

Why Do Teachers Want to Wake Up Earlier on Monday?

Mega 97.9 is blaring at me at 6 a.m. and several snooze buttons later, sometime around 6:20, I realize I have to get out of my bed and my apartment, fast! Nothing seems to permeate my brain other than will I make it, can I get to work on time, which would be 7:30 in the morning.

-S. Zimmerman, 12th grade Science teacher.

One of a staff of twenty-five at Baruch College Campus High School who all rise early on Monday mornings to come in and talk; about what so early in the morning? First about the week's events, but then also about students. The Monday morning meetings at BCCHS provide grade teams a time to meet and discuss the students who are struggling the most in their classes. Teachers can use this time to work together to help design specific strategies to support the students they profile and track their progress with documentation throughout the school year. Teachers not only benefit from this meeting time to improve student success, but also develop meaningful relationships as colleagues, thus contributing to a strong sense of professionalism and support.

Many teachers at Baruch College Campus High School begin thinking about Monday morning meetings (MMM) the night before, wondering about lesson plans, making photo-copies, and having everything organized and graded for the week to come is present in their minds, in addition to: "Which two students will we be discussing this week at the MMM?" Teachers need each other to facilitate their work in supporting struggling students and in assessing and furthering their own development as learners. These meetings serve a dual purpose, by fostering the professional development of teachers while also honoring their voice in the design and implementation of specific strategies that will be most successful in supporting those students who are at risk academically at BCCHS.

"The most powerful form of learning, the most sophisticated form of teacher development, comes not from listening to the good works of others but from sharing what we know with others...By reflecting on what we do, by giving it coherence, and by sharing and articulating our craft knowledge, we make meaning, we learn." Roland Barth, Improving Schools from Within

Action Research Question: How do these Monday morning meetings contribute to the professional development of teachers and impact student achievement?

This research project is based on the experiences of this staff of twenty-five and the students they work to support through these regular Monday morning meetings. As teachers of 9th grade (Uzma Shah) and 12th grade (Kiara Vigil) we work in grade teams every Monday morning to discuss students who are at risk of failing any of their classes or who the team has concluded needs additional support in their learning. Through our research we have found that the structures, roles of teachers, and use of time for these Monday morning professional meetings varies greatly from one grade team to another and this pushes us to ask: How do our Monday morning meetings contribute to the professional development of teachers and impact student achievement? In order to answer this question we began as our students would in planning an experiment or writing a research paper, with evaluating our context and community to find out how to best design tools for data collection, which was our next step.

Our Community Context

Jill Myers, Principal, was approached by leaders of the Department of Education and the Superintendent of District 2, as well as parents to help build a new high school for a wide variety of students from all boroughs and backgrounds. Rigor would be emphasized for students to achieve high levels of understanding while pursuing a college preparatory curriculum. Baruch College Campus High School is a partnership between New York City's Community School District Two and Baruch College, City University of New York. Located in the heart of Gramercy Park, the school shares the College's library, computer services, and physical education facilities. A major strength of the Baruch community is a diverse student population comprised of multiple ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds. Baruch opened in 1997 with 100 students and has grown to its' present enrollment of 400 students. At Baruch College Campus High School, we expect each of our graduating students to take four years of Regents level math and science, as well as at least three years of a second language. In addition our students must participate in a 2-year intensive writing program and four years of social studies education. This community works collaboratively to create and plan courses, units, professional development workshops, grade team meetings, department meetings, and school wide events.

As teachers at Baruch College Campus High School we were initially inclined to focus our research on some (or even all!) of the professional development meetings we attend on a weekly basis. Each teacher at BCCHS attends an average of eight to twelve meetings per month on various topics related to student achievement and professional development. Staff meetings after school, every Monday, from 3:00-4:00 follow a monthly schedule for their agendas and functions.

Include the following:

- Principal administered whole staff meeting for various purposes depending on needs of the school community (Advisory, Report Cards, Parent-Teacher Conferences, et al)
- Department Meeting: History, English, Science, Math, Foreign Language & Art
- Grade Team Meeting: Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, Twelfth
- Study Groups:
 - 1) Portfolio development for tenured teachers as a means for assessing their practice and for the purpose of professional development
 - 2) Examination of instructional practices and developing support strategies for new and non-tenured teachers

In addition to the MMM and the aforementioned after school meetings, the staff at Baruch meet weekly with mentor teachers, in ELA (English Language Arts) teams on the 9th and 10th grades, and parent-teacher meetings, teacher-student meetings, teacher-guidance counselor meetings, and a wide range of other meetings on need to need basis.

We chose to focus our study on the Monday morning meetings that begin as a whole staff and then break into grade team groups. These meetings have evolved the most over the past six years and therefore offer a large pool of data. The founders of the school created these meetings to help unify the staff's vision for the week and to provide continuous monitoring of student progress while also building community. Since the inception of the meetings their format and content have been modified based on the needs of teachers, changes in the student population, and the administration's willingness to adapt to fit these needs.

In its' present form the Monday morning meeting follows this agenda:

- 7:30-7:40: Teachers gather to read Weekly calendar announcements individually
- 7:41-8:00: Teachers meet by grade team to discuss 2 students

Teachers take on roles during this time-Facilitator, Recorder, Time-keeper

Facilitator: lead the discussion of 2 previously selected students

Each teacher: shares the struggles and strengths of those students in his/her class and suggests strategies for support

Recorder: Takes notes to keep on file as part of the Team's binder and to give copies to the Administration, Guidance office, and Advisors.

Time is also used by all to discuss which two students will be profiled for the following week.

The above agenda is ideal but not often possible due to time constraints. This study will illuminate the changes necessary to improve these meetings based on the perspectives of teachers. To further understand the purpose and structure of these meetings and the various roles teachers play to ensure these goals, it is essential to explain more about the background and history of Baruch College Campus High School. This agenda was created by teachers based on their discussion of their needs with input from the Administration. The Monday Morning Meetings function well because of the support of the whole of Baruch's community and voluntary participation by staff. Cavazos and the Members of WEST (Women Educators of Science and Technology) emphasize in their paper: *Connected Conversations: Forms and Functions of Teacher Talk* the importance of community.

Certainly the composition of a conversation group is critical if it is to be a caring community that encourages participants to engage in serious, thoughtful reflection about their lives as... teachers.

-Talking Shop, Authentic Conversation and Teacher Learning, 143

This study will further demonstrate how Monday morning meetings at Baruch had a positive impact on the professional development of teachers, thus improving their work in supporting struggling students.

Tools Used in Studying a Professional Community of Teachers

With the support and leadership of the administration, teachers are able to find their own voice in designing many of the structures and purposes necessary in participating in a myriad of professional development meetings. This context enhances our study, which would not have been possible without the support of our Principal, Jill Myers, and the students and teachers of Baruch College Campus High School. With the input and guidance of our peers we were able to begin generating a menu of action research tools that would prove indispensable in writing this research study. Methods for data collection:

* Student Surveys (Appendix i):

Short answer and scaled questions to assess students' perceptions of the school in terms of academic and emotional supports offered to them when they were "at risk" in one or more classes. Biographical section for them to complete included the following information: gender, college, major, year of graduation.

* Teacher Questionnaires (Appendix ii):

Included short answer questions designed to assess how teachers perceived the content and process of their grade team meetings each Monday morning and once a month after school.

* Interviews (Teacher and Student):

Allowed teacher(s) to elaborate on their short answer questions they responded to in writing for our questionnaire. Recording device: notes. This allowed deeper thought and reflection for the teacher and added depth of data to the questionnaire they had completed prior to the interview.

* Team Binders:

Each grade team was given a binder at the beginning of the school year to keep their own documentation for the work they do in their team meetings in terms of making calendars for projects/tests etc. to balance assignment due dates for students as well as student progress reports and notes taken during each of the Monday morning meetings.

* Anecdotal notes from Meetings:

As members of the 9th grade team—U. Shah, and 12th grade team—K. Vigil, we take our own notes during the Monday morning meetings to record both the content and process of this time.

* Feedback Session with Teachers: An hour long forum for teachers to share their experiences and ideas about the Monday Morning Meetings, particularly areas that needed improvement, with prompting by researchers with questions.

Data Description & Data Analysis

What did students have to say?

A student survey was distributed to alumni to assess their perceptions of the school in terms of academic and emotional supports offered to them when they were at risk of failing in one or more classes. This survey also included a biographical section for them to complete which detailed the following information: gender, undergraduate institution, major, year of graduation. The data collected from these surveys demonstrated that students felt one of the strengths of Baruch College Campus High School was the strong relationship between teachers and students where teachers individually or as team would meet with students on a regular basis to insure their academic success. Students indicated that what helped prepare them for college was being successfully in their classes at Baruch College Campus High School and that the rigor demanded of them did not go without support from all members of the faculty. Unfortunately we did not receive as many fully completed students surveys as anticipated. We were unable to use a lot of this data to reach broader conclusions, but the comments of students about the strong sense of support they felt from their teachers does suggest that the time teachers are using during the Monday morning meetings (specifically designed to be a forum for discussion about struggling students and how to support them) impacts how teachers plan, teach, and ultimately ensures that students are successful.

One student said: “Mr. Jonas was great teacher. He helped me with my hardest subject, Math, and always acknowledged my strengths and weaknesses. He was also my advisor and helped and advised me with other situations.” –Baruch College Campus High School Graduate, 2002.

Additional student responses were clear indicators of supportive teachers as instrumental in their success in High School and College.

- “They all had time for me, no matter what.”
- “They helped me get through any problems I had, and I always learned a lot from their classes.”
- “Pushed me to think more, and made me learn more about myself.”
- “The sense of the community is very important, and the accessibility of counselors, tutors, teachers, show students the importance of assistance with work.”

What did Teachers have to say?

A teacher questionnaire (appendix iii) was distributed to all staff members. This included short answer questions designed to assess how teachers perceived the content and process of their grade team meetings each Monday morning and once a month after school. These questionnaires were the most helpful tool in collecting data for our research study. The reason we chose to use this tool was to help base our conclusions on teacher experiences and as a means for comparing the different structures grade teams use in their meeting time to try and ascertain the most effective use of time in supporting students while also giving teacher voice and ultimately enhancing their own professional development.

Teachers Interviews yielded additional data and rich anecdotes

The use of individual interviews with teachers allowed teachers to elaborate on their short answer questions that they responded to in writing in the questionnaire. Time for response allowed deeper thought and reflection for the teacher and added depth to our data collection.

What data was revealed to us through these interviews?

- Personal reflections by teachers on Monday morning meeting time
- Follow-up or lack thereof on student progress
- Allowed more in-depth information on the content and process of the Monday morning meetings to be gathered to show how important these meetings were to the teachers.

Teachers valued the meetings for the sense of community that was created and the ability to really work collaboratively with colleagues in a professional setting to design student-specific support strategies for those students who were struggling across the grade. The impact and importance of these meetings was articulated by teachers in these interviews despite any reservations they may have also stated about the lack of structure or time that did lead to levels of frustration, and impeded high levels of success in supporting all students who were being discussed.

For me, MMMs are most helpful in identifying which students have problems..and which students are struggling across the board. It's useful comparing behaviors and hearing what other teachers do to address them.

- Y. Lee, 10th grade Chemistry Teacher

This information echoed the broader statistics gathered from the questionnaires and thus demonstrates how teachers wanted more time and more structure that *they* design, so that they could ultimately support more struggling students.

Grade Team Binders: Teacher generated source of data

Each grade team was given a binder at the beginning of the school year to keep their own documentation for the work they do. This documentation includes: making calendars for projects/tests etc., updates on students, inter-team memos, notes taken during the meetings, and notes received from other teachers outside the team. Every team has a unique system of record keeping that reflects the students they select, strategies and interventions provided, this documentation also provides opportunities for the teachers to reflect on their own practice and their effectiveness as a grade team.

Teacher Talk needs a structure that originates from the participants

It seems that structure serves our purpose, which is to inform members of the grade team and advisors about students that are struggling and discussing strategies for helping struggling students.

–L. Loizides, 11th grade Chemistry Teacher

After reviewing notes, surveys, interviews, and the organizational structures (team binders) being used by each grade team, we noticed that there were no uniform structures being used to support the discussions teachers were having about how to help struggling students. We asked the following question to collect more data for analysis of the Monday morning meetings.

Are there any uniform structures for note-taking outside of the meeting and during the meeting?

Teacher responses to this question varied, however, the overall indication was that some sort of structure was needed, perhaps more telling was that they wanted to play a role in developing this structure.

Ideally two students are discussed. Often the meetings are interrupted by administrative concerns or distractions. Quality depends on the facilitator. Everyone knows the role, but not everyone does it well. Timing is difficult.

–K. Bloomfield, 9th grade Social Studies Teacher (see Graphs 2 & 3 for additional findings)

Yes [there are uniform structures], by use of note taker summary sheet during the discussion (designed by the 12th grade team) and through the facilitator's use of comment sheets completed by all grade teachers prior to the meeting about two specific students. – S. Zimmerman, 12th grade Science teacher (see Graphs 2 & 3 for additional findings)

Additionally, a guidance counselor, a regular attendee of the Monday morning meetings had this to say in regard to structure for the use of time:

It would probably help if there was a standard form that we used to document this. I keep every memo and form I get on every student in my office where they each have a folder however I thin everyone does something different.

–K. Auerbach, Guidance Counselor

All these members of the Baruch College Campus High School staff participate in the yearly retreat in august for community building, instructional practice workshops, and planning and thus share a common experience and language to work in groups as professionals. This type of community enables rich dialogue but does not necessarily guarantee time for meaningful reflection on the Monday morning meeting time, indicating that teachers need more time and need to be compensated for it accordingly.

At the very least, participants in a good conversation share a common language. But this is not enough. Speakers and listeners in a good conversation are usually members of a shared discourse community, using shared vocabulary and register, following unwritten rules about topics, turn taking, and taboo.

–Talking Shop, Authentic Conversation and Teacher Learning, 178

These quotes from teachers at Baruch College Campus High School exemplify the varied experiences of grade teams during the Monday morning meetings, but also acknowledge the general need for structure. We further investigated the development of these structures and the impact on the teachers participating. We have found that giving teachers voice in designing the use of time in discussing strategies for improving student achievement allows them to create structures that benefit their aims. It also fosters a strong sense of professionalism and community. Though many of the teachers feel there is room for improvement in these meetings, everyone still gets up extra early on Mondays to come in to school and talk about kids with their colleagues.

Here is what one teacher had to say about her feelings about these professional development meetings:

It is positive, it creates a sense of unity within the school, and sometimes unexpected moments and information are shared because all of the 11th grade teachers are there to share them. –L. Howard, 11th grade Math Teacher

Out of 24 staff members surveyed (21 teachers and 3 guidance counselors) 19 surveys were completed and analyzed. The following percentages of data demonstrate that many of the teachers were unsure of how effective the Monday morning meetings were, due to inconsistency in structures being used and time management issues. Nonetheless they were also motivated to continue these professional development meetings and have provided many suggestions for how to improve them.

Evolution of the Monday Morning Meetings at Baruch College Campus High School from a monologue to a meaningful dialogue takes time and a supportive administration

When groups of teachers have met to talk month after month over several years, their conversations change and develop in regular patterns. Early conversations and the stories told within them establish the identities of the participants and probe the boundaries of spoken and implicit rules of exchange...As a conversation group develops and participants find their voices, the conversational floor opens to greater complexity, depth, and tolerance of uncertainty. Teachers are more ready to wonder, speculate, think aloud, and express doubt and regret. Thoughtful, supportive listening becomes more important than advice giving or problem solving.

- Talking Shop, Authentic Conversation and Teacher Learning, 179

In the fall of 1997 with a staff of 8 and student body of 100 teachers and administrators began meeting every Monday at 7:30 am to share the news for the week (weekly calendar) and discuss their concerns about students and planning. By the fall of 2002 the staff numbered 26 and the students nearly 400, clearly the structure of these meetings needed to change, but the purpose remained the same, to unify the staff and support students. See Graph 1 for data findings.

A deeper analysis of the Monday morning meetings at Baruch College Campus High School had led to broader conclusions for instructional practice, professional development of teachers, and the need for policy initiatives. See Graph 4 for data findings.

Teachers require more time to work collaboratively in structuring how they use professional development meetings where talk revolves around how to analyze student progress and use strategies to improve upon student achievement; with additional time to follow-up on the strategies implemented and give teachers voice in analyzing the effectiveness of this meeting time. See Graphs 5 & 6 for data findings.

Policy Implications and Recommendations

The End of Isolation: Respecting Teacher Voice and Time

The isolation within which contemporary teachers work is so common as to be almost transparent. Isolated from other professionals, teachers and their practice are embedded within a hierarchical system in which the day-to-day activities are governed by external forces: administrative mandates, parental requests, and legislative directives. The teachers--the ones with the most knowledge about the specifics of the contexts in which they work--may feel the least empowered to engage in innovative practices that could enhance the lives of their students in important ways.

- Talking Shop, Authentic Conversation and Teacher Learning, 164

This research study has shown that teachers want and need more time to reflect on their work in professional meetings where teacher talk is focused around supporting struggling students.

Education policy makers need to consider that teachers need guidance, a supportive administration, and compensation for time used in enriching their own professional development, which aids the instruction and support of their students.

Appendix i

BCCHS

Survey for Alumni

1/9/03

Gender: _____ (optional)

Year you graduated: _____

College: _____

Intended Major: _____

Section I

Respond to the following questions as completely and honestly as possible:

1. Were you ever at risk* of failing a class at BCCHS? Yes or No

*not meeting the requirements and expectations for the class as set by the teacher, as outlined in the course letter.

2. If yes, list classes and years below:

3. Did you succeed in passing the class? If not, describe why not. If yes, check off which of the following strategies you think helped you improve and pass.

____ After school help

____ Peer tutoring

____ Meeting with the Teacher (one on one)

____ Meeting with the grade team

____ Meeting with your advisor

____ Meeting with your parents and check all apply:

____ Advisor, ____ Teacher, ____ Principal, ____ Counselor

____ Phone calls home

If there are any additional supports that were offered to you not listed above, describe here:

4. Which teacher(s) or class(es) had the most impact on your learning and why?

5. In what ways did BCCHS support and prepare you for work you would do in college?
In what ways could BCCHS provided you with additional preparation?

6. Describe your advisory experience, be as specific as possible. You may include supports offered, positives, and suggestions.

Section II

Survey for Alumni

1/9/03

Out of a scale of: 1

2

3

4

5

Disagree

Agree Somewhat

Strongly Agree

1. Baruch was a safe learning environment:

1

2

3

4

5

2. I always felt teachers were available outside of class to help:

1

2

3

4

5

3. After school academic programs increased my understanding of content areas:

1

2

3

4

5

4. I feel more prepared for college work than my peers (students from other high schools):

1

2

3

4

5

5. I feel that Baruch's emphasis on discussion skills prepared me well for college:

1

2

3

4

5

6. I feel that Baruch's emphasis on cooperative learning (group work) prepared me well for college:

1

2

3

4

5

7. I feel that Baruch's emphasis on reading and writing prepared me well for college:

1

2

3

4

5

8. I feel that Baruch's emphasis on critical thinking and problem solving prepared me well for college:

1

2

3

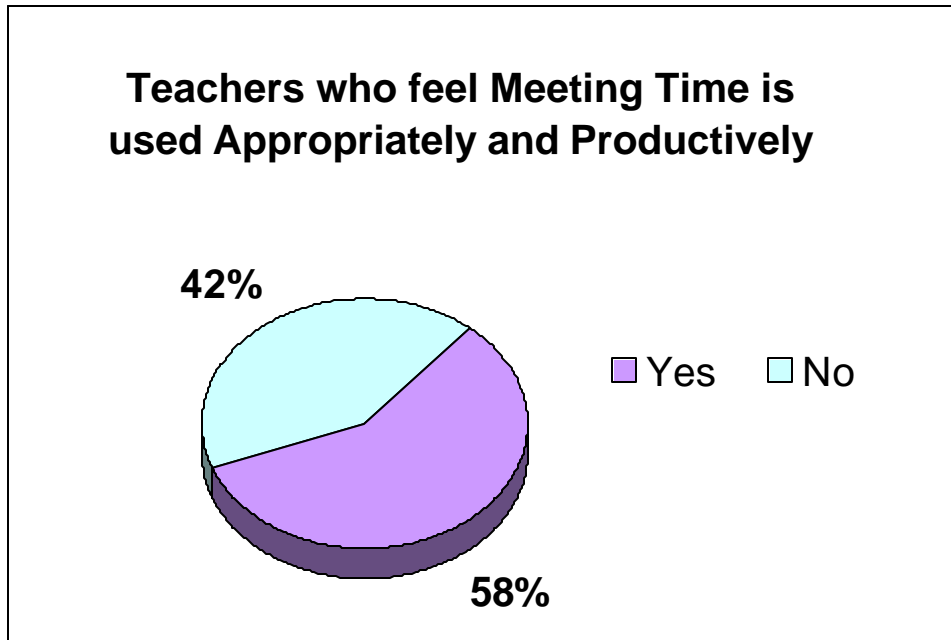
4

5

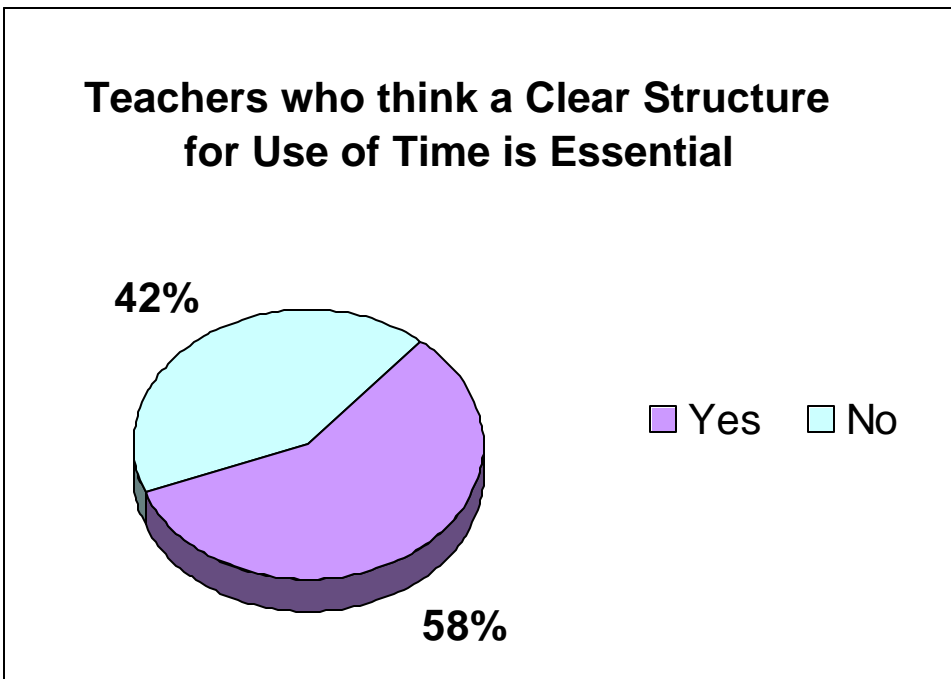
Are there any other additional comments you would like to make about the education you received while attending Baruch College Campus High School that would have been helpful for life in college?

***THANK YOU FOR FILLING OUT THIS SURVEY HONESTLY AND COMPLETELY,
PLEASE RETURN TO MS. VIGIL, ANY OF HER ADVISEES (CURRENT), OR MS.
SHAH'S MAILBOX.***

Appendix ii

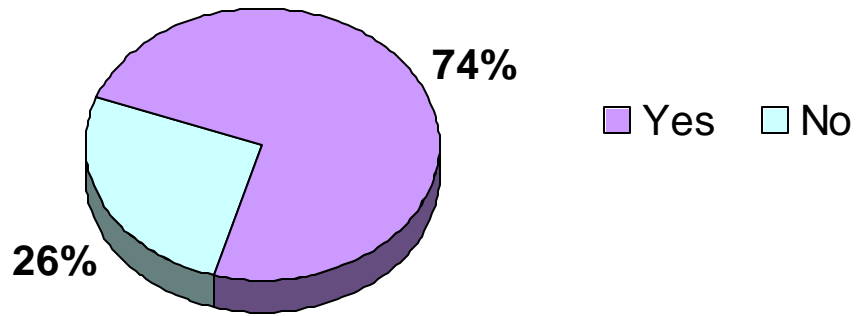


Graph 1



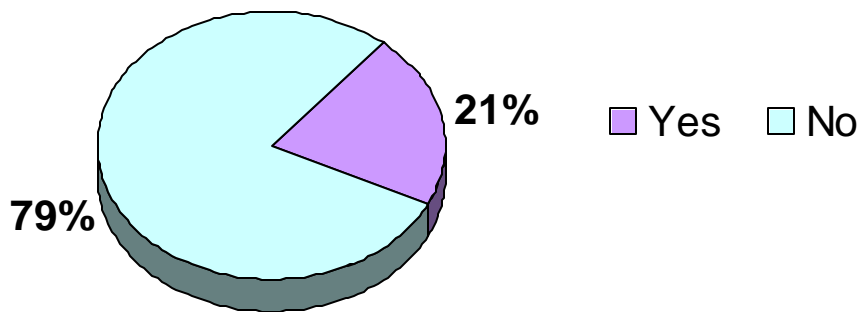
Graph 2

**Teachers who think Defined Roles
are Necessary in using Meeting Time
Successfully**



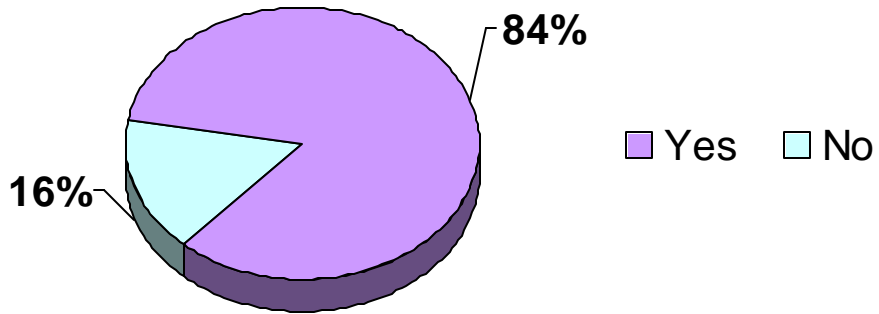
Graph 3

**Teachers who feel their Monday
Morning Meetings Enable them to
Better Support Student Achievement**



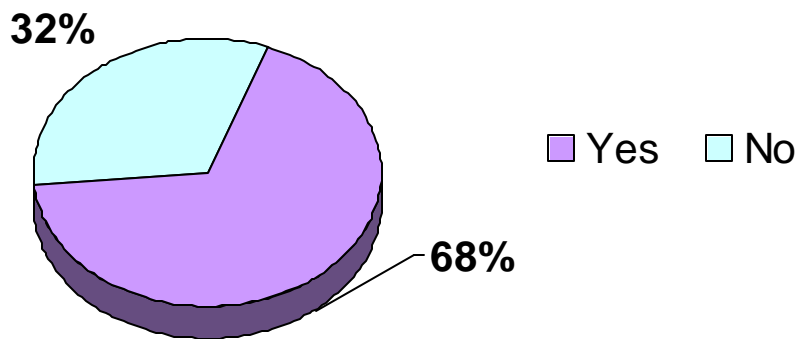
Graph 4

Teachers who think more Time for Follow Up is Needed to Track Progress of Students



Graph 5

Teachers who feel they Need More Time to Prepare for and Reflect on their Meetings



Graph 6

Bibliography

Clark, Chris M., *Talking Shop, Authentic Conversation and Teacher Learning*, New York, NY Teachers College Press, 2001

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Meyers ,Ellen and Rust, Frances O. *Taking Action with Teacher Research*, Portsmouth, NH, Heinemann Press, 2003