Getting Started With
Protocols

The Purpose of Protocols

In the context of teacher collaboration and professional planning time, protocols serve several important purposes:

- Structuring conversations to ensure they remain focused and productive
- Building the foundational skills essential to effective teacher collaboration
- Helping to nurture a culture of collegiality, trust, and mutual appreciation
- Ensuring everyone in the group has an opportunity to contribute and be heard
- Reducing the tendency toward subjective, digressive, or one-sided conversations
- Promoting substantive, in-depth conversations about a specific topic
- Encouraging active, respectful listening among all participants
- Providing a "safe space" for teachers to share their work with colleagues
- Allowing difficult questions or issues to be raised in constructive ways
- Eliminating unhelpful excuses, complaints, or comments about student behavior
- Keeping conversations focused on goals, solutions, and results

A Few Important Things to Keep in Mind

- Protocol-based conversations can feel awkward at first, since people are typically not accustomed to highly structured discussions. Awkward feelings tend to dissipate quickly as people become more familiar with protocols and more experienced using them.
- Protocols are most effective when used by trained group facilitators. In the context of professional learning communities and common planning time meetings, subtle facilitation skills and strategies can mean the difference between a highly productive meeting and a counterproductive meeting.
- When starting out, it is important to practice using protocols as designed and intended. Most protocols were developed by skilled and experienced practitioners, and their underlying logic and rationale may not be immediately comprehensible at first.
- Over time, administrators and teachers should build up a repertoire of particularly useful or relevant protocols. Once facilitators and teacher-leaders become more conversant in the use of protocols, they can begin modifying them to suit the needs of a meeting or specialized topic.

Additional Background Information

Educators can find an abundance of protocols on the School Reform Initiative website (schoolreforminitiative.org/protocol), including the following useful resources:

1. *A Rationale for Protocols*
2. *Attributes of a Learning Community*
3. *Considerations for Responsive Facilitation*
4. *Feedback Principles*
5. *Glossary of Common Protocol Terms*
6. *Why Protocols?*
7. *Forming Ground Rules*
8. *Group Agenda Planning Form*