

TODD: How Often Should We Meet?

Once a team is created, one of the first questions that arises is how often the team should meet. The easy answer is most teams meet weekly to address concerns. If there is not enough to cover weekly, the meeting becomes an opportunity to engage in training, tabletop exercises or learning more about how team members approach problems. Teams that meet once a month or as needed are really in a reactive rather than a preventative mode. Teams that meet every two weeks may work, but will require more thoughtful engagement on how best to talk with each other and stay current on potential risk cases.

Teams must find a happy medium in terms of how often they meet. Most mid-to-large schools have teams that meet weekly for 1–2 hours. This provides a frequency of communication and sufficient meeting time to discuss previous cases, action plans, adjustment, and to introduce new cases. Teams that meet once a month or every two weeks may lose the ability to respond quickly to emergency situations and follow up on action items to ensure the team members are completing the tasks that they are assigned. The ability to communicate effectively electronically can make meetings, and the time in between the meetings, much more efficient and communicative.



Team leadership is critical here. In the same way very few of us like homework, there is a tendency to cut meetings short or cancel them if there is nothing pressing. When this happens, it sends a message to the

team that the meetings are not particularly important, and this begins to chip away at team members carving out that time each week for the meetings. When meetings are canceled, rushed or begin with “Let’s get this done because I know everyone is busy,” there send an unintended message that encourages moving quickly and avoiding debate, which works against the team process.

If your team is just starting out, meet weekly and set a good habit that will provide the team excellent opportunities to grow, talk and be ready to respond to cases. If you haven’t been meeting regularly or have met monthly or as needed, consider a transition to meeting every two weeks for a semester before adjusting to once a week. It is important to not trade meeting more frequently with canceling meetings. Teams should try to keep meeting cancellations under 10%. If you begin to cancel meeting more regularly, look at training and tabletop exercises to make every meeting valuable.

There can be other pressures and tasks that team members have that make meeting weekly difficult. Most teams are made up of staff and faculty that are doing this work on top of their other main responsibilities. We have found a letter from the college president, local school superintendent or company CEO to all team members’ supervisors and for the HR file can help underline why this staff or faculty member’s participation on the team is so critical. This costs the school or organization nothing and often results in better team member participation.