

# Cozad Community Schools

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## COZAD TEACHERS LEARN TOGETHER AT “UN-CONFERENCE”

### Community supports powerful learning model for teachers.

More than 100 teachers from central and western Nebraska gather at Cozad Middle School on a warm summer morning just days before the start of the school year. They come from small panhandle towns and larger central Nebraska communities like Kearney and Grand Island. They don't get paid and they aren't required to attend, yet they are excited to participate in a day of learning which they design together.

Cozad Community School's 100th Meridian EdCamp is an example of a new type of professional learning format which is rapidly gaining popularity among educators throughout the world. Often referred to as “un-conferences”, EdCamps break the traditional mold of staff development for educators. Participants meet as a group in the morning and are asked to suggest topics about which they would like to learn or share with others. The group then votes on the topics, and the most popular ideas are used to create a schedule for the day, with small-group sessions lasting under an hour. The atmosphere is relaxed and informal, and learning happens primarily through discussion and sharing. The result is an individualized experience which is meaningful to the teacher and which meets their most pressing needs. In addition, teachers get to meet and build relationships with peers they might otherwise never meet.

EdCamps are organized and held throughout the year and across the world. In Nebraska, EdCamps have been organized in communities from Omaha, Grand Island, and Kearney to the small panhandle community of Bayard. To avoid conflicts with busy school schedules, most EdCamps are held on Saturdays, but Cozad's organizers have aimed for a weekday shortly before the school year begins. This not only avoids a weekend commitment on the part of busy teachers, but also provides a great morale boost for the start of the year. The Cozad community has pitched in as well, with the local development corporation providing coffee and rolls in the morning and the Cozad Community Health System providing lunch for all attendees.

According to organizer Patty Wolfe, the first 100th Meridian EdCamp last summer was a great success, and attendance exceeded expectations. “Over 100 teachers attended, some from as far away as Bayard, Bridgeport, and Mitchell, NE. It was a great experience for our teachers and it is a really enjoyable day of learning. The most powerful part is the conversations that happen among teachers.” Topics ranged from using technology tools in classroom instruction to building better relationships among staff, students and communities. While technology is often discussed during sessions, it is not the focus of EdCamps. “It's really about teachers coming together to share what works and to build connections to each other. Those connections with other educators are our most powerful learning resource.”

The second annual 100th Meridian EdCamp will be held at Cozad Middle School on August 9th. All educators are welcome. More information is available at <http://edcamp100meridian.weebly.com/> or you may contact Patty Wolfe ([patty.wolfe@cozadschools.net](mailto:patty.wolfe@cozadschools.net)) or Dave Evertson ([dave.evertson@cozadschools.net](mailto:dave.evertson@cozadschools.net)).