

Department “Amazing”

Departmentalization: It's not just for High School Anymore



Departmentalization

With the development of the Common Core State Standards, and the increased pressure from current accountability measures; students and teachers must have a deeper understanding of content-specific skills. The departmentalized model allows teachers to step away from a generalist role and serve as experts in the content area (Gewertz, 2014). Departmentalization gives teachers the opportunity to teach preferred subjects and specialize in their instructional practice. Teacher teams are created allowing

1

SPECIALIZED INSTRUCTION

Specialist vs. Generalist

2

STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Improvement in
academic achievement

3

TEACHER JOB SATISFACTION

Teachers plan for and
teach subjects they
prefer

students to see two or three teachers with a specialized focus in specific subjects. For example, one teacher will teach reading, writing, and social studies while another teacher will be responsible for math and science. This model is gaining popularity across the nation. District Leaders around the nation have also shared that this classroom model assists in meeting the needs of special needs students, allowing for better team planning and problem-solving, maximizing resources (financial and personnel), and exposing students to a variety of teaching styles.



Teacher Satisfaction and Student Achievement

Do departmentalized teachers enjoy teaching more than self-contained teachers?

Are students benefitting academically from this model?

Research shows that there is direct improvement of teacher attitudes and specialized teaching when fewer subject areas are taught. Departmentalized teachers experienced “higher morale, lighter workload, and increased overall job satisfaction in comparison to self-contained teachers at the same school” (Strohl et al., 2014, p. 110). This job satisfaction impacts the quality of instruction. Rather than one teacher being stretched too thin, teaching five subject areas, teachers work within a content area they can specialize and dig deeper into. This departmentalized model allows for personalized professional development for specific subject areas and gives teachers the opportunity to become ‘experts.’ Much like the medical practice, doctors specialize in specific areas of the body; educational practice should not be any different. Are you going to see your general practitioner for Lasik eye surgery? No, you are going to see an eye surgeon trained in best practice methods of treatment. If you are a student struggling with reading and writing, why shouldn’t you see a teacher specialized in best practice of reading interventions? These questions are ones we need to consider when grouping student for instruction. If we want to meet the growing demands of the Common Core Standards and improve student achievement, then elementary departmentalization must be implemented in schools across our country.

Gewertz, C. (2014). ‘Platooning on the Rise in Early Grades. *Education Week*, 33(21), 16–17.

Hood, L. (2009). “Platooning” Instruction Districts weigh pros and cons of departmentalizing elementary schools. *Harvard Education Letter*, 25(1–3), 13–17.

Strohl, A., Schmertzling, L. C., Schmertzling, R., & Hsiao, E.-L. (2014). Comparison of Self-Contained and Departmentalized Elementary Teachers’ Perceptions of Classroom Structure and Job Satisfaction. *Journal of Studies in Education*, 4(1), 109. <https://doi.org/10.5296/ise.v4i1.4802>

