Stages of Team Development

While the process of developing a professional learning team may feel uniquely personal, there are certain stages of development common across teams. By understanding that these stages exist—and by describing both the challenges and opportunities inherent in each stage—school leaders can improve the chances of success for every learning team. Use the following quick reference guide to evaluate the stages of team development in your building and to identify practical strategies for offering support.

Characteristics of Stage	Strategies for Offering Support
Stage: Filling the Time	
• Teams ask, "What is it exactly that we're supposed to do together?" • Meetings can ramble. • Frustration levels can be high. • Activities are simple and scattered rather than a part of a coherent plan for improvement.	☐ Set clear work expectations. ☐ Define specific tasks for teams to complete (for example, identifying essential objectives or developing common assessments). ☐ Provide sample agendas and sets of norms to help define work.
Stage: Sharing Personal Practices	
• Teamwork focuses on sharing instructional practices or resources. • A self-imposed standardization of instruction appears. • Less-experienced colleagues benefit from the planning acumen of colleagues. • Teams delegate planning responsibilities.	☐ Require teams to come to consensus around issues related to curriculum, assessment, or instruction. ☐ Require teams to develop shared minilessons delivered by all teachers. ☐ Structure efforts to use student learning data in the planning process. ☐ Ask questions that require data analysis to answer.
Stage: Developing Common Assessments	
• Teachers begin to wrestle with the question, "What does mastery look like?" • Emotional conversations around the characteristics of quality instruction and the importance of individual objectives emerge. • Pedagogical controversy is common.	☐ Provide teams with additional training in interpersonal skills and conflict management. ☐ Moderate or mediate initial conversations around common assessments to model strategies for joint decision making. ☐ Ensure that teams have had training in how to best develop effective common assessments. ☐ Create a library of sample assessments from which teams can draw.

Stage: Analyzing Student Learning

- Teams begin to ask, "Are students learning what they are supposed to be learning?"
- Teams shift attention from a focus on teaching to a focus on learning.
- Teams need technical and emotional support.
- Teachers publically face student learning results.
- Teachers can be defensive in the face of unyielding evidence.
- Teachers can grow competitive.

☐ Provide tools and structures for effective data analysis.

☐ Repurpose positions to hire teachers trained in data analysis to support teams new to working with assessment results.

☐ Emphasize a separation of "person" from "practice."

☐ Model a data-oriented approach by sharing results that reflect on the work of practitioners beyond the classroom (for example, by principals, counselors, and instructional resource teachers).

Stage: Differentiating Follow-Up

- Teachers begin responding instructionally to student data.
- Teams take collective action, rather than responding to results as individuals.
- Principals no longer direct team development. Instead, they serve as collaborative partners in conversations about learning.

☐ Ask provocative questions about instructional practices and levels of student mastery.

☐ Demonstrate flexibility as teams pursue novel approaches to enrichment and remediation.

☐ Provide concrete ways to support differentiation.

☐ Identify relevant professional development opportunities; allocate funds to after-school tutoring programs.

☐ Redesign positions to focus additional human resources on struggling students.

Stage: Reflecting on Instruction

- Teams begin to ask, "What instructional practices are most effective with our students?"
- Learning is connected back to teaching.
- Practitioners engage in deep reflection about instruction.
- Action research and lesson study are used to document the most effective instructional strategies for a school's student population.

☐ Facilitate a team's efforts to study the teaching-learning connection.

☐ Create opportunities for teachers to observe one another teaching.

☐ Provide release time for teams to complete independent projects.

☐ Facilitate opportunities for cross-team conversations to spread practices and perspectives across an entire school.

☐ Celebrate and publicize the findings of team studies.