

Richard and Rebecca DuFour on the Elements of Teacher Teamwork

“One of the more pointless debates going on in many school districts is who will decide how teams will use their collaborative time,” say consultant/authors Richard and Rebecca DuFour in this Solution Tree advertisement in *Education Week*. “Both sides should be able to agree that if teachers do not use the collaboration time for the purpose intended (that is, if they don’t co-labor on the right work), there will be no gains in student achievement.” What is “the right work”? For the DuFours’ list of 18 critical issues for grade-level and subject teams, see: <http://www.allthingsplc.info/pdf/tools/CriticalIssuesForTeamConsideration.pdf>

The big idea here is that when educators work collaboratively rather than in isolation, students learn more. Key elements of collaboration are:

- Committing to implementing a guaranteed and viable curriculum;
- Using interim assessments that provide ongoing evidence of each student’s learning;
- Collectively analyzing that evidence and using it to inform and improve practice;
- Putting in place a systematic intervention process that provides struggling students with additional time and support.

It’s also important, say the DuFours, for teacher teams to be as self-directed as possible, so that if the principal leaves, the work will continue. Team leaders and administrators should agree on the work to be done, a timeline, and what the team will present as evidence of completion. As long as things are running smoothly, administrators should meet with teams only once a quarter to review progress, analyze evidence of student learning on interim assessments, and offer specific support. But if there are signs of dysfunction on a team, administrators should attend meetings to get things back on track. The key principle here is *reciprocal accountability* – the team is accountable for doing its work and administrators are accountable for providing what’s needed to support success.

“Who Decides Who Decides” by Richard DuFour and Rebecca DuFour in *Education Week*, Nov. 3, 2010 (Vol. 29, #10, p. 14)