Master Schedule

Of all the "sacred cows" in a high school, the master schedule ranks at the top—with good reason. To figure out a system by which several hundred (or thousand) students all move through the required and elective classes they need, as well as through the lunchroom, and all teachers have full course loads as well as lunch and prep time is quite an accomplishment. Once you have it figured out, heaven forbid you alter the student day in any way, shape, or form. Anyone who has spent time working in secondary education can attest to the panic that ensues if the period-ending bells are altered or, in a situation of true desperation, they don't go off at all. So, realizing the dynamics that are defined by a master schedule, how do you go about changing it?

Acceptance and Data

First, we must acknowledge that to implement the RTI framework you will need to disrupt the master schedule! Anyone who believes he can make such changes without doing so is fooling himself. The level of disruption or alteration can vary from school to school, and leadership teams should carefully consider all changes before implementing them. The rationale for why and how the master schedule is disrupted also needs to be carefully examined and communicated, so that leadership can maintain or build consensus. When we change the schedule, we are changing the daily work experience of our staff—hitting very close to home. Change can be hard, but it's much smoother if it is well thought out and rational.

We suggest you start by examining your data. No matter what form of registration you use—arena scheduling or student request format—the first step is to review your registration data and ask questions like the following:

► How many classes don't meet minimum enrollment requirements?
► What classes have high failure rates?
► What classes have a history of low overall enrollment?

Questions like these help administrators identify courses that may not be serving students in the best possible way. From that point, they can begin to formulate potential areas of change in the master schedule. The purpose of this inquiry is to identify room for movement or innovation.
While options that come out of this type of questioning can have controversial outcomes, it is important to consider them. Reviewing the data gives administrators a powerful tool. While an option can easily be challenged, documentation of a class having the highest failure rate for three years or meeting its enrollment capacity at the end of registration cannot be easily dismissed. As budgets get tighter and resources dwindle, reviewing these data is an essential process for identifying areas of change in the master schedule. Administrators must be willing to find that potential change, fight the battle for change, and know that in the long run it is better for kid.

Schedule Reorganization
In addition to reviewing your registration and class enrollment data, take time to consider other aspects of your current system to see if they might be reorganized or refined to support stronger outcomes for students.

Advisement
Most schools have a system for advising students, but is its purpose clearly defined? Schools can start with examining current structures already in place. Think about your current advisement system, and ask the following questions:

► How often do students and teachers see each other?
► What is the structure for their time together?
► Are there specific tasks or activities students need to complete each day, week, month, or term?
► How are academic supports fostered during this time?
► Is there, or could there be, time for remediation?
► How do students and staff build relationships during this time?
► What data or information do you have supporting the effectiveness of the current system? (Sometimes this is as easy as using a short survey to begin gathering some baseline data.)

Once you have the data, what do they tell you? Are students in need of work completion skills? Do they need skills development in the area of reading? Whatever the data may indicate, look to an already established time, like advisement, as a potential for delivering tiered services to your students. Advisement time can be used largely as a Tier 1 activity, providing additional relationship building and academic and social behavioral support to all students. In addition, specific plans can be made
for a subgroup of students to address a unique need through this system. Figure 9.1 (page 124) shows a few options to consider for creatively using advisement time in middle or high school settings.

In order to build time for Tier 2 interventions, consider reallocating the number of advisements. For example, if you currently have twenty-five advisements with twenty kids, what would it look like if you now had twenty advisements with a few more kids in each one? If you could make that happen, you would have the five additional teachers available to deliver interventions during this time. Rather than having to add staff in order to add time, often the solution is about being creative with what you have.

Whatever your school decides, if there is a current advisement system in place, you can and should review the allotted time. The insight and buy-in for the teaching staff is another critical aspect to consider when examining how to best utilize an advisement system.

Figure 9.1: Options for using advisement time in middle and high school settings.

**Option A: Daily homeroom-Eighteen minutes a day**
- Each day has a purpose:
  - Monday: Grade checks
  - Tuesday and Thursday: Academic supports
  - Wednesday: Group meetings
  - Friday: PBIS activities
- Student organization: Each teacher has approximately twenty students of mixed grades.

**Option B: Once a week-Thirty-five minute-advisement**
- Grade-level activities
- Student organization: Each teacher has approximately twenty students of one grade level.

**Option C: Daily-Thirty-two minutes a day**
- Monday: Grade checks
- Tuesday: Character-education activities
- Wednesday: Silent sustained reading
- Thursday: Antibullying Olweus activities
- Friday: Current events and homework time
- Student organization: Grade level
When reviewing the current structure, it is important that administrators seek out insight from teachers. Of course, it is equally important to realize that 100 percent upfront buy-in for this or any change is unlikely.

**Passing Time**

All secondary schools have passing time. The need to transition students from class to class creates a potential opportunity to implement some interventions. The length of passing time can vary from school to school: some schools use three to four minutes, whereas block schedule schools frequently use eight to ten minutes. Using this time for intervention may not be feasible in some settings, but in some schools, especially block schedule schools, passing time is a valuable time slot that can be tapped into.

For example, schools that are implementing a check-in/check-out intervention may use passing time for more frequent check ins with students. Some repeated reading interventions, for example, can take three to five minutes to complete. While that amount of time is not ideal, schools need to be creative and look at all time slots in the day as potential opportunities to implement an intervention. Note that attempting to implement an intervention during a passing time must have student buy-in. Passing time gives opportunity for social interactions with peers, so some students may see delivering the intervention then as a punishment. Staff must be willing to build a relationship with a student to make using this time work. The student and intervention staff must also have a clear agreement about where they will be meeting, because time is precious.

**Study Halls**

For students who are struggling with academic and organization skills, study halls are most often a complete waste of time. For students who lack the skills to maintain independent self-directed work, or the mastery of content needed to meaningfully do the work in the first place (even if they could keep themselves on task), study halls can be a recipe for disaster for those who are struggling. However, many secondary buildings do include study halls for students on a regular basis (often to get that master schedule to work out!). We encourage you to think about how this gold mine of time could be repurposed for the benefit of at-risk students. What if the only students who had study halls were those with the academic and organizational skills to make independent study time a valuable part of their day? Study halls have potential to deliver a variety of interventions to those for whom independent study is not yet possible. The students would not be missing valuable instructional time if they were pulled from a study hall to participate in an intervention! If schools are going to utilize study halls as a delivery model, potential ideas to structure this valuable time include teaching and practicing study skills, implementing a modified check-in/check-out, or delivering targeted instruction in a particular content area.
Longer (or Shorter) Lunches

If your school has thirty or more minutes allocated to lunch, this time could also be considered for interventions. Again, student buy-in, a positive relationship with the person delivering the intervention, and a specific, agreed-on meeting time and location are necessary. Because this is usually considered a social time for kids, lunches have the potential to be used for a modified check and connect.

On the other hand, what would happen if you reduced the amount of time for each lunch? What if you went from a thirty-minute lunch to a twenty-five-minute lunch? You would have five minutes to work with. Now, what if you adjusted other aspects of the school day—shorter passing times and maybe a minute or two reduction in class time? You could potentially come up with twelve to fifteen minutes to use creatively in providing interventions. Leadership teams must be willing to be creative. Every minute counts.

Before or After School Intervention

Commonly, there is time in the schedule at the end of the day, when staff are available but students are not in session. This is another possible time for intervention implementation. At the high school level, some students can drive. Even if the students themselves don't drive, occasionally parents are willing to either transport their children to school a bit early or pick them up from school a bit late. This may be especially true if implementing the intervention outside of the school day limits the impact of an intervention on other class choices for a student. Another option is to work with district transportation departments to determine whether an early or late bus route can be created to bring students in or take them home at different times. If a student is willing to commit to coming in before or after school, could you have some flexibility in the staff start time? Could it be altered ten to fifteen minutes? Before and after school are great times for a check-in/check-out intervention. Student buy-in and motivation to attend are essential to the success of before- and after-school interventions.

Graduation and Credit Recovery Options

Another common feature of high schools are graduation and credit recovery programs. While the organization and requirement for these types of programs varies by school and state, they have the potential to greatly assist struggling learners. Most credit recovery programs take place after school or on weekends, allowing students to accumulate time outside of the typical school day toward credit. Many credit recovery programs are based on accumulating a certain amount of time (minutes or hours) before credit is awarded. As students spend time outside of the school day working on improving their skills in the identified area, schools can consider how this time toward credit recovery can be allocated in students' best interests. Technology has become an increasingly efficient and cost-effective format to assist with this.
**Additional Courses**

If you have squeezed every opportunity out of the current structures available in your system, it may be time for more significant changes, such as adding or changing course offerings. When schools view their current structure and registration data to identify potential places for change, the conversation almost certainly turns to what else needs to be added to support additional courses. One option is to add staff, but given the current state of educational funding, that is not a practical solution to rely on. Think further outside the box, and don’t equate additional courses with new staff. If we go back to our discussion earlier in this chapter, we discussed the need for the master schedule to be adjusted. What if you found four classes that had the lowest enrollment and chose to offer a specific class focused on improving reading comprehension (or any other skill identified through your data review) in its place? Yes, you may have staffing concerns to deal with or, in some states, licensing issues or restrictions to consider; but these ideas merit consideration in light of making more efficient resource allocations.

**Same Courses With Extra Benefits**

If additional courses are not an option, another possibility is to offer certain courses with extra time. What if you could take your typical core curriculum and add to it so more students would reach the intended outcomes?

Consider a school that was experiencing a high number of ninth-grade algebra I failures (substitute any class here—it could be biology or geography). Does this sound familiar? The school is already allocating course sections to the high number of students who are repeating the class. Since the sections are already being taught, the purpose of the class can be reconsidered. For example, let’s say you currently have fourteen sections of algebra I for ninth-grade students. When you look at the data on the incoming ninth graders, you learn you really only need twelve. However, you have two additional sections due to the high number of students who need to repeat algebra I. What if you did something different with the sections of algebra I for those students needing to retake it? Perhaps students could be scheduled more strategically according to MAP math scores? Potentially organizing students this way would allow for a more fine-tuned structure of the curriculum offered to that group of students—for example, one or two strands.

**Double Dosing: Investing in Time on the Front End**

Sometimes the needs are best addressed with a double dose of instructional time. This usually comes at the cost of an elective or an allied arts class. However, the argument here is that investing in more time up front to address foundational reading, writing, or math deficits will benefit students greatly as they progress through their middle and high school careers. Further, students who don’t have mastery in
basic skills are more likely to struggle in all their courses-electives and core courses alike.

An effective example of double dosing is found at Chisago Lakes High School. Students who are identified as being in need of remedial reading and writing are placed in the RTI English 9 class. This class is team taught by a licensed English teacher and an intervention specialist, who is also a licensed teacher (in this case, a licensed Spanish teacher). Being a four-by-four block school with eighty-minute class periods, a typical English 9 class is one full block for one semester. A double dose means that students in the RTI English 9 class receive double the instructional time, which is a full school year of English.

The class is designed around research-based practices in literacy instruction for secondary students (for example, Allain, 2008; Diamond, 2004; Kamil, 2004). The course covers standards and content addressed in the core English 9 curriculum, but it is taught at a modified pace, with adaptations based on the instructional needs of the students. For example, all ninth-grade students study Romeo and Juliet, but RTI English 9 students may learn the play with the support of parallel text. In additional time allocated, remedial reading and writing intervention occur for about thirty to forty minutes daily, at the beginning of each block. The data collection plan includes weekly assessment with the CBM-Reading and twice monthly assessment with CBM-Written Expression (correct word sequences – CWS) for every student.

It is important to note how this intervention is not the same class “slower and louder.” Students get twice the instructional time to cover the expected content, with a smaller class and even smaller student-to-teacher ratio. Given twice the time, students cover all grade 9 ELA standards, plus work on remediation of missing skills in integrated fashion. The expectation and reality is the most students who were at-risk readers placed in the class for grade 9 are ready to succeed in a regular grade 10 English class. Far from tracking, this is intensive targeted remediation with the focused goal of catching kids up.