life examples show that a large percentage of the teacher's preparation time is dedicated to paperwork and conferencing. During the sample week of planning activities, it would be impossible to grade even one class set of essays during the allotted planning time. Thus, a teacher who gives writing assignments to five classes of 35 students and who works efficiently during her five 60-minute planning periods, will be unable to give timely feedback to students unless a substantial amount of work is brought home.

Teachers have traditionally been expected to bring work home because the job cannot be done any other way. In fact, early in U. S. history, teachers were not allowed to marry because of the time their families would require. But nowadays, teachers do marry, and they do have children. Because many teachers also have second jobs, they no longer have the option of working an extra 20 to 30 hours grading papers.

Negative Effects of Reducing Planning Time

By scheduling too little planning time, policy makers cause students to receive fewer writing assignments and more machine graded tests. Although several effective teaching strategies have evolved that decrease the paper load, such as peer evaluation with rubrics and cooperative learning, students must eventually get teachers' feedback. Of necessity, many teachers' [lesson plans](#) are made with primary consideration given to how much grading the assignment will require.

For this reason, insufficient planning time makes attaining higher standards less likely and deprives students of a quality education