Grade-Level Planning Meeting Guide

# Overview

This guide helps facilitate effective collaboration and support among all teachers in a grade level. It is drawn from the practices at **New Heights Academy Charter School** (NY).

**Who this is for:** Teachers and support staff across a grade level that provide Tier 1 instruction, support, and interventions. It’s particularly relevant when teachers are instructing different content to the same group of students.

**When to use it**: This tool should be used weekly as an agenda and framework during grade-level meetings. These meetings provide a dedicated time to collaboratively address student needs, discuss interventions, and review progress.

**How to use it:** Teachers and support staff engage in structured meetings using the agenda provided. They identify students in need of additional support, discuss and assess support plans, analyze academic and behavioral needs, establish timelines, and allocate responsibilities.

# Best Practices

This tool provides structures for teacher accountability, relationship building, and determining additional support for students. This is not intended to be used as a deep dive into instruction or the specific performance of an individual child or group of children. To use this tool well, consider the following best practices:

* **Regular collaboration:** Weekly grade-level meetings provide a consistent platform for teachers to collaborate and discuss student progress, ensuring a unified approach to student support.
* **Data-driven decision making:** Teachers come prepared with student data, enabling informed discussions and targeted interventions based on actual performance and behavior patterns.
* **Open dialogue:** Focusing on open and nonjudgmental discussions fosters an environment where teachers can share insights, strategies, and challenges and exchange ideas.
* **Differentiated support:** By analyzing the root causes and barriers to learning, whether challenges are due to skill or will, the team can tailor interventions and support students’ academic and behavioral needs more effectively.
* **Leveraging relationships:** The tool draws on existing teacher-student relationships to support interventions, recognizing that strong rapport can improve students’ learning experiences.

**Caveat:** This tool will guide and create a structure for discussion, but it does not serve as a formal intervention, nor should it be the only discussion about a student. It is a way for staff who see the same groups of students but provide different content instruction to collaborate and learn from each other to best support student growth and progress.

# Potential Outcomes

* **Enhanced student support:** Collaborative discussions and targeted interventions can result in improved academic performance and positive behavior among students.
* **Innovative solutions:** Sharing successful strategies encourages teachers to explore new approaches and fosters an environment of knowledge sharing and practical solutions to common classroom issues.
* **Student engagement:** Leveraging teacher-student relationships and knowledge of students improves student engagement in interventions and support plans.

# Grade-Level Meeting Protocol

The protocol has three sections:

**1. Opening:** This segment establishes a warm and inviting atmosphere, ensuring all participants feel comfortable and can engage constructively in the meeting.

**2. Identifying and discussing students:** This critical phase delves into the specifics of students who require additional support to thoroughly understand their unique needs and challenges.

**3. Action plan:** In this concluding section, student insights inform a concrete action plan. This plan should clearly outline the next step and measurable outcomes to track progress effectively.

A blank template for the planning and implementation is available to help organize these steps.

**Teachers:**

**Grade Level:**

**Date:**

**Additional Participants:**

## Pre-meeting preparation

* **Gather and analyze data.** Collect relevant data on student performance, both academic and behavioral. Analyze the collected data to identify trends, patterns, strengths, and areas of concern.
* **Identify students who need additional support.** Review your class roster and identify students who may need additional academic or behavioral support.
* **Prepare notes and comments.** Based on the data analysis and student identification, prepare specific notes and comments to contribute to the discussion during the meeting.
* **Bring necessary materials.** Bring any materials, data, or notes you’ve prepared for the meeting for reference and sharing.

Section 1

#### Meeting overview (5 min)

* **Welcome and purpose:** Be sure to set a positive tone and create an inclusive atmosphere so that all participants feel valued and engaged. The meeting is only as valuable as the participants make it, and engagement and collaboration are critical. As the facilitator, think about how you are intentionally establishing an environment where all participants can lean into collaboration.
* **Soft opening:** Engage in the chosen light activity, like a Buzzfeed quiz, to kick-start the meeting. How can we make this activity enjoyable and engaging for everyone?
* **Agenda review and additional items:** The grade-level chair reviews the agenda and asks whether any extra topics need to be added. Allocate time slots for each agenda item to ensure effective time management.

## Section 2

#### Identifying and discussing students (25 min)

* **Identify students in need of additional support (behavior and academics).** Share relevant student data to identify students who may need additional support academically or behaviorally. What data points are most important in identifying priority students?
* **Analyze data.** Teachers analyze the collected data to identify students who may need additional support. academically or behaviorally. Identify patterns and trends that may indicate challenges and strengths. What trends or patterns are emerging from our data analysis? Are there any specific indicators that highlight academic or behavioral challenges and needs?
* **Discuss challenges.** Engage in collaborative problem solving to understand the root causes of challenges. Brainstorm potential factors contributing to students’ difficulties. What are some possible underlying factors that might be affecting these students’ performance? What strategies have we found effective in addressing challenges with students? Where are the students thriving? How can we potentially leverage student strengths and successes to bolster their support?
* **Prioritize student support.** Based on data analysis and discussions, prioritize students who need immediate attention and support. Consider the urgency and severity of each student’s situation. How can we ensure that our resources and efforts are focused on students who need it the most? What criteria should we use to prioritize students for intervention?
* **Discuss plan/support needed for students.** Discuss students who are on support plans and assess their progress. Share updates on the effectiveness of interventions that were previously implemented. What successes or challenges have we observed in implementing the interventions? Brainstorm effective interventions and strategies to improve their situations. What successful strategies have we used in the past that could benefit these students? How can we adapt these strategies to suit the unique needs of each student?
* **Reflect on academic challenges.** Engage in a reflective discussion to determine what the barriers are to student success and whether they are due to skill or student will. Analyze both content mastery and motivation or behavior, as well as the system and structures built around them, as contributing factors.
* **Tailor support and interventions.** Use insights gained to tailor support and interventions for each student. Discuss strategies that address the challenges pertaining to both skill and will.
* **Determine the scope of challenges.** Discuss whether identified challenges affect all students, some students, or specific classrooms. Consider if certain challenges are isolated or common across the grade level. Are the academic or behavioral challenges consistent across the entire grade level or localized to specific areas? How can we gain insights from classrooms where these challenges are not as prominent? What specific strategies have been effective in classrooms where these challenges are less pronounced?
* **Address behavioral concerns.** Address behavioral concerns among students through proactive and strengths-based approaches. Encourage teachers to share successful behavior management strategies and strong classroom culture–building opportunities.

## Section 3

#### Action plan (25 min)

* **Outline an action plan.** Begin outlining potential interventions and support strategies for the identified students. Assign responsibilities for further research and planning. What initial strategies or interventions can we propose to support these students? How do these intervention and support strategies address the identified barriers in section 1?
* **Explore incentives and additional supports.** Discuss incentives and additional support strategies for students who need extra assistance. Address academic support needs through tutoring, resources, or other interventions.
* **Agree on a timeline and milestones.** Collaboratively establish a timeline for implementing interventions and assessing student progress. Define specific milestones and checkpoints to track the effectiveness of the intervention and consider whether/when caregiver communication and partnership is relevant and needed.
* **Discuss a monitoring plan.** Discuss a plan for monitoring student progress and reviewing the effectiveness of interventions. Determine when and how the team will reconvene to assess outcomes. How can we continue to track these students’ progress and adjust our interventions as needed? When should we schedule follow-up discussions to review the outcomes of our support strategies?

# Grade-Level Meeting Tool in Action

This is a fictional composite of a grade-level meeting in New Heights Academy Charter School.

## Participants

All seventh-grade teachers, as well as:

* Melissa, a seventh-grade math teacher
* Mercedes, the team leader
* Cassie, the assistant principal

## Background

Melissa is completing her class notes when James, a student passionate about soccer but facing academic challenges, enters and asks her to sign a student agreement form that he had forgotten earlier. Melissa appreciates his effort and engagement. James discusses his challenges in math and increased motivation to focus due to an upcoming soccer game. Melissa applauds his efforts and shares his improved grades, and James beams with pride. Melissa makes a note to discuss this in the grade-level PLC meeting, as she believes connecting his academic growth to his love for soccer could be beneficial.

## Meeting Overview

Mercedes kicks off the meeting with an engaging BuzzFeed activity. This lighthearted start builds camaraderie and sets a positive tone for the meeting. The group includes both seventh-grade teachers and the emergent bilingual specialist and special education teachers, ensuring diverse perspectives. As Mercedes presents the agenda, she highlights James' case as one of several student cases scheduled for discussion, following up on previous conversations about his academic journey and engagement.

## Identifying and Discussing Students

Mercedes notes James' progress on behavioral and social-emotional well-being, acknowledging that most teachers have observed positive changes in his participation and assignment completion.

James’ ELA teacher, however, expresses concern about his academic performance in her class and suggests he might need academic intervention. The discussion shifts to the student tracker, the system used to identify students’ academic and personal goals, the incentives and interventions used, and the effectiveness of those interventions toward student goals. Other teachers share mixed experiences in their classes, noting improved engagement but varying degrees of content mastery.

Melissa emphasizes the importance of aligning James’ goals in the tracker with his soccer ambitions and discusses her strategies to ensure content engagement. Other teachers share plans to address James' “checkbox” mentality (i.e., only finishing the assignment), and Cassie, the assistant principal, offers to observe and provide support in upcoming classes this or next week to better address his needs.

## Action Plan

The team agrees on next steps for James and updates the tracker. James’ ELA teacher and Cassie will meet to assess his progress, while Melissa plans to discuss the tracker’s goals with James, extending it to all subjects. She intends to update James’ mother on his growth, emphasizing his all-around improvement and discussing next steps for support. The team aims to reconvene in three weeks to assess progress and potentially adjust the frequency for updating the tracker.

## Next steps are documented and include:

* The ELA teacher and Cassie identify specific moments during lessons where James appears most engaged or disconnected, using these insights to tailor future instructional strategies.
* Melissa schedules a one-on-one meeting with James early next week to discuss the updated goals on his tracker. The meeting will focus on setting achievable, short-term objectives across all subjects, linking each to his interests in soccer where possible, to boost his motivation.
* Melissa schedules a call with James’ mother for the end of the week to share recent positive developments and discuss strategies for supporting James at home. This conversation will also cover how the home environment can reinforce the goals set in school.
* The team commits to a detailed review of the tracking system in three weeks to evaluate its effectiveness and make necessary adjustments based on James’ progress and feedback from all involved parties, including James himself and his caregivers.

# Sample Template for Grade-Level Meeting

This is a customizable template for a grade-level meeting.

**Teachers:**

**Grade Level:**

**Date:**

**Additional Participants:**

## Pre-meeting preparation

* **Gather and analyze data.** Collect relevant data on student performance, both academic and behavioral. Analyze the collected data to identify trends, patterns, and areas of concern.
* **Identify priority students.** Review your class roster and identify students who may need extra support academically or behaviorally.
* **Prepare notes and comments.** Based on the data analysis and student identification, prepare specific notes and comments to contribute to the discussion during the meeting.
* **Bring necessary materials.** Bring any materials, data, or notes you've prepared for the meeting for reference and sharing.

## Identifying and Discussing Students (25 min)

* **Identify priority students (behavior and academics)**:
* **Data analysis:** What trends or patterns are emerging from our data analysis?
* **Collaborative problem solving:** What are the root causes of challenges?
* **Prioritization and selection**:Prioritize students who need immediate attention and support.
* **Discuss plan/support needed for students:**
* **Reflective discussion on academic challenges**: Are challenges due to skill or student will?
* **Tailoring support and interventions:** Discuss strategies that address both skill and will challenges.
* **Determining the scope of challenges**: Discuss whether identified challenges affect all students, some students, or specific classrooms.
* **Addressing behavioral concerns:**

## Action Plan (25 min)

* **Action planning**:
* **Exploring incentives and additional supports**:
* **Agreeing on a timeline and milestones:**
* **Future monitoring and review**:

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