

# Move 2

## Join PLCs or Grade-Level or Department Meetings

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**M**ost schools have established collaborative time through professional learning communities (PLCs), grade-level meetings, or department meetings. These are opportunities for coaches to make connections with a wide array of teachers. The key is to remember that at this point in the year, the focus must be on building relationships rather than assigning tasks or directing conversations.

How coaches engage in team meetings will depend on how long they have been in the school. If you are new to a school, you may be about meeting as many teachers as possible. If you have been coaching at the school for a while, you may wish to focus on reconnecting. In either scenario, teachers are often protective of their meeting time, so it's helpful to think of yourself as a guest rather than as a facilitator at this stage of the process. As the year progresses, there will probably be opportunities to support through facilitation; for now, it's okay to just listen.

## Reflect



What does *joining team meetings* mean to you?

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## What This Move Looks Like

This move is as much about holding back as it is about jumping in. It's amazing how much we can hear when we dial back our inclination to solve problems for people and instead try to understand where they are coming from. Following are some ways you can engage while still maintaining a light touch.

### 1. Keep an Open Mind

When it comes to working with teachers, wondering is more powerful than knowing. This means we must avoid making assumptions about individuals and teams. We can't underestimate the complexity of teaching; keeping this in mind is imperative if we hope to build trusting relationships. Entering each and every conversation with an open mind is how we model a learning stance.

### 2. Avoid Taking Over

It can be tempting to take over collaborative conversations and shut down the voices of others, especially when a group is demonstrating confusion, cognitive dissonance, or frustration. We want to right the ship and keep things moving, so we jump in and take control.

This is particularly damaging during the relationship-building stage of the school year; we'd hate to have teachers walk away from a conversation thinking that we have an agenda or that we think we know better. As the year progresses, the coach's role during these meetings may shift to a more facilitative one, but for now, our purpose is to build relationships.

### 3. Listen and Self-Monitor

A meeting is a great time to practice strategies for listening, self-monitoring, note taking, and positive body language. Think of it as a chance to cheer teachers on, listen for openings for future coaching, and understand where teachers are coming from as the year begins. Achieving this depends on being an effective listener. We can enhance and refine our listening skills by self-monitoring the following behaviors:

#### Behaviors That Take Us Away From Effective Listening

- Interrupting the speaker
- Providing advice too quickly
- Thinking about our response when the speaker is still speaking
- Being uncomfortable with silence
- Piggybacking or hijacking the conversation
- Bringing our own agenda to the conversation

*Source:* Sweeney and Harris (2020).

### 4. Explore Unfamiliar Curriculum With Teachers

Whenever teachers encounter new curricula or content, a coach can be a thinking partner for exploring and making sense of how to move forward. Rather than thinking about this as a training or professional development session, think of it as a time to review, explore, and understand a new resource. Such an approach will lead to openings for future coaching, as it sends a strong message that the coach is a partner, rather than someone who is there to hold teachers accountable for implementing curricular resources with fidelity. Some guiding questions for curriculum review include:

- ▶ How is the new curriculum organized?
- ▶ How does the learning progress across any given unit or chapter?
- ▶ What are some considerations around pacing when it comes to the new materials?
- ▶ As we review the resource, what questions or concerns come to mind?

#### 5. Include This Move on Your Sign-Up for Informal Coaching

We can't wait for an engraved invitation to join team collaboration; we have to take action to create opportunities for this to happen. Maybe teachers don't think to invite a coach, or maybe they don't trust that a coach is there to support them in a respectful and responsive way. This may be due to what coaching has looked like in the past, how well teachers know the coach, or other factors. Creating the opportunity to join team conversations may come down to putting this option on a sign-up sheet that you share with teachers early in the year.

### How to Partner With the Principal on This Move

Principals often view the first few days of the school year as a time to get teachers up to speed around expectations. Yet it can be damaging when this responsibility lands on the shoulders of coaches. To get on the same page, a principal and coach can work through the following questions to ensure that this move is used in a way that builds trusting relationships with teachers and doesn't eliminate opportunities for deeper coaching as the year progresses.

- ▶ What message will we send to teachers about why a coach will be joining team collaboration?
- ▶ Which teams will the coach focus on, and why?
- ▶ Will the principal also join team collaboration time? If so, will the purpose be the same or different?

### Moving Forward

We know that relationships are the foundation for coaching. But it's important to keep in mind that how we join team meetings at the beginning of the year will change quite a lot as the year progresses. The coach as facilitator, guide, and co-planner will become essential elements of Student-Centered Coaching. But for now, it's okay to join as a thinking partner, listener, and friend.





## Tools and Artifacts

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### TOOL

Self-Assessment:  
How Am I as a  
Listener?



### PODCAST

Student-Centered  
Coaching: The Podcast,  
Episode 7, With  
Joy Casey



### TOOL

Language for  
Exploring a  
Resource or  
Curriculum

[www.dianesweeney.com/launching-tools](http://www.dianesweeney.com/launching-tools)

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