



# *Rethinking Teacher Learning* *emerging models*

MORE TIME, MORE POSSIBILITIES:  
A Cross-Content Design

## ***What We Know***

There is very little evidence that professional development (PD) in its current form is effective. Teachers are largely unsatisfied with their PD and view most of it as rules-driven rather than developmental. But teachers and principals agree on what ideal teacher learning looks like: job-embedded, personalized, based on authentic collaboration with peers, and focused on the components of teachers' jobs for which they feel accountable: planning and delivering instruction to students.

## ***It's About Time***

When we talk to teachers, the issue of time invariably comes up. Teachers consistently tell us they want more time to plan, design, and learn from each other. We've taken on the challenge of finding this time within already-tight school district budgets while also making sure the time is used well by teachers and contributes to student growth. We've found that when teachers are given time for PD, they really lean into solving day-to-day challenges. Teachers want to increase the success of their students. When they are given the time to observe each other's classrooms, reflect on their practices, and work together, improving student success across an entire system becomes possible.

As we have started to find this time in a few districts' schedules, we have seen new teacher leaders emerge and more innovation and risk-taking among both new and veteran teachers. A new form of coaching and support has started to develop as well. Rather than relying on a coach who may not have time to support each teacher's needs, teachers have begun to work collectively to support each other. Coaching (not simply coaches) is emerging as a critical strategy to give teachers feedback on their practice. Teachers feel that the time they spend together is more valuable than other forms of teacher learning and allows them to self-reflect.

The following pages present a case study of how one school district found the time within a traditional schedule to engage and support its teachers in powerful ways.

## ***Meet the Models***

The Innovative Professional Development (iPD) Challenge, organized and supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is an effort to radically redesign PD systems. We've taken a systems-change view because PD affects so many elements of a school system and each of them must be reexamined. Our work focuses on supporting districts as they re-imagine teacher ownership and engagement; collective and individualized learning; use of high quality content; data and delivery infrastructure; leadership capacity; resource optimization; and supportive policies.

As we began redesign work with iPD districts, several models emerged for increasing peer feedback, collaboration, and reflection for teachers. This document describes one of the models, which we call a cross-content design, and which was implemented in schools where teachers were organized into interdisciplinary teams. But we predict that as the work continues, other models, as well as variations on this model, will emerge.



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*“I feel like I know my students better.”*

*Average  
high school PD time  
during the 2012–2013  
school year*



**75 hours**

*Average PD  
time during 2013–  
2014 for grades 9–10 of  
redesigned high schools*



**245 hours**

*Difference  
in average  
PD time  
after redesign*



**+170 hours**



# Case Study: Bridgeport Public Schools

## A Cross-Content Design

The Bridgeport Public Schools district serves more than 20,000 students, 98.8 percent of whom are eligible for free and reduced lunch. Student scores on state assessments have historically been among the lowest in Connecticut, and the retention rates for new teachers are also below average. For the 2013–2014 school year, the district redesigned grades 9 and 10 in three traditional high schools, using a cross-content design, to better serve students and embed PD time in the school day.

## Understanding Plus Time

When interdisciplinary teachers attend iPD, a Plus Team of expert teachers replaces them in the classroom. Students receive five full days of instruction each week: four days a week with their regular teachers and one day with the Plus Team. Plus Teams are made up of teachers reallocated from other positions in the district, so their subject expertise and certifications vary.

Plus Teams teach lessons that creatively target skill gaps, with a goal of college readiness for all. Plus Teams have one full day of iPD each week, which they use to design lessons. Plus Teams across participating schools develop lessons differently. Two of the three Bridgeport schools have chosen to organize Plus time around a theme, such as research writing or life skills, in which students research colleges or explore stress management. The third school uses Plus time to focus on project-based learning.

## How iPD Works for Teachers

Teachers participate in one full day of iPD a week. This adds up to 170 additional hours of PD time annually, which is more than double the amount of time teachers had before the redesign. iPD takes place at their own schools, except when they gather for multi-school iPD once a month. Interdisciplinary teacher teams collaborate on assignments using Literacy Design Collaborative (LDC) tools and resources. (For more information on LDC, visit [www.ldc.org](http://www.ldc.org).) Teachers use the National Paeida Center's Socratic Seminar as a key strategy. Though a full-time iPD coordinator supports each school and an additional coordinator rotates between the schools, teachers are increasingly leading their own learning. Teams also use iPD time to develop personalized learning for students and regroup students according to need.

### One Day per Week **iPD Schedule**

M	Plus Team
T	9A interdisciplinary team
W	9B interdisciplinary team
Th	10A interdisciplinary team
F	10B interdisciplinary team

*“In the past, PD was mostly subject-centered. Recently it’s been more holistic and collaborative.”*



# How the School Schedule Works

Teachers are organized into four interdisciplinary teams of four teachers each, two for each grade (9A, 9B, 10A, and 10B), that teach in STEM (math, science, math lab) and humanities (English, social studies [SS], literacy lab) combinations. The school schedule is organized into four regular days and one full day each week of iPD for teachers and Plus time for students. Each day has seven periods. During the four regular days, the interdisciplinary teams teach together in flexible schedules made up of three blocks, which run for more than two hours each. Teachers adjust time, grouping, and class size to fit instructional and student needs. They can incorporate special education or English Learner support without disruption. Each interdisciplinary team shares a common prep period.

During the regular schedule, students take seven courses a week: three humanities courses, three STEM courses, and, while teachers have prep time, PE or an elective. While teachers have prep time, students have PE or an elective. They take an eighth Plus course one full day each week taught by the Plus Team. While students attend this course, interdisciplinary teachers are freed to participate in a full day of iPD.

*Four Days per Week **Regular School Schedule***

Interdisciplinary Team	Teacher	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th
9A	English	<b>Prep</b>	HUMANITIES English, SS, literacy lab			HUMANITIES English, SS, literacy lab		
	SS							
	Math	<b>Electives/ PE</b>	STEM Math, science, math lab			STEM Math, science, math lab		
	Science							
9B	English	<b>Prep</b>	HUMANITIES English, SS, literacy lab			HUMANITIES English, SS, literacy lab		
	SS							
	Math	<b>Electives/ PE</b>	STEM Math, science, math lab			STEM Math, science, math lab		
	Science							
10A	English	HUMANITIES English, SS, literacy lab			<b>Prep</b>	HUMANITIES English, SS, literacy lab		
	SS							
	Math	STEM Math, science, math lab			<b>Electives/ PE</b>	STEM Math, science, math lab		
	Science							
10B	English	HUMANITIES English, SS, literacy lab			<b>Prep</b>	HUMANITIES English, SS, literacy lab		
	SS							
	Math	STEM Math, science, math lab			<b>Electives/ PE</b>	STEM Math, science, math lab		
	Science							

*“There’s always something for me to improve on. It’s refreshing to see what other teachers are doing. We feed off each other.”*

## Design Principles

### 1. Classroom conditions must be better for teaching and learning.

The school redesign must lead to improved conditions in the classroom.

### 2. What students are doing in Plus time must serve them well.

The work students do while teachers are collaborating needs to be instructionally strong, supportive, and engaging. Early dismissal from school is not an option.

### 3. PD must be relevant and real.

The content of teacher learning must be driven by classroom realities and teacher needs.

## Model Highlights

This cross-content model was built using a process called School by Design. Strategies included:

- creating a streamlined, high-efficiency model for all participating schools and grades
- creating a cost-neutral design with no increase in class size
- partnering with the teachers’ union to allow for the waivers needed
- setting aside a team of teachers who are deployed to free teachers for iPD
- using common lessons and a lesson study protocol as the focus of teachers’ work on iPD days
- building district capacity to use the process without the need for outside assistance, creating a pathway to sustainability

## Model Variations

The School by Design process is not limited to restructuring school schedules to find time for PD.

There are many variations to a single-subject design, including:

- making iPD appropriate for every level: elementary, middle, and high school
- creating multi-year personalized learning pathways that combine subjects
- using blended learning and integrating virtual learning during Plus time
- organizing schools into dual-subject departments instead of interdisciplinary teams
- creating a college delivery model for grades 11 and 12 organized on a community college schedule





The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is supporting a number of districts as they redesign their PD systems. We seek to put teachers at the center of our work by engaging them in the design, delivery, and implementation of innovation.

<http://collegeready.gatesfoundation.org>

 #ipdchallenge

The School by Design process is developed by TimeWise Schools. Together, we are looking to capture other school models that use teacher and student time innovatively to support teacher growth and development and accelerated student learning. Let TimeWise know if you have a model in mind: [timewiseschools@gmail.com](mailto:timewiseschools@gmail.com)